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**Channeling Echoes: The Collection and Narration of Acehnese Effective Histories in America**

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While attending a conference entitled “The Historical Background of the Aceh Problem” (Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore, Grand Plaza Parkroyal Hotel, 28-29 May 2004) I was reminded of a recent visit to a community of Acehnese refugees living in the United States that I had conducted just three months earlier. The Acehnese with whom I was visiting had given me the seat of prominence squarely in front of a television in order to conduct our most frequent shared ritual: the viewing of the latest video material about Aceh, in this case an Australian “Four Corners” television special about the already twenty-seven year conflict in the province.<sup>1</sup> More than half-way through the program the well-known and well-respected head of the Southeast Asian office of the International Crises Group, Sydney Jones, commented that the Free Aceh Movement’s (Gerakan Aceh Merdeka, GAM)<sup>2</sup> claims that the Indonesian nation-state has no historical basis amount to a fantasy. At this point the room erupted in a cacophony of sneers and laughter. My Acehnese interlocutors, who usually regard Jones’ comments with great respect, especially her criticism of Indonesian policy in Aceh, found her

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<sup>1</sup> The Indonesian province of Aceh is located on the far northwest corner of the island of Sumatra at the western mouth of the Straights of Malacca. In 1976 Hasan di Tiro returned to Aceh from the United States, where he had lived since his involvement in a 1950s rebellion against the Indonesian central government known as Darul Islam. Following his return, he declared Aceh an independent state and began a guerilla movement. The resultant war has continued until the present day with intermittent pauses and intensifications in the fighting. The most brutal violence followed the reinvigoration of guerilla forces in the late 1980s and the subsequent, often indiscriminate, response by the Indonesian military.

<sup>2</sup> Labeling the various political actors advocating independence in Aceh is difficult and politically problematic. The official name of Hasan di Tiro’s organization is the Aceh Sumatra National Liberation Front (ASNLF). GAM is an acronym that can generally be used to denote any Acehnese activist that advocates an independent Aceh, even those that may not officially have joined the ASNLF but who view Hasan di Tiro as the symbolic leader of a broad-based Acehnese independence movement. More commonly, however, GAM is used by both Acehnese and Indonesians, including military authorities, to denote the armed fighters of the ASNLF. Therefore, unarmed activists and civilians accused of “being GAM” are at great personal risk because this designation usually means that the Indonesian military considers them members of the armed, enemy front. In order to minimize confusion and refrain from using any potentially threatening designations, I will avoid using the term GAM to describe people except when quoting others. I will reserve the term ASNLF for those associated formally with Hasan di Tiro’s organization (e.g., fighters, government ministers, etc.) and identify all others either broadly as members of unarmed political organizations or more specifically by explaining the particular aims and ideologies of those organizations. I will, however, use the term GAM when describing the intellectual and ideological basis that is shared by the majority of Acehnese pro-independence activists, those attached to the ASNLF as well as other organizations.

assertion absolutely humorous. What was not completely clear, and what I failed to realize as significant at the time, was why they found this particular assertion so funny. As I participated in the above-mentioned conference, I was reminded of this moment during a series of exchanges about these very historical claims, claims which form very important streams of Acehese nationalist discourses.

Most recent scholarly accounts of Acehese historical narratives (Aspinall 2002; Aspinall 2003; Schulze 2003) focus solely on a group of highly standardized histories that are frequently invoked by certain activist circles advocating for Acehese political independence. These scholars have drawn attention to various aspects vital to the political projects of these activist circles. These aspects include, among others, interaction with an international community and legal framework (Aspinall 2002; Aspinall 2003), engagement with key aspects of Indonesian nationalist ideology (Aspinall 2003) and the mobilization of powerful symbols of Acehese history such as recalcitrant resistance to colonial rule and diaspora (Aspinall 2002; Aspinall 2003; Schulze 2003). However, all of these studies assume that Acehese nationalists tell historical narratives in order to make claims within a system of international law and custom governing decolonization. These authors pay little attention to the significance of historical accounts and symbols except to the extent that Acehese place these accounts and symbols within standardized narratives specifically fashioned to make such claims. Narrative takes the form of an argument that is offered in the style of a case presented in a court of law and the individual stories and symbols that Acehese offer are judged useful (or not) based on their ability to support that argument.

In this thesis I wish to problematize the notion, implicit in much of the contemporary scholarship, that the primary importance of Acehese historical narratives lies in the legal

arguments they make for Acehese independence. In doing so I do not question the value of scholarship devoted to the understanding and explanation of the key legal arguments that Acehese pro-independence activists, or their counterparts in other nationalist movements, make in the service of their independence struggles. I do question, however, the overwhelming attention that the scholarly literature pays to these narratives as arguments, especially to the degree that this preoccupation is to the detriment of attention paid to more subtle aspects of Acehese nationalist narrative experience. Acehese do not only tell histories for the purposes of making legal claims about Acehese independence and stock notions of Acehese identity are politically efficacious outside of these narratives. The very historical stories that Acehese so often use in their legal arguments are intractably entangled in notions of Acehese identity that are deeply embedded in Acehese and Indonesian public discourses about Aceh. They are not solely the privy of Acehese nationalists and are utilized by various actors, including the Indonesian state, Western media, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The way they produce invocations of Acehese identity that are meaningful to Acehese, Indonesian and wider audiences helps to explain why they have not yet been brushed away as the empty words of warring elites among a population that has endured twenty-seven years of recurring and often brutal violence. In my experience Acehese nationalist refugees living in the United States are far less personally invested in meta-narratives of Acehese independence than they are in the individual accounts and symbols that they offer as evidence within those meta-narratives. Keeping this in mind, to ask whether individual Acehese tell histories that support the nationalist meta-narratives of either the Indonesian or Acehese nationalist camps or to judge these histories by how consistently they support such meta-narratives is only to uncover one aspect of Acehese nationalist narrative experience.

In what follows I will examine some of the individual historical accounts and symbols that Acehese refugees living within a particular community in the United States regularly retell to me when I visit with community members.<sup>3</sup> I will examine these tales and symbols individually and relegate their possible placement within a wider meta-narrative about Acehese independence to only secondary importance in order to illustrate that these histories are significant in themselves and not simply as evidence in an argument for independence. Of course this does not deny the importance of the formal legal meta-narratives, especially to the degree to which they have become one of the major sites of the reproduction of Acehese history. As a result I will regularly refer to these legal arguments in my discussion of other aspects of Acehese narrative experience. When I sit down in front of these refugees with my mini-disc recorder and I ask to conduct formal interviews about Acehese history, they usually string together a series of stories that corresponds with the standardized meta-narratives described briefly above and in more detail below. However, when I turn off the recorder, or sometimes during a particularly long interview when my interlocutors and I are growing weary of the formalities imposed by a formal relationship of researcher to subject, the strict forms inspired by the meta-narratives disintegrate and new patterns and stylings emerge. Many of the same episodes and characters reappear, but in a fashion that hardly resembles the carefully crafted legal and political arguments about state sovereignty made when the recorder is on. These new styles sometimes seem to mock the earlier arguments, especially in their disregard for the formality of legal and political consistency. The tales now appear in strings of stories related

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<sup>3</sup> This community centers around a few municipalities, all within a two-hour drive of each other, but representatives stretch to cities hundreds of miles away. These refugees represent diverse personal and political backgrounds, but they form a community to the degree that they are all in regular communication and voluntarily associate with each other for certain social and political purposes despite important differences in political opinion and strategy. They also differentiate themselves from Acehese communities in other parts of the United States and loosely recognize themselves as a collective unit.

and juxtaposed to each other through free association. One story jogs another in a pattern that seems to have less to do with Acehese political sovereignty and more to do with how these Acehese refugees experience and represent Acehese ethnic and nationalist identities in the fullness of their inconsistencies.

What do these alternate patterns of storytelling reveal about Acehese nationalist imaginings? How are these stories politically efficacious, if not simply through the meaning of the arguments in which they are placed as evidence? In beginning to answer these questions I turn to Foucault's (1984, 86-88) notion of "effective history":<sup>4</sup>

...if interpretation is the violent or surreptitious appropriation of a system of rules, which in itself has no essential meaning, in order to impose a direction, to bend it to a new will, to force its participation in a different game, and to subject it to secondary rules, then the development of humanity is a series of interpretations... History becomes "effective" to the degree that it introduces a discontinuity into our very being... "Effective" history... deals with events in terms of their most unique characteristics, their most acute manifestations. An event consequently, is not a decision, a treaty, a reign, or a battle, but the reversal of a relationship of forces, the usurpation of power, the appropriation of a vocabulary turned against those who had once used it, a feeble domination that poisons itself as it grows lax, the entry of a masked "other."

If one thinks of the telling of history as a political act, then one understands what I mean by history as politically efficacious. All histories are told within fields of discourse entangled in webs of power and domination. Efficacious histories affect these webs of power. But truly effective histories, in Foucault's sense, are very specific types of efficacious history. One can easily see how effective histories are efficacious. Effective histories reverse "a relationship of forces" through any number of methods, including but not limited to usurpation, subversion and direct resistance. However, if Acehese attempts to align certain key historical events with the principles of international law and custom governing national sovereignty and human rights are

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<sup>4</sup> My interpretation of effective history, especially my suggestion that effective histories are often conflicted in their political efficacy, is greatly indebted to E. Valentine Daniel's (1996, 72-103) discussion of the "communicative act," which I introduce below.

designed to be politically efficacious, I question the degree to which they are effective. Although these attempts are “surreptitious appropriation(s) of a system of rules (e.g., international law and custom)... to bend it to a new will,” they fail to display other characteristics of the effective history. With these legal arguments Acehnese do not “dismiss those tendencies that encourage the consoling play of recognitions” nor “emphatically (exclude) the ‘rediscovery of (them)selves’” (Foucault 1984, 88). Quite contrarily, in their insistence on the continuity of an ethnic Acehnese nation they engage in the very search for origins that opposes the effective history. Effective histories introduce “discontinuity in our very being” and run the risk of “poisoning” those who affect political power through their narration. Following E. Valentine Daniel (1996, 72-103) they also tend to be spontaneous and find their meaning largely through emotional regimes of signification rather than the order imposed by certain dominant logical regimes.

Despite the lack of effectiveness located in these standardized stories when they are placed within dominant meta-narratives, there are a variety of ways in which narrators and audiences can and do make them effective. These narratives resonate with their tellers and listeners in a variety of ways. Regardless of their narrator, they nearly always echo with historical and emotional associations, powerful discourses of Acehnese identity, and other aspects that cannot be reduced to evidence in a meta-narrative. The effectiveness of these histories often lies in these echoes. The Acehnese nationalist refugees that I have studied react to the echoes present in nearly all these histories in a variety of ways. Sometimes they embrace and amplify them, purposefully turning their historical tales into more effective ones. At other times they attempt to minimize them, usually through the imposition of an interpretative frame that robs their stories of their spontaneity and makes them easier to control. Regardless, any attempt



to understand Acehnese narrative experience requires one to pay close attention to these echoes and how they affect the effectiveness of Acehnese histories.

In this thesis I will present some examples of Acehnese effective histories narrated from exile, paying close attention to the echoes they produce and from which they are produced, in an attempt to reconceptualize the way scholars might think about Acehnese historical narrative experience. I begin with a detailed ethnographic description of the refugees I have studied subtitled “Acehnese Public Libraries.” I have chosen this subtitle in order to describe the aspect of this community that I find most interesting in relation to the transmission of nationalist histories: the various and multi-faceted networks in which these refugees participate and through which they collect and disseminate their histories. The role of exiles in the creation of any nation is crucial, however, most scholarship on Aceh has not examined the role of Acehnese refugees and other Acehnese migrants involved in the nationalist project except to briefly note their presence and their importance as living representatives of a nationalist trope of diaspora or to examine the role played by certain key GAM leaders while in exile (see Schulze 2003). But Acehnese refugees play a vital, constitutive role in the creation and dissemination of the nation and I hope that this section begins to draw attention to some of the ways in which they do so. Before moving to Part II, I introduce a metaphor that I find particularly useful in thinking about the ways Acehnese collect and retell their histories: that of echo. After examining the networks through which these refugees collect their histories and explaining why I choose to think of the process of collecting and disseminating these histories as “echoing,” I turn to the retelling of the narratives in Part II. In this section I attempt to illustrate the effect of echoes located within these histories. I first introduce the concept of the “communicative act,” a notion introduced by E. Valentine Daniel (1996) in his ground-breaking work on ethnic violence in Sri Lanka. I

employ this concept not in order to offer a blue-print for thinking about Acehnese effective histories, but to suggest some ways one might think about these histories outside the boundaries of the dominant meta-narratives mentioned above. I also find the “communicative act” a useful way to think about Acehnese effective histories because it illustrates the often conflicted nature of effective history. I then turn to three sites of Acehnese historical narrative—an ethnic and religious identity strongly linked with a non-Southeast Asian Muslim world, a pair of airplanes, and a forgotten rebellion and its misplaced leader—in order to illustrate some of the ways my Acehnese interlocutors make these ubiquitously invoked symbols effective. Finally, I close this thesis by returning to the laughing refugees mentioned above and I try to make sense of this laughter, as well as the discussion at the above-mentioned conference, in light of the effective histories I explore below.

## **Part I**

### **Collecting Histories: Navigating Acehese Public Libraries**

### **Acehnese, Exile and the Resisting of Diasporic Intimacy**

And all the spaces of our past moments of solitude, the spaces in which we have suffered from solitude, enjoyed, desired and compromised solitude, remain indelible within us, and precisely because the human being wants them to remain so. He knows instinctively that this space identified with his solitude is creative; that even when it is forever expunged from the present, when, henceforth, it is alien to all the promises of the future, even when we no longer have a garret, when the attic room is lost and gone, there remains the fact that we once loved a garret, once loved an attic. (Bachelard 1958)

Scattered throughout several U.S. cities—New York, Baltimore, Harrisburg, Washington D.C., Philadelphia, Houston, Salt Lake City and others—live groups of Acehnese refugees. In none of these cities, as far as I have been able to discern, does the Acehnese refugee population exceed thirty persons, and in most cases they number less than ten. Although there is great variation in the ages and status of those within these communities,<sup>5</sup> the majority of these Acehnese are young single men under the age of 35. Most have received official refugee status through the United Nations as a result of their political activities or because they were targeted by Indonesian military authorities for some other reason.

Kirsten Schulze (2003, 244) argues that diaspora has been an important part of the various narratives told by GAM since the early 1980s. Specifically, she references the self-exile of key ASNLF leaders to Malaysia, Singapore, Australia, the United States and Europe during that time period. She also mentions the role of ethnic Acehnese Malaysian citizens who aided fleeing GAM members and provided the organization with financial backing and volunteers during this time, though it should be noted that the extent of this support is contested.<sup>6</sup> Many of

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<sup>5</sup> Their ages range from young children to adults in their fifties and there are single men and women as well as married couples and families. Their occupations include student, factory worker, full-time activist and service sector employee. Some have acquired U.S. citizenship.

<sup>6</sup> The refugees with whom I have worked, many of whom spent time in Malaysia while trying to attain refugee status, speak disdainfully of ethnic Acehnese Malaysians as people who have forgotten their cultural and political commitments to Aceh and have become Malay. This often involves a class distinction because these refugees usually view ethnic Acehnese Malaysians as having an upper-middle class status that Acehnese

the refugees in the United States self-consciously identify with this history of diaspora. One common way is through narratives that, although personalized, reveal common circuits of travel. These circuits usually involve an impetus for leaving Aceh (e.g., raising the suspicion of local authorities, becoming the target of a particular Indonesian military unit, having family members who are being targeted by the military, etc.) that causes one to flee to Malaysia, sometimes with a stop in Jakarta or Medan. Usually Acehnese stay in Malaysia for several years (one man lived there for eight years [Interview 24 August 2003]) often encountering harassment from the Malaysian authorities and spending time drifting in and out of prison. For those who decided to try to move out of Malaysia, the most common step was to apply for refugee status through the United Nations while in the Malaysian capital of Kuala Lumpur, though some have crossed another border, usually into Thailand, before receiving help from other international refugee services.

Periods of migration correspond with particular historical events. For example, there was a period of increased migration following the beginning of the *reformasi*<sup>7</sup> in 1998. This migration waxed and waned depending on the level of violence in Aceh and the level of cooperation between Malaysian and Indonesian authorities cracking down on Acehnese dissidents in Malaysia and illegal Indonesian immigrants in general. One of my interview partners noted that following 1998, Indonesian and Malaysian authorities started to work more

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immigrants, often illegally entering Malaysia, cannot obtain. Further, the trope of ethnic Acehnese Malaysian support of GAM and other pro-independence movements in Aceh is sometimes invoked by the Indonesian government and military, especially a version that alleges groups of Acehnese Malaysians provide arms to GAM forces. Others argue that most of GAM's weapons come directly from the Indonesian military itself.

<sup>7</sup> The term *reformasi* denotes the period of democratic reform that began with the fall from power of the dictator Soeharto in 1998. All non-English words used in this paper, unless otherwise noted, are Indonesian-Malay.

closely together making it difficult for illegal Acehese migrants to stay in Malaysia.<sup>8</sup> As a result more Acehese began to apply for refugee status and tried to leave Malaysia for the United States or Europe (Interview 23 August 2003; Interview 7 February 2004). In addition, the rise of non-violent, pro-Acehese independence organizations that occurred in the province following Soeharto's fall led to situations in which leaders of those movements, usually students, were being secretly monitored by military and police authorities despite the outward appearances of peace and the purported atmosphere of increased democracy (29 August 2003). Some of these leaders also fled Indonesia. Today the refugees I have spoken with usually claim a dual purpose for their flight—the protection of their personal safety and the opportunity to spread information about Aceh to the international community.

While still in the planning stages of my research for this project and assessing various field sites, I was informed by one interlocutor that I had no need to worry about finding a location to meet Acehese because, as he expressed it, “we are at the height of our diaspora.” This comment reflects an attitude that is common among the group of refugees with whom I have worked, most of whom are very aware of the presence of other Acehese living abroad. They express political and cultural connections to these Acehese in terms that are usually familial. These Acehese refugees manage to keep in touch with quite a few of their colleagues in different parts of the world. There are regular social and political meetings that are attended by members of the community I studied, some of whom live hundreds of miles away. Many Acehese own cell-phones and use them to contact and SMS<sup>9</sup> Acehese in Malaysia and

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<sup>8</sup> A 1998 report published by a U.S.-based refugee services NGO (Mason 1998, 14-18) notes that this increased cooperation was the result of the Asian financial crises and the desire of the Malaysian government to secure Indonesian aid in the return of other Indonesian nationals illegally in Malaysia.

<sup>9</sup> SMS is a common abbreviation used to denote the practice of sending text messages via cell-phones. It can be used as a noun (e.g., “I received an SMS.”) or as a verb (e.g., “They SMS-ed me last night.”).

Indonesia. At least one has a satellite phone. These various means of communication are used not only to contact family members but to spread information about Aceh, the political situation there, and people's sufferings. In many ways they serve as important lines of communication connecting members of an Acehnese diaspora, aiding these groups in imagining themselves as being members of a shared experience of suffering and displacement. They also serve to strengthen imagined links to Aceh, especially to the degree that they are used to contact people within the province. Some tell stories of ten-second phone-calls to loved ones in Aceh made in the middle of the night so as to circumvent the surveillance of phone lines by authorities that harass family members if they know that they have been contacted by their overseas family and friends. These lines to Aceh work in both directions. Zain,<sup>10</sup> an associate of a student-led pro-independence organization, once remarked to me that:

I receive messages sometimes in the middle of the night from people I do not even know. They SMS me, "help us, the military is coming to get us, someone wants to hurt us." When I ask them how they received my phone number they tell me that they went looking for help and someone gave it to them. I don't know them. I want to help them, but there is not much I can do. I will try. (29 August 2003)

Zain's comment is interesting because it shows the extent to which Acehnese refugees, especially the former student-activists, are able to continue to see themselves as empathizing with a wider Acehnese population. James Siegel (2000, 361-378) makes an important distinction between Acehnese who have directly suffered at the hands of the military and these student activists. Using the metaphor of "possession" he writes that:

When students talk about army violence, they speak about what the army has done to Acehnese villagers. But they do not do so in the same way as villagers themselves. Villagers raised their shirts to show me cigarette burns, held out their hands to display broken fingers, and so on. But as I have said, they did not repeat the emotions they felt when injury was done to them. It was strange to me to hear

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<sup>10</sup> All names used in this paper, unless those of already well-known public figures, are pseudonyms.

the violence of the army described much more emotionally by students... who were themselves untouched, than by villagers...

Students borrow the injuries and even the deaths of others the way Acehese women take their dreams from spirits. They thereby signal that they are in the grip of something, that they have something to say, that they do not know what it is and so cannot articulate it, and that until they do, they cannot rest.

In one important sense Siegel's distinction has broken down since 1999 when he conducted the research on which it is based. Since that time many of the student activists, including those whom I have studied, have become the direct victims of military violence. Nonetheless, there are similar differences in the ways that Acehese refugees relate themselves to the widespread suffering within the province. When I ask those who I later find have been tortured or otherwise directly targeted by military violence to explain key moments and symbols of Acehese history, they often do so with personal stories that resemble the ones described by Siegel. They relate to me vivid and graphic images of their experiences and insist on showing me each of their scars. In several instances they even answered broad and abstract historical questions (e.g., Can you tell me about Acehese history?) by relating their personal experiences with violence and torture in ways that seemed to ignore my initial inquiry. Yet they rarely offered their stories of violence unless prompted. Student activists, especially those whom have not directly experienced military violence, speak much more regularly about this violence and do so with far more explicit emotion. Like Zain in the above example, they regularly indicate that they take on the suffering of fellow Acehese as their own. It is this group that urgently insists on making sure I see every photo and video depicting the brutal acts of the military in Aceh and that regularly share SMS-es from Aceh with me. If Acehese student-activists are truly possessed by the sufferings of Acehese villagers as Siegel suggests, then videos, cell phones and SMS-es often serve as the mediums through which their demons are channeled.



The various ways that Acehnese stay in contact, allowing them to circulate conceptions of Acehnese ethnic and political identities, evokes Arjun Appadurai's (1996) notion that scholars must begin to rethink what constitutes a "locale." Appadurai argues that faster rates of migration, communication and consumption brought about by globalization require scholars to think in new and flexible ways about the sites of ethnographic and historical study and their geographical boundaries. I challenge Appadurai's notion that new ways of identifying the cultural and geographical sites of anthropological and historical research are only necessary because of changes in rate brought on by a process of globalization. I would argue that migration, communication and consumption have always presented challenges for bounded notions of culture and ethnicity. Nonetheless, I find Appadurai's notion useful here to the extent that it helps one to think about the technologies that Acehnese are employing in reifying an ethnic identity.

In describing her own concept of "diasporic intimacy," Svetlana Boym critiques Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (1991) by noting that in his account of the birth of nationalism he leaves out "the stories of internal and external exiles, misfits and mixed bloods who offer digressions and detours from the mythical biography of a nation. The development of their consciousness does not begin at home, but at the moment of leaving home" (Boym 2001, 255). There is no doubt that for the Acehnese refugees mentioned above an important element of their national "consciousness" began, in fact, at their "moment of leaving home." Far from allowing themselves to be refugees who have fled Aceh simply for reasons of personal safety, many also point to strategic reasons for their departure—either they have a mission to spread the news of the horrible injustices Aceh is suffering and gain supporters in the international community or they have come to learn about government and democracy so that they can wait

until the moment of Acehnese independence and return to lead their country to its rightful place among nations. Some members within the community have lodged critiques at other members implying that some Acehnese are too interested in their own personal well-being and do not spend enough time engaged in political activity directed towards rectifying the situation in Aceh. Though I suspect that such conflicts are also deeply affected by pre-existing divisions within the community, especially between those with different strategic and philosophical approaches to independence, these critiques are taken quite seriously and cause great angst among those whose determination in the struggle has been questioned. These reactions seem to be the result of insecurities brought on by the experience of exile, insecurities that can be explained in part by Boym's concept of "diasporic intimacy" and the struggle I think large groups of these refugees are making to refuse it:

I will speak of something that might seem paradoxical—a "diasporic intimacy" that is not opposed to uprootedness and defamiliarization but is constituted by it... Diasporic intimacy is haunted by the images of home and homeland, yet it also discloses some of the furtive pleasures of exile... the tenderness of exiles is about a revelation of possibility after the loss. Only when loss has been taken for granted can one be surprised that not everything has been lost... Diasporic intimacy is belated and never final; objects and places were lost in the past and one knows that they can be lost again. The illusion of complete belonging has been shattered. Yet, one discovers that there is still a lot to share... Exile is both about suffering in banishment and springing into a new life. The leap is also a gap, often an unbridgeable one; it reveals an incommensurability of what is lost and what is found. (Boym 2001, 252-256)

In this description Boym makes clear that the experience of exile is often productive and even pleasurable. Even while one continues to suffer loss, one begins to realize that "not everything has been lost" and that there are "furtive pleasures" to be found through the unusual experience of exile. These are the pleasures that allow great exiled writers to "resist the sentimentalization of the immigrant story and the commercialization of nostalgia" (Boym 2001, 258) or that can be seen "as the mutual attraction of two immigrants from different parts of the

world” (Boym 2001, 254). What Boym does not explain in detail, however, is that the type of diasporic intimacy that she describes can only take place “when loss has been taken for granted.” Far from a moment of instantaneous recognition, this ability to take loss for granted only enters one’s life slowly and never completely.

Evidence of what Boym might call diasporic intimacy was already becoming apparent among the Acehnese that I worked with for this project. It was clear that many of them viewed themselves as the “heroes of a novel” (Boym 2001, 254) and took a sort of pleasure, although a qualified one, in their role of outsider, outlaw and disseminator of Acehnese nationalism. Some also quite clearly were taking pleasure in the more mundane aspects of their existence as refugees. Opportunities to participate in the U.S. economy and receive social services, especially opportunities for children born in the U.S. (therefore U.S. citizens) to attend American schools, were cited again and again as aspects of their status as refugees that they especially enjoyed. One group of Acehnese has become acquainted with Sudanese refugees living within their apartment complex. In doing so, they forge bonds of a shared experience of exile rather than those of a shared experience of Aceh. But these signs of diasporic intimacy are consciously resisted even as they are expressed. Most of these refugees immerse themselves in signs and representations of Aceh including independent Aceh flags, maps, music videos and recordings, and rear-view window mirror hangings in their cars. Even when they express the pleasures of exile they do so in a fashion that is hesitant and apologetic as if they feel guilty for expressing such a sentiment. Usually the acknowledgement of one of these pleasures is followed immediately by the assertion that if Aceh were to become independent they would return as

quickly as possible.<sup>11</sup> Sometimes they volunteer the assertion that they suffer as much as their “brothers and sisters in Aceh,” but in a different way.

In offering this description as one of a refusal of diasporic intimacy I do not mean to doubt or belittle the authenticity of these Acehnese refugees’ suffering. Many of my Acehnese contacts have lost loved ones in the violence, some have escaped death and torture themselves and others currently have family members in prison. But in these caveats and qualifications that are deemed necessary when explaining even small pleasures Acehnese find in their lives as exiles, I sense an interesting struggle to resist sentiments resembling those that Boym identifies as diasporic intimacy. Boym’s concept allows, in fact requires, the exile to suffer. He or she does not eliminate the loss of exile nor intellectually abandon their homeland, but comes to realize new possibilities and sees his or her own past perceptions of their homeland in their stark naivety. If the Acehnese refugees discussed above have come to realize the “illusion of complete belonging” or a “revelation of possibility after the loss,” these are realizations that they feel they must repress. They self-consciously resist such disillusionments and revelations attempting to drive them away through a discourse that repeatedly references historical tropes about Aceh and diaspora while remaining symbolically and communicatively connected to Aceh and other Acehnese through cell phones, the internet and the occasional satellite phone. These “immigrants always perceive themselves on stage, their lives resembling some mediocre fiction with occasional romantic outbursts and gray dailiness. Sometimes they see themselves as heroes of a novel, but such ironic realizations do not stop them from suffering through each and every novelistic collision of their own life” (Boym 2001, 254). Their “third country” (the country of their resettlement), as one Acehnese calls it (29 August 2003), is not a site of possibilities in

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<sup>11</sup> However, in at least one instance the spouse of someone who had made such a claim came to me later and expressed her own view that due to the schooling available to their children in the U.S. the family may have to be flexible on this point.

Boym's sense, but a place of waiting and, at best, preparing oneself and the outside world for the day of Aceh's liberation.

### **Collecting Histories in America: NGOs and SMS-es**

"There are many kinds of collectors, and in each of them a multitude of impulses is at work." (Benjamin 2002, 261)

One of the most important ways that these refugees prepare for Acehese independence is through the collection of histories. They avidly occupy themselves with this activity and regularly invoke it as an important part of their struggle. Their apartments, especially those of the single men who usually live together in groups of two or more, are filled with historical literature ranging from activist and NGO materials with historical content (Amnesty International 1993; Hasan 1958; Hasan n.d.; Human Rights Watch 2001; Mason 1998; Mason 2001) to the works of Dutch colonial-era scholars (Snouck Hurgronje 1906; Zentgraaff 1983) and modern Western academics (Reid 1969; Reid 1988). Certain refugees regularly suggest books for me to include on my research reading list and periodically answer the questions I ask by referring me to the work of one or another scholar, sometimes with book in hand and the relevant sections already highlighted. Their houses and apartments are full of historically charged objects. Acehese and U.S. flags hang on their walls as do fading black and white and color photographs of pro-independence leaders, family members and parents. They periodically reference the various Acehese *hikayat* (history; story), epic poems about various periods in Acehese history dating from the early consolidation of the Acehese Sultanate in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries until the war with the Dutch in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (see Drewes 1979; Drewes 1980; Iskandar 1958; Siegel 1979), though very rarely are

these references specific and my interlocutors readily admit that most of them preferred not to read the texts in their youth.

Though much scholarly focus has been given to the study of the refashioning and retelling of historical narratives, the process of collecting histories is equally as important. Where, when and through what methods stories are collected can reveal much about their efficacy and the multiple regimes in which they carry purchase. Narratives are always told with an audience in mind. They are collected in this fashion as well. But if the audience of a retold narrative is to a relative degree clear to the narrator at a given moment, the audience of a narrative at its moment of collection may be vaguer. At the time a narrative is collected, its collector may believe that it resonates with one or more possible audiences, audiences to whom he or she explicitly imagines relating these tales at a later date. Conversely, he or she may believe that a particular history will not resonate with any audience, but later, at a moment when its efficacy becomes apparent in new circumstances, the narrator might recall the story. Recalled historical moments may be collected in large part because they resonate with the collector's personal history as he or she perceives that history to be meaningful. Then there is the possibility that some historical elements are recognized as significant and consequently collected even if their collectors are not fully aware of all of the elements of their efficacy and power.

A study of the collection of historical narratives is quite problematic for the student of historical anthropology, especially when dealing with oral narratives. Attempts by scholars to be present at an authentic moment of historical collection, whatever this is imagined to be, are theoretical impossibilities. One's very presence at such a moment immediately constitutes an audience and the line between collection, construction and narration is blurred. But to think of these lines as distinct and clear is problematic in itself. Narration and collection are dynamic and

they are intimately interrelated through networks of communication, feedback, imagined audience, improvisation and a multitude of other factors related to the exchange of historical stories. How one refashions and relates a narrative depends to a great extent on how one collects it. All these processes depend on an imagined audience. Therefore, theorizing about the collection of historical narratives requires scholars to pay close attention to a multitude of factors and networks involved in the collection of history and its narration.

In the case of the narratives that I have collected from my Acehnese interlocutors, reflecting on the various human networks in which these refugees participate has been quite helpful in thinking about how Acehnese collect their histories and how this collection impacts the tales' refashioning, narration and efficacy. Aspinall argues that:

Acehnese nationalism cannot be viewed as a movement constituted and structured merely in response to domestic conditions. Its character has also been formed, in quite fundamental ways, through a process of interaction with the international system..." (2002, 23)

Given the context of Aspinall's statement, it seems that he is thinking of "Acehnese nationalism" as synonymous with the nationalist histories that he examines in his article. In his argument it is chiefly these histories that have been shaped by an Acehnese activist elite in response to the expectations of an international regime of negotiable laws, norms and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) governing national self-determination and human rights. Again recalling Appadurai's (1996) problematizing of "locale," I wonder if "domestic conditions" can be so easily separated from the "process of interaction with the international system."<sup>12</sup> Even if one ignores romantic invocations of Acehnese diaspora, the extent to which

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<sup>12</sup> Aspinall (2002, 21-3) does blur this line in his discussion of "global civil society" as a new paradigm for thinking about national sovereignty, in this case both Indonesian and Acehnese. Despite this suggestion, his general analysis continues to reify a questionable distinction between the "local" and the "global" that I do not think has ever been completely adequate for describing Acehnese appeals for independence, and is especially not useful in understanding the international networks of historical exchange that I am discussing here. A case in point is Hasan

the American Acehnese refugee community participates in a network of Acehnese activists around the world seems to dilute the meaning of such a distinction. It also speaks to possible reasons why Boym's diasporic intimacy seems unable to take hold as well as addresses questions about the collection of Acehnese histories themselves. The nation is always an abstracted identity, but the way that Acehnese refugees today experience that identity is very different than the Soviet-era exiles about whom Boym writes. In an important sense, Acehnese abstractions of homeland have a different experiential quality.

I return to Zain's distressing SMS-es and the refugees' ten second phone calls in the middle of the night. These electronically generated links with an Acehnese homeland create a new space in which to experience Aceh from the vantage point of exile. This space is imagined to be a very personal one, yet unlike the imagined personal spaces of previous exiles, this space allows a relatively "real-time" interaction with intimate family and colleagues. Again, this is not to say that this space is not an abstract one. But experiencing the abstraction of an Acehnese homeland under these circumstances has significant implications for how that homeland enters a configuration of events, discourses and signifiers related to the experience of Acehnese nationalism, diaspora and exile. Not least among these is the possibility that Acehnese subjects themselves may feel that such connections make their experiences of Aceh more authentic, a sentiment expressed to me when Zain has mentioned that at times he knows what is happening in Aceh before most Acehnese do. One might also make the argument that when compared to the methods of personal communication utilized by previous generations of exiles, regular voice to voice contact with family, friends and colleagues who are physically within the geographic boundaries of an imagined nation (e.g., Aceh) create a set of circumstances that are closer to

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di Tiro. Whatever one's opinion of the hagiography surrounding this figure, it is quite clear that he played a vital role, if not the single most important one, in the developing of Acehnese nationalism in its early contemporary form and that he did so nearly completely from the vantage point of exile.



those under which their colleagues still within those boundaries are forming their own abstractions, though this would be an argument fraught with theoretical problems. Regardless, the community that is forged in this qualitatively significant way should be an important consideration for anyone analyzing how Acehnese collect, refashion and narrate their histories.

Inevitably upon my arrival at one of the homes of these refugees someone pulls out the latest VCD (Video Compact Disc) full of pictures and video clips taken from journalists, friends and BBC (British Broadcasting Company) or ABC (Australian Broadcasting Company) news coverage. As I watch these films, which are specifically shown to me, I cannot help but notice that the conversation amongst the Acehnese in the room often turns to identifying those in the photos and film clips. On one occasion of particular irony (8 February 2004), a large group of these refugees and I were watching an Australian news special in which one Acehnese activist appears in a darkened room so as to conceal his identity. Those watching the program quickly began a conversation in which they tried to identify this “anonymous” activist by name. He, like many of the Acehnese who appear in these clips, was someone known to most in the room. These conversations that identify friends and colleagues in television specials and collections of photographs are ones that almost never include me, at least not as a primary participant. Nor do I suspect that they are performed principally for me. They are almost always conducted in Acehnese, the language that these refugees use when they specifically want to exclude me from a conversation or feel that I have no need or desire to understand what is being said. Clearly the stories that these Acehnese refugees collect and then re-narrate to me are not simply formed through a “process of interaction with the international system” but are constitutive aspects of that system itself because these refugees are so deeply imbedded within it. Several of those who appear in these videos are people with whom these refugees regularly correspond. Some now

live outside of Indonesia, but I suspect that even those still in Indonesia, and possibly Aceh, can be contacted if the need arises. Through these networks, stories about Acehnese ethnic and national identity are produced and exchanged. These stories are not primarily meant for those within the network itself but are explicitly passed between its members for the purposes of educating sympathetic outsiders. This is evident in the way these Acehnese explicitly claim this educational mission as vital to the success of their political endeavors. However, in order to be successfully passed through this network these stories must also resonate for those within it. If Acehnese turn to this electronic community in order to find good stories to tell historians and anthropologists such as myself (as well as American foreign policy makers), they also turn to it to find out which stories are being endorsed and embraced by those constituting the network itself.

I should also note that it is not only Acehnese who constitute this network of international activists. These groups of refugees are in regular contact with an international NGO and scholarly community that is also occupied with the production of discourses, many of them historical, about Aceh and other regions of the world. This international NGO and scholarly community consists of human rights organizations, refugee relief services, scholars associated with various institutions, groups specifically created to lobby Western governments in regards to their foreign policy towards Indonesia, and many others. As Aspinall (2002, 21-3) suggests, these international NGOs have been vital in creating a space for a “global civil society” within Aceh and around the world. They have had a great impact on the conflict, first by shifting Acehnese nationalist objectives from an absolute recognition of independence to a more flexible demand for a referendum and then by offering the infrastructure for the now defunct peace initiative and humanitarian aid. The Acehnese refugee community that I have studied regularly

cooperates with such international NGOs and Western scholars and many of their political activities occur under the auspices of one or another such organization. For the purposes of this thesis, I am most interested in how non-Acehnese members of these communities also serve as a network through which histories of Aceh are exchanged. Like the Acehnese members of such networks, they too enter into a tangled web of discourses about Aceh. How they collect and narrate histories of Aceh from, to, and with the help of their Acehnese colleagues is vital to any understanding of the collection and narration of Acehnese histories among Acehnese.

But this electronic network of internationally-based Acehnese nationalists and their non-Acehnese colleagues is not the only source of Acehnese histories. I began meeting with these Acehnese in the spring of 2003. In an ironic stroke of coincidence under rather disheartening circumstances, it proved to be a very productive time to begin my project. This was due to the breaking down of the peace talks and the resumption and expansion of Indonesian military offensives in the province in May of that year. I spent that summer in Manado, North Sulawesi, studying Indonesian language and spending as much time as I could trying to gauge how the Indonesians with whom I was living and studying understood the conflict in Aceh in cultural, historical and religious terms. Due to the renewed violence, I found that both Acehnese refugees in the United States and Indonesians in Manado, Jakarta and Central Java were more than willing to offer their thoughts on Acehnese history and politics. What struck me in these discussions was that both Acehnese nationalists and anti-nationalists drew from nearly the exact same repertoire of historical events. In many, but by no means all, the framing of these stories was slightly different. In particular these differences revolved around the meta-narratives and frames used to establish claims on a legal or quasi-legal basis about Aceh's relationship to the Indonesian state. But the component stories that made up these tales were nearly identical:

Acehnese resistance to the Dutch, Islam's special status, Indonesia's Revolutionary debt to the province, an airplane bought by the Acehnese people, Aceh's status as one of the only provinces to vote against the Golkar Party, and so on.<sup>13</sup> In some cases non-Acehnese Indonesians were even able to talk about specific key figures in Acehnese history such as Iskandar Muda or Teungku Tjik di Tiro.<sup>14</sup> In other cases the framing of these stories, especially those framed as a broken promise, were nearly identical as well.

In retrospect, that these historical repertoires would be shared should not have been that surprising. James T. Siegel (2000, 365-370) writes:

Acehnese university students... are nearly indistinguishable from Indonesian students outside the province... Their model (for activism) was student actions in Jakarta. They never noticed anything anomalous in this, and it certainly has many precedents in the history of nationalism.

As in other parts of this chapter, Siegel's description fits many of the members of the community that I have been studying, especially the former students. The only present day full-time activist among them began his career as a student protester during the *reformasi* alongside student colleagues, especially Javanese, from other parts of the archipelago. Only then, he notes, did he begin to realize the importance of his own homeland and its quest for independence. In 1998, after the fall of the New Order, he began working with Acehnese pro-referendum groups (22 August 2003). Siegel (2000, 365-373) suggests that being a student, a path that in theory leads to a place in the Indonesian middle class and continues a pattern of Acehnese men seeking a livelihood by leaving Acehnese society to take on a non-local identity, is what allowed

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<sup>13</sup> Aspinall (2003, 139) notes similar experiences with pro- and anti-independence Acehnese inside of the province in the late 1990s and early 2000s. These Acehnese also employed the same historical events to argue for differing political positions.

<sup>14</sup> Iskandar Muda was the seventeenth century Acehnese Sultan who is remembered today as the ruler who oversaw Aceh's golden age and who put into place both Islamic law and Acehnese local custom. The title Teungku Tjik di Tiro usually refers to Muhamad Saman, an *ulama* (religious teacher) from the Pidie region of Aceh who led resistance against the Dutch until his death in 1891.

Acehnese youth to so easily be<sup>15</sup> simultaneously Acehnese and Indonesian. Nearly every one of the refugees I have studied was educated in Indonesian state schools. Only one, the student activist mentioned above, has received a *pesantren* education.<sup>16</sup> This was at a well-known “modern” *pesantren* on Java. As Siegel alludes, the experience of being Indonesian students must be considered when thinking about the historical narratives that Acehnese students tell.

There are a series of related Indonesian symbols against which nearly all of the refugees I have studied regularly rail. Most of these center on an axis that might best be described as educational. Chief among them are the Java-centrism of Indonesian educational institutions and the state’s arrogant usurpation of the Malay language, symbolized in the 1928 renaming of Malay as *bahasa Indonesia* (Indonesian). Thus, it is no small irony that these nationalists are not only often called upon to relate histories that so closely resemble ones told by those resistant to Acehnese nationalism, but they frequently must do so in Malay.<sup>17</sup> At least one of my interview partners was forced to admit that nearly all of the major characters of Acehnese nationalist histories can be found in Indonesian school books, despite his protests that only a “little bit” about each of these heroes was actually taught (Interview 21 October 2003). Indeed, I have located stories told by Acehnese interlocutors in Indonesian texts ranging from a 1979 history book for the Indonesian military (Ariwiadi, 1979) to a 2000 high school primer based on the 1994 national curriculum and 1999 supplemental to that curriculum (I Wayan Badrika 2000).

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<sup>15</sup> I use “be” here rather than “identify as” to capture Siegel’s sense that this process involves a state of being that includes many facets of lived experience rather than simply a self-identifying label.

<sup>16</sup> A *pesantren* is an Islamic boarding school.

<sup>17</sup> Malay is the language these interlocutors most frequently share with their non-Acehnese interlocutors. The Indonesian national language is a standardized dialect of Malay. In this paper I will most often use the term “Malay” to describe the language that my Acehnese interlocutors usually speak when not speaking Acehnese and reserve “Indonesian” for when I wish to draw attention to the Indonesian nationalist heritage of the term or reflect a particular usage of it by a particular source.

John R. Bowen (1989, 681-687) has pointed out that in the 1970s and 80s “provincial leaders” under the New Order regime began to construct histories of Aceh that focused almost entirely on the coming of Islam and “the early grandeur of the court in Aceh Darussalam.” These histories focused very much on figures such as Iskandar Muda and the wealth and power of the Acehese Sultanate in previous centuries. Knowledge of Acehese history, especially knowledge of the very period that Acehese nationalists now claim as their golden age, was actively cultivated and appropriated by the New Order at the very historical moment that many of those I have studied would have received their primary and secondary educations.

In drawing attention to the ways in which many of the student activists I have studied may depend upon their experiences of being Indonesian, especially their educational backgrounds, in order to produce their histories, I do not wish to deny nor support the validity of Acehese nationalist critiques of official Indonesian histories. Clearly these examples do not necessarily disprove Acehese claims of Java-centrism in Indonesian educational policy nor do they support or contradict Acehese or Indonesian nationalist notions of ethnic identity. But they do point to an interesting conjunction and suggest one important way of thinking about Acehese histories. Just as Acehese activists are engaged with the electronically-generated community of fellow Acehese refugees and nationalists, they are also connected to an Indonesian national community that for many, until quite recently, offered an identity that was not in opposition to being Acehese (Aspinall 2003, 140; Siegel 2000, 366). Today this Indonesian community does not serve simply as an audience for Acehese historical narratives but it continues to be a place from where these histories are drawn and significantly contributes to their efficacy (and sometimes their effectiveness). This is evident in the example of Acehese nationalists’ use of the word *merdeka* (free; independent):

“Indonesia” now stands in the way of these students. It brings them back to their origins in the village and the family. It is one of the surprises of this movement that, for students at least, their past in Aceh weighs on them as a burden while they rely on the authority of a word, *merdeka* (independence) taken from the history of the country from which they wish to secede... If students lack ideology... They rely on the residues of the word *merdeka*, which for them, of course, resonates from the time of the (Indonesian) Revolution. At the moment this word indicates simply a promise of something better. In the absence of other authority, it lends them the aura of Indonesian history as it has continued to shine, carefully illuminated by the New Order propaganda but not less believed in for that. Students thus rely not merely on an Indonesian word and Indonesian experience but also on an Indonesian authority. They know that *merdeka* is worthwhile not because they know what it would mean practically... or even spiritually... but because of the weight of the word itself. (Siegel 2000, 371-2)

Siegel raises interesting points here and elsewhere about the authority that the Indonesian nation holds over many Acehnese nationalists through its ability to define, introduce and control the symbolic terminology of the conflict. He suggests that in many instances the independence movement in Aceh clearly mimics the Indonesian Revolution in significant and ironic ways. According to Siegel the sense of the term *merdeka* as Acehnese students use it comes directly from the Indonesian Revolution and may in large part derive its “weight” from that period. Edward Aspinall (2003, 144) writes that Acehnese “promote an authentic and ancient Acehnese identity as the foundation for an independent state” as a way of providing a “mirror-image” of the Indonesian nation in order to establish Acehnese claims of independence. As Aspinall describes it this truly is a “mirror-image”: it reflects Indonesia in reverse. In Aceh one finds Indonesia’s opposite. Indonesia is a recent fabrication; Aceh is an authentic five-hundred year kingdom. In Indonesia tyranny and injustice reign; in independent Aceh justice and prosperity has flourished and will again. And so on. But Indonesia serves as more than a site against which Acehnese nationalists frame their histories. It informs and constitutes much of Acehnese history and serves as another forum in which these histories are given meaning. Indonesian histories echo in the narratives told by Acehnese nationalists.

### **Framing Histories, Echoing Pasts**

In a recent article by Edward Aspinall (2002) the author groups Acehnese nationalist narratives into two relative categories. The first of these categories is what he refers to as the “successor state idea.” Acehnese nationalists attempt to establish, through a series of three historical steps, that Aceh was illegally incorporated into the Indonesian state:

The references to history are also intended... to establish a legal basis for independent statehood in the language of international law... There are at least three distinct steps in the argument. The first step is to show that the Acehnese Sultanate was a legitimate sovereign actor in the international state system... The second step is to establish that the initial assault on the Acehnese Sultanate and the subsequent attempt to incorporate it into the Dutch East Indies was illegal... Acehnese nationalists attempt to ground their claim on what Buchanan calls the principle of “rectificatory justice,” whereby “succession is simply the reappropriation by the legitimate owners, of stolen property.” However, in order to establish the application of this principle to contemporary Aceh, GAM leaders must take a third, more difficult, step. This requires them to prove that Aceh’s incorporation into the Netherlands East Indies and Indonesia never became legally valid. To make this point, they argue that Aceh was never defeated by the Dutch and... Holland transferred sovereignty (which it did not legally possess) over Aceh to the new colonizer, Indonesia. This transfer of sovereignty was an illegal act... (Aspinall 2002, 12-13).

The successor state idea is a distinctly legal argument. Its success or failure rests on its ability to make claims on international law, especially the norms that pertain to the rights of national self-determination in former colonies. As such, any episode that disrupts the legal argument, particularly those that may reveal that Aceh voluntarily joined the Indonesian national project, are omitted from narratives based on the successor state. Events such as the October 15, 1945 pledge of loyalty to the Indonesian Republic as well as the Darul Islam revolt of the 1950s, both showing an Acehnese commitment to an Indonesian nation-state, must be “systematically reinterpret(ed)” in order to remain consistent with the successor state argument (Aspinall 2002, 13).



The second major category of arguments for Acehese independence that Aspinall identifies are those that refashion the old legal claims made by narratives of the successor state and make new ones based on an admittance that Aceh did enter into the Indonesian national project. Subsequently, the Indonesian central government violated Aceh through economic exploitation and human rights abuses. This violation is the basis for a termination of Aceh's relationship with the Indonesian state and justifies Acehese independence (Aspinall 2002, 18-20). Aspinall notes that this argument is more common among the members of the unarmed nationalist, pro-referendum or human rights movements, most notably SIRA (*Sentral Informasi Referendum Aceh*, Acehese Referendum Information Center), which tend to have student leadership. This concurs with Siegel's (2000, 336-340) experiences in 1999 when the still developing student movements tended to phrase their claims in terms of the broken promises of the Indonesian nation-state.

It was quite clear during my research that the ideas of the successor state and the broken promise are the dominant narrative frames through which Acehese interpret and represent historical experience. By frame I refer to a heuristic device used to structure a string of historical episodes. This device can determine many aspects of narrative form including chronology, language, and which episodes can and cannot enter a narrative. The framing of a narrative is central to its efficacy. Frames argue, cueing the narrator to present only those stories that are consistent with a particular argument. In the case of the successor state and the broken promise, frames take the form of two meta-narratives of Acehese history, one which claims Aceh has always stood alone (*berdiri sendiri*) and one that claims Acehese have regained their right to national sovereignty after joining the Indonesian nation-state in an earlier period. I have regularly encountered examples of both of these historical frames while conducting research

among U.S.-based Acehnese communities. Some of my Acehnese interlocutors frequently craft tales that include all three of the steps Aspinnall identifies as part of the successor state idea. Another group regularly cites evidence of human rights abuses and important historical symbols of an unfulfilled promise (*janji*) as reasons justifying Acehnese independence, admitting that Aceh did at one time join Indonesia with the consent of its population. Acehnese are conscious of these differences and reference them as two distinct ways of arguing for Acehnese independence: the historical reasons (*alasan sejarah*) versus those associated with the current situation (*keadaan sekarang* or *keadaan saat ini*). Though I never witnessed this personally, I gather from conversations with members of the community that they argue among themselves as to which of these legal arguments is most appropriate, a finding consistent with that of Aspinnall (2002, 20).

One important way that the frames of the successor state and broken promise are politically efficacious is by isolating Acehnese nationalism from wider discourses on Aceh. This allows Acehnese to make specific and consistent claims within a particular regime of authenticity (e.g., international norms governing secession) and marginalize events, themes and discourses that might call into question the legitimacy of their independence movements. But one should not assume that Acehnese nationalists only narrate history when making arguments about Acehnese independence. Nor should one assume that the two dominant framings of Acehnese history always successfully isolate Acehnese nationalism from these wider discourses.

In their use of the Malay/Indonesian word *merdeka*, it is unlikely that Acehnese students are consciously invoking the Indonesian national revolution. They more than likely would deny this connection in the same manner that the many former students I have met speak disparagingly of “the so-called *bahasa Indonesia*” and Java-centric textbooks that they often

subtly rely upon in their political activities. Nonetheless, the word *merdeka* echoes with connotations of the Indonesian Revolution. In fact, as Siegel points out, it may derive its very authority from this association with Indonesian nationalist history. This occurs despite the fact that it is often used within the framework of the successor state which attempts to affirm the authenticity of the Acehese nation by denying the legitimacy of the Indonesian Revolution. It was Hasan di Tiro, himself a member of the generation of the Revolution, who authored the first successor state narrative and gave the Acehese independence movement its name: the Free (*Merdeka*) Aceh Movement.

*Merdeka* is just one example of how Acehese histories echo. I have chosen this metaphor of echo to help illustrate the process through which Acehese nationalists collect and narrate their histories and how the products of those narrations are received by those listening. When Siegel hears Acehese students using the term *merdeka*, he cannot help but hear the authority of the Indonesian Revolution in their utterances. He suspects that it is this power and authority that makes the term meaningful rather than any sense of what the word signifies, which its users may not even understand or be able to imagine. Thus, *merdeka* echoes with the time of the Indonesian Revolution and it is through this association that it gains its true effectiveness. In this sense the metaphor of echo corresponds with the associations that an utterance carries and is consistent with the way “echo” is commonly used metaphorically in English speech (e.g., “Her inaugural address echoed the writings of her late father.”). But I also use echo here in another sense that is more closely related to the process of “echoing.”

When I stand at the edge of a cavern or inside of a ravine I can never help but play with the echoes I hear and produce there. I whisper and shout and move from place to place trying to find out which pitches, timbres and volumes resonate in the most pleasing ways and from where.

Sometimes my echoing produces dissonance. At other times the sounds I produce simply drift away. Often my echoes are answered by someone else in the cavern. We yell back and forth, usually only partially interested in what the other is saying. Echoes can contain signifying power and when they do this no doubt alters their effect. But the effect of an echo is never simply a product of what is said. Sometimes what is said does not matter at all. When Acehese nationalists tell their stories, whether they employ either of the frames discussed above or not, they often listen for and try to produce echoes in ways similar to my own play at the edge of a cavern.

Acehnese histories are full of echoes. Like the use of the word *merdeka*, these echoes are sometimes contradictory and ironic. Whether or not Acehese can identify the link between *merdeka* and “the history of the country from which they wish to secede,” they like the quality of the word’s echo, what Siegel describes as its weight. Histories that they narrate under certain circumstances, for instance when I am not recording them, tend to more freely embrace such ambiguous echoes. The successor state and the broken promise frames attempt to repress the echoes in the interest of making a legal argument. But echoes are unruly and sometimes drown out the intentions of the narrator or amplify them in unintended ways. Just as a hiker in a deep ravine can only hope to minimize the echoes he or she produces, Acehese bringing historical episodes to bear as evidence to support either of the major arguments for independence are limited in their ability to hide the multi-faceted historical associations these episodes contain. Because Acehese refugees collect their histories from so many different sources and because these histories resonate in so many possible ways, it often becomes difficult to control the echoes these histories produce. This sometimes results in a story resonating with a listener or a narrator in an unintended way. Often these unintended echoes are the result of refugees stringing

together individual stories through a pattern of free association in which particular episodes in Acehnese history evoke others in a cycle of narratives that rely on the impact of their echoes. But despite these risks, Acehnese narrators often seem to revel in this process. This is clear in the rich multi-vocal and multi-layered symbols that they use in narrating their histories. Below I will explore some of the ways that the Acehnese historical narratives that I have collected produce, receive and deflect echoes of Acehnese and Indonesian histories.

## Part II

### Narrating Collected Histories

**Staunch Muslims and their Communicative Acts:  
Historical Lessons on How to be an Acehnese**

...the application of *shari'a* in Aceh is the solution for ending the conflicts taking place. Such application does not only correspond with Aceh's history, it does not contradict the spirit of the Indonesian unitary state or the 1945 Constitution. (National Awakening Party senior officials Ali As'ad and Usuf Mohammad cited in Arskal 2003, 226)

Following the fall of Soeharto in 1998 and the beginning of the *reformasi*, the Indonesian government began to grant the Acehnese province special concessions after years of war and human rights abuses that had intensified during the 1990s. As part of these concessions, legislation was passed by the central government in Jakarta paving the way for the implementation of Islamic law (*syariat*), in the province. As the above quotation alludes, there was much debate about the appropriateness of granting such a concession both before and after passage of the 1999 ("Administration of the Specificity of Aceh as a Special Province") and 2001 ("Exclusive Autonomy for the Special Province of Aceh as Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam Province") laws which represented the major steps in the government's authorization of *syariat* in the province. Indonesian Muslim scholars and public intellectuals such as Nurcholish Madjid questioned the wisdom of such a move fearing that it would be resented in Aceh for further bringing the heavy-handedness of the central government into religious affairs (Arskal 2003, 227). Muslim activists from outside of Aceh took to the streets and chanted "We want the *sharia* in Aceh now. In other areas later, if possible" ("Muslims want autonomy, Islamic law for Aceh," *The Jakarta Post* 12 August 1999). Within Aceh, the "concession" of *syariat* was met with ambivalence. Some *ulama* (religious scholars)<sup>18</sup> supported the implementation of *syariat* and there were scattered reports of enthusiastic bands spontaneously "enforcing" an as yet uncodified

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<sup>18</sup> In Arabic *ulama* is the plural of *alim* (religious scholars). However, in much of Southeast Asia *ulama* is often used as a singular form as well as a plural. In this paper I will follow this usage and use *ulama* as both a singular and a plural noun.

law (Arskal 2003, 225-6). But many important Acehese leaders questioned or opposed its implementation, while other Acehese openly expressed disbelief that *syariat* would bring any substantial changes to years of exploitation under the New Order (“Aceh initiates ‘moderate’ sharia court,” *The Jakarta Post* 5 March 2003; Arskal 2003, 226). This debate was carried out in the context of other national concerns, not least of which included the rise of Islamic, and sometimes violent, political movements as well as fears of the disintegration of the Indonesian nation-state (“Circus Tigers in Senayan,” *Tempo* 2000; Emmerson 2000). The above public statement was offered at the height of such debate in 2001. It was made by senior members of former President Abdurrahman Wahid’s National Awakening Party (PKB), one of the plan’s most vocal supporters. What is most interesting about the statement is the certainty with which it purports that Aceh’s problems will dissolve once *syariat* is implemented. The reasoning that these officials offer is that *syariat* “correspond(s) with Aceh’s history.”

The above debate, as it continued through 2003 and 2004, was followed by my Acehese interview partners with only peripheral interest. Their overwhelming response was amusement at the notion that the Indonesian state could implement *syariat* in the province. Some of the public criticism in Indonesia had suggested that *syariat* would fail because it was being implemented from above and did not reflect the true desires of the Acehese people. Others rehashed more common arguments about the oppressiveness and cruelty of a legalized codification of Islamic law.<sup>19</sup> These arguments were not ignored by the refugees I studied, but their usual response to my inquires on this point was quite different. They emphatically pointed out that offering *syariat* to Acehese was like dumping water in a well. “Why do we need *syariat* in Aceh, we already follow it there,” was the response I heard again and again usually

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<sup>19</sup> Both of these opinions were offered at a public talk at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, by Yuniyanti Chuzaifah (2003), a Javanese women’s Muslim activist and scholar, in the spring of 2003.



accompanied by a cacophony of sneers. The response of my interlocutors confirmed what I had suspected from the moment I first learned of the government's concession of *syariat*. The policy, though no doubt finding emphatic supporters within the province, has much more to do with public imaginings of Aceh than with a well-developed policy assessment of the contemporary grievances in the province.<sup>20</sup> More importantly for my discussion is that the refugee's response also reveals the shared discursive logic of Acehnese nationalists and their foes. It admits, in a qualified yet important way, that the Indonesian government does truly understand Acehnese identity. The policy is criticized not for misrepresenting Acehnese piety, but for attempting to bring into being a state of affairs that already exists. My Acehnese interlocutors would more than likely argue that Ali As'ad and Usuf Mohammad are absolutely right in their assertion that *syariat* is consistent with Acehnese history. They simply point out that this is exactly why it is not needed.

This shared discursive logic is intimately tied-up in the notion of "Acehnese history" that Ali As'ad and Usuf Mohammad cite as the proof of the appropriateness of *syariat* in the province. Central to understanding many of the ways Acehnese identify themselves and are identified by others are a group of related ideas about Aceh to which various commentators have returned over several centuries. These ideas resemble what Foucault (1972, 56-63) identifies as concepts, objects of discourse that "appear" and "circulate" in "fields of statements" as they undergo "procedures of intervention." Such procedures of intervention change the forms, meanings and political effects of concepts with each new set of historical circumstances that

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<sup>20</sup> I should note that Aspinall (2003, 142) has recorded instances of GAM rebels promising the implementation of *syariat* upon independence to villagers in the hopes of earning popular support. Even the earliest manifestations of contemporary Acehnese nationalism reference Islamic law as the proper guide of Acehnese society (Hasan n.d.). But GAM ideology remains primarily nationalist, rather than what might popularly be called "Islamist," and Islam holds at most an ambivalent role in Acehnese nationalism, as I will explore in what follows (Aspinall 2003, 136-143; Kell 1995, 61-66).

serve as their context. They are consciously manipulated, but they are not empty and ready to be filled with any interpretation or ideology. These concepts carry signifying weight of their own and as they pass from one field of statements to the other they carry that weight with them even as their meanings radically alter. Over at least the past five-hundred years, two linked concepts have been central to Acehese identity, though as I will point out below, who is included within the category of “Acehese” has regularly shifted. The first of these concepts revolves around Islam. Aceh has often been considered a place of particular importance in the Muslim world and the Indonesian archipelagic *umat* (religious community; Arabic: *umma*). Many have commented on the importance of Islam in Aceh. However, how this relationship has been imagined depends greatly on who is providing the commentary and which “Islamic world” they view as the most authentic as well as the immediate political configuration into which they interject their descriptions. The second concept central to Acehese identity might best be denoted with the word *staunch* but includes an entire repertoire of related terms including rebellious, stubborn, dangerous, hard (*keras*) and others. Acehese pride themselves on their resistance to foreign occupiers; outsiders have often seen them as being harsh or even inhumane. The two concepts identified here, one centered on Islam and one that I identify as staunchness, are nearly always linked. Their specific meaning and political purchase in any given usage are intimately tied to how they stand in relationship to one another.

In the above example Acehese refugees and Indonesian government officials are only able to alternately employ *syariat* against each other because of how Islamic law echoes with well-known Acehese pasts that participate in discourses of the two linked concepts above. The two officials seem to be referring to, among others, a group of key moments in the history of Aceh’s relationship to the Indonesian nation, in particular a favorite tale in the broken promise

narratives mentioned above. According to this story the Acehese *ulama* Daud Beureueh, who had gained great influence in Aceh during the Indonesian Revolution when the region was left unmolested by both Dutch and Indonesian forces, only agreed to join Aceh to Indonesia based on his understanding that Aceh would receive special status and be allowed to implement *syariat*. When this promise was not realized the Acehese population became disenchanted with the central government and Daud Beureueh joined the Darul Islam rebellion, which aimed to make Indonesia an Islamic state. I suspect that it largely must be this historical recollection of Daud Beureueh's devotion to the cause of Islamic law that allows the Indonesian government to so publicly and optimistically bestow *syariat* on Aceh in what amounts to a type of post-humorous peace offering to the ghost of the late *ulama*.<sup>21</sup> But some Acehese, my interlocutors for example, reply that for all intents and purposes Acehese society has already placated that ghost. Their response affirms yet reverses the expectations of an imaginary Indonesian inquisitor. In some ways it represents the response that those taught to think of Acehese as pious Muslims should expect: pious Acehese live by Islamic law. In other ways it reverses those expectations by denying the appropriateness of Islamic law in Aceh. These refugees know that Indonesians, and many non-Indonesians for that matter, already believe in their adherence to *syariat* and they know that they can turn these expectations against their would-be-benefactors in an historical tautology of measured effectiveness: You may think you know us, but you don't. But then again, you really do.

In many examples similar to this one, I believe that Acehese participate in something resembling what Val Daniel identifies as “communicative acts,” specific types of effective history:

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<sup>21</sup> See the article “Dalam Sangkar Emas Republik” (*Tempo* 2003, 50) for one example of Indonesian public discourse linking Daud Beureueh to the recent implementation of Islamic law.

Uncontained (by logical interpretants) and driven by emotional interpretants they contain, energetic interpretants lead to spontaneous action. Ungoverned by the courtesies of rule-governed behavior, energetic interpretants explode. Their meanings are precipitated, not before, not after, but *in the act*. (1996, 102-103)

Using a trichotomy from the semiotics of Charles S. Peirce, Daniel argues that in such a “communicative act” the logic of a hegemonic order is subverted through a specific action that marginalizes dominant logical regimes and subsumes emotion. In examples such as the discussions I have had with Acehese refugees about *syariat*, Acehese reject the “courtesies of a rule-governed behavior” that might otherwise require them to suppress expressions of stereotypes in the interest of their political aims. These responses are visceral and often contradict carefully self-constructed images that portray Aceh as the victim of foreign oppression and malicious stereotypes. Yet the invoking of these very stereotypes generates another type of power through the expression of a communicative act. If the more carefully crafted images of Aceh find their meaning in the “courtesies of rule-governed behavior,” these latter examples turn those rules on their head. They reject the very systems of sensibilities in which softer images find their effectiveness by offering an interlocutor exactly what he or she does not expect to hear from politically savvy Acehese: images that meet his or her most stereotyped, and often most feared, imaginings of Acehese character.

I have encountered countless other examples of Acehese invoking such politically potent images of Acehese ethnic identity in similar communicative acts. Many of my Acehese contacts periodically use symbols and images that quite unambiguously invoke notions that mix Islam, Aceh and violence or even aggression. These are images that in most contexts they vehemently deny as stereotypes. For example, despite the Indonesian military’s pervasive presence in the region and the discourse of terrorism that military officials were already employing in the 1990s, Jacqueline Aquino Siapno (2002, 120-21) records that some Acehese

purposefully described their brand of Islam as *fanatik* at that time, a word that came into Acehnese via Dutch colonialism (Siegel 2000, 415) and that carries the same connotations as in the West. At a May 2003 protest at the Indonesian Embassy and the United Nations offices in New York City following the resumption of hostilities in Aceh, one protester, a leader in a student pro-independence organization in Aceh who now heads organizing efforts in the United States, wore a pendant that he described as a “traditional Acehnese dagger” (*rencong*). He explained that such knives were used to fight the Dutch “because we didn’t have any gunpowder” (23 May 2003).

These acts are not limited to the contemporary era. In one of my favorite examples the famous Dutch Islamicist and Advisor for Native Affairs C. Snouck Hurgronje writes of his experience trying to acquire copies of Acehnese epic poetry, known as *Hikayat*:

In many manuscripts of which I succeeded in having copies made, I have met exhortations in verse to zeal in waging war, prayers for the downfall of the Dutch, and the like. These were inserted to fill up the blank pages, and appeared at the end of works of the most diverse character. They were the fanatic effusions of the copyists... (Snouck Hurgronje 1906, II, 120)

On more than one occasion, I have humorously imagined one of Snouck Hurgronje’s “fanatic” Acehnese “copyists” madly “effusing” prayers and verses on the blank pages of the *Hikayat Ranto*, *Hikayat Pocut Muhamat* or any of the other various manuscripts Snouck Hurgronje collected. If he actually brushed off these effusions as easily as his nonchalant anecdote suggests, then clearly the copyists failed in their endeavors. Knowing that these manuscripts were for the Dutch Islamicist, the authors of these prayers and verses surely put them to paper as a strategic invoking of stereotypes that they knew their Dutch readers would find and about which their readers might worry. This does not rule out that such prayers were offered in religious sincerity. But I suspect that more than one wise Acehnese scribe recognized that the

effectiveness of these prayers increased in multiples when they were written on the pages of Snouck Hurgronje's manuscripts rather than offered at a mosque or saint's grave to fall only on the ears of the Almighty and his intercessors.

These communicative acts only work because they echo. As Acehnese refugees race from one tale to another in a seemingly haphazard manner, they conjure a series of images and associations that their listeners understand because of the ways in which they know or participate in Acehnese history. These images are effective not primarily because they make an argument but because of the "weight" of their words (Siegel 2000, 372), the images they invoke, the emotions they recall. My interlocutors seize control of discourses ripe with reverberations that can be channeled in such a way as to effect an emotional impact in the very act of their expression. Like the scribbled prayers of the copyists, these spontaneous histories are far less concerned with relating a meta-narrative of Acehnese national sovereignty than with evoking a well-timed emotional effect that derives in large part from the echoes embedded in well-known genealogies and stereotypes of Acehnese identity. Acehnese channel these echoes at particular moments when they know that others are listening. Despite their intensity, they are playful moments. Acehnese truly seem to revel in them. They are shared not only with me, but with colleagues and friends who gather around and react in a self-congratulatory manner as these stories are told or their punch lines expressed. But despite the great interest and intensity with which these stories are told, they also carry a measure of insecurity. As one shouts to another across a canyon one can never be quite sure how that other will hear the echoes of one's own voice nor how long the echoes will be remembered. Acehnese are acutely aware of this. They also seem acutely aware of the possibility that after he delivers his message, Perumal will be put to death.

Perumal is an agricultural laborer in E. Valentine Daniel's (1996, 85-7) first example of a communicative act. In a story retold by contemporary tea-plantation workers in Sri Lanka, Perumal is verbally accosted by his white overseer. This overseer, himself rather unskilled in the delicate art of tea-bush pruning, grows violently angry with Perumal whom he claims is not pruning with the proper cuts. The white man proceeds to show the laborer how to do it properly, despite his own ineptitude, periodically yelling "like this" as he illustrates the cuts between barrages of insults and profanities. The story ends with the overseer returning the knife to Perumal who then turns it on the overseer yelling "like this" as he severs the man's arm "exactly fifteen inches long," the exact length of a properly pruned tea-bush. Daniel writes that "this (the white man's) body has become public property, available for useful appropriation by the collective memory of a subordinated people against future oppression." What is not completely clear is whether or not "the Perumal cut" itself or the retelling of the story represents the communicative act. I interpret both to be communicative in Daniel's sense, and this seems to be his intention. But this begs an important question about the nature of the effectiveness of these acts, one that I think is especially relevant in the Acehnese case. I have often wondered about the fate of Perumal. Surely his communicative act, however poetic, did not go unpunished. I suspect that he was not given the opportunity to revel in his story as his economic descendents do today. My musings over the fate of this anonymous laborer point to the conflictedness of Daniel's communicative acts specifically, and effective histories more generally.

The meaning of Perumal's perfectly executed cut may have been "precipitated... in the act," but the momentary reversal of power relations that he effected was probably of little consolation shortly thereafter as these relations shifted back and his communicative act became the grounds to justify an even harsher response directed at him. Acehnese historical narratives

face similar problems. Because these histories echo with many pasts, Acehnese are able to manipulate and channel them in a variety of ways to confuse, frighten or simply keep the interest of those at whom they direct their narratives. But sometimes these echoes resonate for too long or in unintended ways. Because the very stereotypes that Acehnese rely upon to produce these effects often counteract the carefully constructed meta-narratives that they tell in other contexts, they can undermine their political aims in important ways. Significant is the way stories invoking these stereotypes are often told in my presence. In many instances, the room becomes hushed, people begin to speak softer, and listeners become more attentive. Often, after an intense row of laughter or excitement following the completion of a story, there is a period of silence as if those telling and listening await my reaction. Following this silence is often an explanation that softens the image. In the example above, for instance, assertions that Acehnese already follow *syariat* are often quickly followed with explanations that this does not mean that Acehnese are fundamentalists or terrorists. They know that such a label could impede their political objectives and so they must quickly recover a self-representation (e.g., the moderate Muslim) that they had momentarily thrown off in amplifying a theme of Acehnese piety just earlier. Thus, Acehnese “effective” histories are often only effective, in the colloquial sense, for a very short period of time before they become a source of political insecurity.

I now turn to the retelling of Acehnese historical narratives. In doing so, I choose to focus on the telling of effective history rather than pre-determined meta-narratives such as the successor state or themes of the broken promise. These meta-narratives represent only one way in which stories of Acehnese-ness (*keacehan*) are passed to outsiders. If Acehnese nationalists realize the importance of these legal narratives for their independence struggles, they do not always seem personally moved by them. Instead the stories that elicit emotional responses from



their narrators and that seem to aim at emotional responses from their listeners, including non-Acehnese, are often the ones told with less attention to the demands of the legal requirements of independence. There are also stories that are not offered unless I ask for them but that I suspect are “collected” in much the same manner as the others because they reveal a certain degree of standardization. What these stories have in common is that they are rich with echoes from which they derive their effectiveness, but they are impossible to recall without also recalling a series of troubling related narratives, events and interpretations. How individual Acehnese recall these conflicted histories, and why they do so, cannot simply be understood as a series of reinterpretations, a source of resilience in the nationalist movement, or a strategy of mobilization. While the stories may function in all of these ways, their invocations are complex and seem to reveal a variety of motives and emotional responses that I argue can only be understood in the context of a close consideration of a series of discursive configurations that lend these stories and images what it is that makes them effective. The collections of histories that follow, mostly fragments, represent the echoes heard by one observer at the other side of a canyon. In re-telling them I have decided to focus on several recurring themes and stories—Arabs and “hardness” (*kekerasan*), a pair of airplanes, a rebellious *ulama*—that seem most able to capture the many conflicted aspects of this spontaneous narrative style: their playfulness yet drastically serious political ramifications; the intensity and revelry with which they are told despite the insecurities they evoke, create and reveal; their ironic status as Acehnese nationalist histories drawn from Indonesian discursive contexts; and the peculiar ways in which they are effective at particular political moments. These narratives are mixed with ethnographic and historical detail offered to help the reader see the processes through which these histories, already collected by their

narrators, have been retold and linked together in a series of effective narrations that echo from several Acehnese pasts.

### **Misrecognized Arabs: On the Ambiguity of Being Mecca's Veranda**

Mauwn: Islam in Aceh, it's different than Islam in Arab... Before Islam in Aceh there was Hindu... So from that background Islam came... So it's different completely (from) the people in Arab who doesn't have a Hindu background...

Me: Is Islam in Aceh better or worse or the same than in the Arab world?

Mauwn: ...you know what the words said, you know the best food, everywhere you go I feel it... (its) your Mom's food because that's (what) you eat from (when) you (are a) kid, because that's the shape of you tongue... So I was grown in Aceh. Sure I say it good in Aceh, but, I think, Islam in Aceh... Islam in Southeast (Asia), because based in Hindu they (Muslims in Southeast Asia) most obedient, it's... more soft the way we think... I think it's more soft, more calmed down better than in Arab... Arabs really tough. (Interview [English] 27 February 2004)

*Serambi Makkah*. "Mecca's verandah." Today this title is one of Aceh's many claims of importance in the colonial and post-colonial Southeast Asian Muslim world. It is a title that Acehnese point to with open pride. Zain (Interview 24 August 2003) relates to me how pilgrims from Java and elsewhere in the archipelago, before there were airplanes, often stopped in Aceh and underwent Islamic learning before proceeding to Mecca. He adds that at least four of the Wali Songo, the Sufi saints who according to popular tradition brought Islam to Java, were from Aceh. Such comments parallel others from his colleagues recalling centuries of Acehnese trade that brought Arabs, Indians, Chinese and others to the verandah (Interview 25 January 2004; Interview 7 February 2004; Interview 8 February 2004; Interview 27 February 2004). Mauwn (27 February 2004) points out that trade through Aceh in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries was dominated not only by Arabs and Chinese but Madurese and Bugis as well,<sup>22</sup> pulling the

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<sup>22</sup> The Madurese constitute a Southeast Asian ethnic group that lives predominantly on the island of Madura off the northeast coast of Java. Bugis are an ethnic group whose homeland Indonesians usually think of as

archipelagic *umat* into Aceh's orb of influence and self-consciously critiquing the way some of his colleagues think of Aceh only in terms of modern geo-political realities. Such a strong identification with a greater Muslim world through pilgrimage and trade has long been central to understandings of Aceh. Already in 1416 a Chinese text had identified the "king" of Aceh as "a Mahomedan" (DasGupta 1962, 25). There were strong connections between Aceh and Ottoman Constantinople as early as the sixteenth-century (Azyumardi 2004; Reid 1969). Yet it is unclear exactly when Aceh first earned the title of "Mecca's Verandah." Azyumardi Azra (2004, 255) speculates that this title was in use at the Acehnese court as early as the seventeenth century, a statement he bases on Snouck Hurgronje's famous ethnography, *The Acehnese* (1906). But I am not aware of any textual evidence to support this claim. Regardless of when the title first came into usage, it remains a powerful image in a variety of discourses about Aceh. But this image can carry multiple edges, especially for those involved in representing Acehnese identity to a variety of different audiences and in a variety of different historical and political contexts.

#### Visiting the Verandah in the Colonial Eras

As alluded to in the collected statements of Acehnese refugees above, Aceh has long held a place of importance as a key node in a Southeast Asian regional Islamic community linking the region to a wider network of scholars, students and others. Aceh's strategic location at the western mouth of the Straits of Malacca made it an ideal port at which Muslim scholars and pilgrims could stop on their way to or returning from other parts of the Muslim World, especially the Middle East and India. Perhaps in large part due to this location, many of the earliest influential Southeast Asian Islamic scholars spent significant portions of their careers in Aceh and lively (sometimes violent) intellectual debates occurred in the seventeenth century Sultanate

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South and Southeast Sulawesi. However, Bugis are widely-known as sea people who conducted trade throughout the archipelago.

(Azyumardi 2004, especially 197-298). Previously, in the early sixteenth century, the Acehese Sultanate had established ties with the Ottoman Empire as Portuguese colonialism began to encroach on both Ottoman and Acehese trading and political interests in the region (Azyumardi 2004, Reid 1969). Although unable to wrest Malacca from Portuguese control, Acehese led forces were able to expel the Portuguese from Aceh itself, including the ports of Pidië and Pasai by 1524 (Reid 1969, 2).

One of the earliest European records to significantly discuss Aceh, the tales of the sixteenth-century Portuguese adventurer Fernão Mendes Pinto (1692), reveals much about what some Portuguese might have thought about this Ottoman-aided “counter-crusade against Portuguese Malacca (Anthony Reid 1969, 268). One of the more interesting aspects of Pinto’s stories, as it relates to my discussion of Acehese religious identity below, is revealed in the way Pinto portrays Aceh’s relationship to a greater Muslim world. Throughout his tale, as Pinto travels in the Indian Ocean and along the East Coast of Asia he encounters a plentitude of bloodthirsty “Turks” and various other enemy peoples he identifies as “Cambayans,” “Malabars,” “Saracens,” etc. Later, in a battle he witnesses between a ruler he identifies as the King of Batas and the Tyrant of Achem (Aceh), the latter’s forces are accompanied by soldiers that Pinto identifies as “strangers.” These strangers are purported to have arrived directly “from the Streight of Mecqua” (Pinto 1692, 19-21) and among them are many who bear the ethnic classifications listed above. In descriptions such as this Pinto clearly portrays Aceh as an important site in a circuit of Muslim activity on the Indian Ocean. It has attracted all of the different types of Muslims he has encountered in other parts of that maritime world. If there is a group of people that might be called ethnic Acehese, Pinto seems quite unconcerned with them. This is in keeping with his portrayal of other Muslims throughout the text. The epithets

mentioned above do not seem to be primarily ethnic ones. Instead, the various labels all denote the most politically relevant identity in Pinto's narrative, that of Muslim. All of them, including "men of Achem," might very well be reduced to "Turk." Thus, it is Aceh as a site of Muslim activity, rather than Acehnese as an ethnic category, that is at the center of Pinto's concern. Clearly, Aceh carries a quality of dangerousness, but its dangerousness lies in its status as the easternmost point of strength in a large, amorphous Muslim world, not in any quality inherent in the region or its inhabitants itself.

Colonial preoccupation with international Islamic networks, especially those that involved Aceh, continued with Dutch influence in the Indonesian archipelago. By the later half of the nineteenth century, Dutch colonials were particularly concerned with the growth of certain pan-Islamic movements in the region (Laffan 2002; Reid 1967; Reid 1969; Kahin 2003, 44-5). During this period the colonial government began the process of consolidating its power over the entirety of the present day Indonesian state. In 1873, after renegotiating an earlier (1824) treaty with the British, which had surrendered all of Sumatra to Holland on the condition that Aceh was permitted its independence, the Dutch began their invasion of Aceh. The initial stages of this invasion proved disastrous for the invading army, militarily and symbolically. This defeat was a devastating and embarrassing loss (Reid 1969, 96-7). Perhaps heightening Dutch fears of pan-Islamism, a series of events occurred in conjunction with the failure of the invasion that involved networks of Acehnese and non-Acehnese Muslims.

Shortly after the invasion began, a July 11, 1873 Reuters cable related the news that eight Ottoman warships were being dispatched to Aceh to protect it from Dutch advances. This news spread throughout Southeast Asia, encouraging recruitment efforts on Java aiming to send Muslims to the "holy war" in Aceh. Arabs in Singapore began to send letters to various places in

the archipelago challenging Muslims to rise up against the Dutch when the warships appeared. Reuters retracted the story the next day after it had been traced to a Turkish nationalist newspaper, but “official denials proved less effective in Sumatra and the Straits than in the capitals of Europe” (Reid 1969, 128, 146, 149). Also following the initial Dutch attacks, a Hadhrami Arab<sup>23</sup> known as Habib Abdur-Rahman az-Zahir, who had risen to a place of prominence in Aceh, sailed to Constantinople attempting to gain support from the Ottoman Caliph. Abdur-Rahman immediately became a subject of turmoil at the Ottoman court as he enflamed the hopes of pan-Islamists and Turkish nationalists alike with his invocation of Ottoman suzerainty over Aceh, which carried the charge of responsibility for Acehnese security. He drew the attention of not only Dutch, but British and Russian diplomats as well, all of whom closely monitored him during his time in the court, some having a large hand in his eventual ouster from Constantinople (Reid 1969, 119-129; Reid 1972). Funding Abdur-Rahman az-Zahir’s efforts was a “Council of Eight” including four Acehnese, two Arabs (one born in Penang) and two ethnic Indians (both born in Penang) who directed significant aspects of the Acehnese war effort from the island of Penang, across the Straits of Malacca, from the start of the war until mid-1874. Considering the decisive Dutch defeat in conjunction with the above string of events it is not surprising that following the invasion of Aceh in 1873 reams of Dutch “mail reports” (*mailrapporten*), regularly sent to the Netherlands, began to reflect an even greater preoccupation with Islam, especially pan-Islamism, as a threat to colonial order (Laffan 2002, 80-2).

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<sup>23</sup> Hadhrami Arabs trace their lineage to the Hadhramaut region of Yemen and certain groups of them were particularly important in trading and political circles throughout the coastal regions of the Indian Ocean. The role played by Habib Abdur-Rahman az-Zahir is not unusual as many Hadhrami Arabs played similar ones in other Muslim Sultanates throughout Southeast Asia. For a collection of work on Hadhramis and other Arabs in Southeast Asia see de Jonge and Kaptein (2002).

The war in Aceh raged on as the Dutch government attempted a variety of policies that failed to stop Acehese attacks and raids and did not succeed in significantly increasing Dutch security in the region. In July of 1891 Dr. Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje, the man who would eventually be remembered as the Netherlands East Indies' most prominent Islamicist and Advisor for Native Affairs, settled in the Acehese city of Kutaradja (today's Banda Aceh) as part of an intelligence gathering mission. He lived in Aceh until February 1892, collecting data for his two volume ethnography (1906) of the Acehese as well as the military intelligence that was his original reason for coming to Aceh. This "Atjeh report" argued that defeating the Acehese would require that the Dutch thwart the efforts of the *ulama*, the group that held the oversight of the armed resistance (Reid 1969, 271-2; Siegel 2000, 9). But though Snouck Hurgronje associated the *ulama*, and therefore Islam, with the resistance of the Acehese, this association was far from simplistic. If Pinto had showed little concern for differentiating between the "Turks" and ethnic Acehese, many of Snouck Hurgronje's arguments were based on such a distinction.

For Snouck Hurgronje ethnic Acehese were typical Muslims. This meant that they were typically lax in their religious beliefs and practices. They engaged in mysticism (Snouck Hurgronje 1906, I, 154-155), paid undue and illicit reverence to Mohammad (Snouck Hurgronje 1906, I, 155), followed pre-Islamic superstition and "pantheistic scheme(s) of philosophy" such as medical rituals designed to produce invulnerability (Snouck Hurgronje 1906, I, 34-38), and corrupted already questionably Muslim practices such as the paying of *ulama* in order to guarantee that deceased family members would find their way to heaven (Snouck Hurgronje 1906, I, 435-438). They regularly failed in their religious duties, especially the recitation of the five daily prayers (Snouck Hurgronje 1906, I, 435-438), and quite often ignored Islamic law.

Snouck-Hurgronje also noted that Acehnese shared many of the religious tendencies of the rest of the archipelago, a comparison that is quite significant. In *The Acehnese* he regularly draws attention to similarities between Acehnese and Javanese Muslims, especially to the degree that he viewed the practice of Islam in Aceh to be both lax and heavily influenced by pre-Islamic traditions. Because of his belief in the general superficiality of Acehnese Islam, it seems clear that the Acehnese themselves were not particularly potent threats to Dutch order. It must be remembered that during this period the primary threat to Dutch hegemony, at least in the eyes of many Dutch colonial officials, was Islam, especially the “fanatical” strains of the religion that directly opposed colonial rule (Kahin 2003, 47). But despite the relative harmlessness of Acehnese Islam, there were reasons that Snouck Hurgronje felt Acehnese Muslims were to be feared. Many of them had arrived at the northwest tip of Sumatra in a boat.

Speaking of a relationship that was of central importance to Dutch colonial ethnography and administrative policy, Snouck Hurgronje compared the role of *hukum* (law, usually Islamic law) and *adat* (local ethnic tradition):<sup>24</sup>

So far we have learnt of the indissoluble union and indispensable cooperation of *hukom* or religious law with *adat*, the custom of the country, as being the very basis of life in Aceh. At the same time we have constantly remarked how the *adat* assumes the part of the mistress and the *hukom* that of the obedient slave. The *hukom* however revenges herself for her subordination whenever she sees the chance; her representatives are always on the lookout for an opportunity to escape from this servile position. They do not require, like the political adventurers, to *seek* for adherents; these are voluntarily furnished by the anthropolatry which is a strong feature in the religion of the Acehnese as in that of most other Mohammedan countries. (Snouck Hurgronje 1906, I, 153)

These “representatives” of the often neglected slave named *hukum* were of particular concern to Snouck Hurgronje. They were the “various representatives of religion” who fell into two broad categories: certain native born *ulama* and foreign Muslims (Snouck Hurgronje 1906, I,

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<sup>24</sup> *Adat* usually designates an official catalog of an ethnic group’s culture, especially visual displays such as physical culture, ritual and patterns of social interaction (See Spyer 1996).



153-90).<sup>25</sup> Snouck Hurgronje identified these two brands of potential troublemakers with the personas of Teungku Tjik di Tiro, the famous *ulama*, martyr, and leader of the resistance to the Dutch, and Habib Abdur-Rahman az-Zahir, the Hadhrami who had gone to Constantinople in 1873 to attempt to elicit aid from the Ottoman Caliph. Muslim immigrants to Aceh, especially Arabs who traced their descent directly to Fatima, the daughter of the prophet Mohammad, and were therefore identified with the title Sayyid or Sharif, were especially troubling in Snouck Hurgronje's account. He devoted considerable attention to the great respect these Sayyids received in Aceh pointing out that, "In practice it may be said that the Acehnese fears the sayyid more than the Creator," "The Sayyid gives orders in his neighbor's house as if it were his own," and "Under the protection of an energetic sayyid even a European might travel in safety throughout Aceh" (Snouck Hurgronje 1906, I, 153-90).

The Dutch continued to be preoccupied with "Islamic fanaticism" even after 1903 when fighting in Aceh officially ceased. Dutch colonial authorities continued to restrict the numbers of pilgrims to Mecca and in literature ranging from fiction (Couperus 1985) to official government documents (van Dijk 1981, 381) "hajis"<sup>26</sup> and "Arabs" continued to receive much attention (see also van der Kroef 1953). Snouck Hurgronje's descriptions of Aceh are important for what they reveal about how he viewed the connection between Aceh, Islam and resistance to colonial rule. Ethnic Acehnese fell within the category of *adat*; they followed local, authentic, Hindu-based customs with only an outward veneer of Islam. It was the Arab visitors and certain unusually devout native *ulama* that were troubling. This select group was able to gain great

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<sup>25</sup> I should note that Snouck Hurgronje more generally separated Acehnese threats to the Dutch into two categories: those pursuing "traditional authority" (e.g., trying to acquire power within *adat*-governed political units known as "*ulebelang*-ships") and those "representatives of religion" mentioned above. It is within the second category that I find the distinction between foreigners and native born *ulama*.

<sup>26</sup> *Haji* is a respectful title which in Indonesia denotes any Muslim, male or female, who has undertaken the pilgrimage to Mecca.

influence over ethnic Acehnese and convince them to resist Dutch colonialism in the name of a purified Islam.

### The Verandah Today: Closed for Renovations?

Today, images and claims of Aceh's connections to an international Muslim community are not always explicit. They can be as subtle as the Arabic letters that appear below "Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam"<sup>27</sup> on the sign at the entrance of Aceh's section of Indonesia's premiere cultural park, Taman Mini Indonesia Indah (Beautiful Indonesia in Miniature Park).<sup>28</sup> Aceh is the only display that I could locate in Taman Mini with an Arabic translation of its name below the Indonesian. The other displays use English, presumably for the benefit of English-speaking tourists. Following this logic, the Arabic-script suggests that the Acehnese display might be more likely to attract Arabic-reading tourists than English-reading ones.<sup>29</sup> Other examples linking Aceh to a greater Muslim world involve certain styles of clothing. Several Indonesian newspaper and television reports I witnessed in the summer of 2003 included photographs and video clips of young school girls who appeared to be studying in Acehnese *pesantren*. In several of these images the young women were all clad in uniform *jilbab*<sup>30</sup> and long-flowing garments.

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<sup>27</sup> Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam (NAD) is the province's official name. Nanggroe is the Acehnese word for the Malay *negara*, which usually translates "state," and Darussalam is Arabic for "realm of peace."

<sup>28</sup> Taman Mini Indonesia Indah, or simply Taman Mini, consists of a series of outdoor displays, each depicting the *adat* of one of Indonesia's provinces. By traveling through each of its displays, the tourist is supposed to feel like he or she is traveling through Indonesia and become acquainted with the physical culture of each of the ethnic groups represented in the park. In the 1970s and 80s Taman Mini became a top tourist attraction for a rapidly expanding middle-class not long after it was built by the wife of the New Order dictator Soeharto (Pemberton 1994, 12-13).

<sup>29</sup> I should note that I am not sure if the Arabic-script was used in this case to represent the Arabic language. It may have been a form of *bahasa Jawi*, various ways of writing Acehnese, Malay and other archipelagic languages using Arabic script. Even if this is the case, it is interesting that only Aceh's display utilized an Arabic writing system.

<sup>30</sup> The *jilbab* (Arabic: *hijab*) is a type of Islamic head and upper-body covering that is not usually worn in Indonesia, but in recent years has become popular as a symbol of Islamic resurgence (See Brenner 1996).

Unlike “the silky *jilbab*... with its various colors” (Siegel 2000, 286) that is more often worn in the province and elsewhere in Indonesia, these young women wore only white and light blue. Even the wearing of colorful *jilbab* can be controversial and some Acehnese view it as the result of “international influence” (Siegel 2000, 286). This sort of school uniform, not necessarily unusual for young girls attending certain kinds of *pesantren* in Indonesia, might very well appear to follow an Arabic style to some in the archipelago, especially Muslim men and women over the age of forty (see Brenner 1996). I have spoken with Indonesians outside of Aceh who have informed me that Acehnese women wear not only the *jilbab* but the restrictive *cadar*, a garment that only allows a woman’s eyes to be seen and that is an extreme rarity in the archipelago, including Aceh. In other conversations with Indonesians I have heard people directly compare Acehnese to Arabs and excitedly reference the privileged place Aceh has held in an international Muslim world.

During the late Dutch-colonial period Arabs were officially identified as the second largest group of foreign orientals in the census (van der Kroef 1953). Along with native-born Chinese, those who had been born in the archipelago also carried the designation *peranakan* (“children,” native-born). This identification was quite complex. On one hand those who carried it were natives in the sense that they had been born in the archipelago. But as their census category demonstrates, they were still clearly “foreign orientals,” a people who had no specific territory within the region outside of the *kampong Arab* (Arab neighborhood) in which they lived and whose *adat* was also foreign in the local milieu.<sup>31</sup> The descendants of these small groups of ethnic Arabs still often live in the segregated quarters of Indonesian cities identified as

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<sup>31</sup> For a Dutch description of Arabs in Indonesia immediately following independence that attributes the group with many of the same characteristics as the Chinese community, including important stereotypes, see van der Kroef (1953).

*kampung Arab*. Not unlike the late-colonial period, Indonesians recognize Arabs as a distinct ethnic group within the Indonesian nation, but simultaneously often identify them as locals who have been Indonesian-ized. “They already speak Indonesian,” I have been told by Indonesian friends and Western scholars, “They do not even know Arabic anymore.” This last perception, though generally accurate, is dispelled by at least a handful of examples. Some Indonesian-Arab families, especially the descendents of migrants from Hadhramaut, maintain connections with family members overseas. A small number of these families send their children to the Middle East to study and learn Arabic (Kazuhiro Arai, personal communication).

Things Arab hold an interesting place in the art of the archipelago as well. Anne Rasmussen (2001; 2004) points out that musical and visual cues that Indonesians perceive to be Arabic regularly appear in a variety of musical genres that she classifies as *Seni Musik Islam* (Islamic Musical Arts). These genres include devotional religious music as well as popular forms such as *dangdut*, an Indie-pop influenced musical style. These cues manifest themselves not only in music but through the visual paraphernalia of performing artists (e.g., recording packaging, music videos, etc.). Rasmussen argues that in this sense things Arab usually carry associations of Islamic piety and authenticity, notions of the Arab that have a long, if ambiguous, history in the archipelago, as is evident in the writing of Snouck-Hurgronje (1906) and other colonial-era scholars (Kroef 1953).

There can be a dark side to the Arab in Indonesia as well. Just as Snouck-Hurgronje feared the role that Arab immigrants in the archipelago, especially Aceh, might play in a rebellion against the colonial government, Indonesia’s Arabs today may be seen as a threat to Indonesian unity. The recent rise in national attention to regional international terrorist groups such as Jamaah Islamiyah point to a new found concern, heavily influenced by global geo-

political discourses, with Islamic terrorism that is often linked to Arabs of both Indonesian and foreign birth (Abuza 2004). In some cases the Arab in Indonesia might be associated with figures such as Abu Bakar Ba'asyir, the controversial Muslim cleric, himself a descendent of a Hadhrami family, who has recently undergone a series of arrests and trials because of his alleged involvement in the Bali bombings and other terrorist acts.

Considering just these possibilities of what it might mean to be "Arab" in Indonesia, the symbolic identification of Acehnese with Arabs and other non-Indonesian Muslims is interesting on several counts. Already in the 1990s the term *teroris* (terrorist) was being used to describe separatist movements throughout Indonesia, including GAM (McRae 2002, 42; Siapno 2002). This continues in the present. Recently, the Indonesian government has successfully portrayed the conflict internationally, most notably to the U.S. Bush administration, as one between the moderate Islam of Indonesia and the more "orthodox" Islam of Acehnese separatists (Winters 2003). In March of 2004 a group representing the Swedish government visited Aceh and nearby Medan on the invitation of the Indonesian government to collect "data on terrorism allegedly committed with the consent and help of GAM leaders in Sweden, including Hassan Tiro" ("Swedish team moves inquiry to Medan," *The Jakarta Post* 20 March 2004).<sup>32</sup> In these examples the conjoined image of Arab and terrorist seem the most prescient way in which Aceh might be compared with a greater Muslim world. But though this image may be particularly useful to the Indonesian government in its war with Acehnese separatists, it is not the only one that Aceh's relationship to a wider Muslim world can index.

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<sup>32</sup> In June of 2004 two of these leaders, Zaini Abdullah and Malik Mahmud, were arrested and briefly detained in Sweden as a result of these investigations. But the Swedish court acquitted Zaini Abdullah due to a lack of evidence stemming in part from the inability of the court to translate documents written in Acehnese (and their unwillingness to accept the credibility of official Indonesian translators) that formed the basis of the prosecution's case. The prosecution then dropped the charges against Malik Mahmud.

In certain popular imaginings, both Indonesian and Western, Indonesian Islam is considered moderate and tolerant because it has been inscribed on a deeply Hindu base. Thus, to claim that Acehese Islam is “orthodox” in comparison to a “moderate” Indonesian version of the religion, as in the example above involving the Bush administration, is to deny Acehese Islam its symbolic roots in a Hindu past. This is an important political move because it allows Acehese Islam to be more easily identified as a non-localized and foreign manifestation of Islam differing from the allegedly Hindu-influenced, moderate Islam of the archipelago. But it should not be assumed that a non-localized and foreign manifestation of Islam indicates an Islam that is seen as undesirable, dangerous or problematic by all parties interested in the Indonesian Islamic community. To the extent that an Islamic tradition imagined in this way indexes purity and religious authenticity, such an imagining may be seen as either pleasantly exotic or as an authentic expression of Islam that supersedes the boundaries between various localized groups within a divided *umat*. Such images can be seen in the discussion above of Arabic cues in Indonesian music as well as in the shouts of Jimmy Muhammad, the pro-*syariat* demonstrator mentioned in the previous section (“Muslims want autonomy, Islamic law for Aceh,” *The Jakarta Post* 12 August 1999).

In addition to being explicitly identified as similar to Arabs, Indonesians sometimes identify Acehese as particularly “hard” (*keras*) people. In this context the word “hard,” expressed with the Indonesian/Malay word *keras*, seems to have a range of meanings including pious, strong, holding to one’s culture, refusing colonial occupation, stubborn, problematic, rebellious, dangerous, dirty and uncivilized. It is difficult to use this word without invoking a meaning that plays in unpredictable ways upon the sensibilities of one’s interlocutor. One of the word’s most common forms, especially important when discussing Aceh, is *kekerasan*, which

usually translates “violence.” It is important to note that Acehnese are not the only group in Indonesia to be identified as *keras*. Nor are they the only group to be identified in comparison with the Arab.<sup>33</sup> Indonesians also place other regions of the archipelago that have had an important historic role in the spread of Islam (e.g., Minangkabau, South Sulawesi) in configurations that include references to the Arab and ethnic groups that are usually portrayed as being stereotypically unrefined when compared to the Javanese (e.g., Batak, Dayak) are often described as *keras* in much the same manner as Acehnese. But simply because these terms can apply to other groups does not diminish their importance when used to describe Acehnese. When Acehnese are described as *keras* or similar to Arabs by Indonesians, Acehnese or others, this must be seen in light of a series of other factors that make these invocations unique even while they are connected to the more general uses of these epithets. Thus, a string of loosely and ambiguously related terms—Muslim, Arab, *keras*, pious, terrorist—serve as one set of conceptual categories which Acehnese must consider when telling their histories and playing with their echoes. But this is not an easy task.

In a publication distributed by the international NGO the U.S. Committee for Refugees (Mason 1998), the late Jafar Siddiq Hamzah, an Acehnese human rights activist and lawyer who was murdered in 1999 while visiting Medan, North Sumatra, is quoted as follows:

According to a 1993 book on Indonesian history, “the more than 3.4 million Acehnese are most famous throughout the archipelago for their devotion to Islam and their militant resistance to colonial and republican rule... (Aceh is) the part of Indonesia where the Islamic character of the population is the most pronounced.” Acehnese, however, take issue with being called “Muslim fundamentalists.” According to (Jafar Siddiq) Hamzah... “The rest of Indonesia is very secular. Acehnese are Islamic, but we are not fundamentalist. You can see the difference, for example, with fundamentalist Islamic countries like Iran and Sudan, which don’t give a role to women. Women have a high place in Aceh.” (Mason 1998, 6)

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<sup>33</sup> Significantly, I have also heard Indonesians use the term *keras* to describe Arabic culture.

In this passage one can see an interesting dilemma for activists such as Jafar Siddiq Hamzah. Acehnese identity, as it is most often understood by Acehnese and various non-Acehnese people, is inextricably bound up in an intense expression of Islam, historic connections to an international Islamic community, and Islamic resistance to colonial rule. One cannot reference what it is that makes Acehnese unique, in short what makes Aceh a nation, without referencing these relationships. But these relationships also become political liabilities at the moment of their expression. Jafar Siddiq Hamzah must not only contrast Acehnese Islam with the secularism of Indonesia but he also must deny that Acehnese are fundamentalists akin to the hypothetical groups of Muslims in Iran and Sudan that he references. The Acehnese refugees I studied frequently express frustration that the Indonesian government and military routinely change the way they portray Acehnese Islam. They claim that one day Aceh is identified as the seat of Islamic terrorism in Southeast Asia, while the next day the sincerity of Acehnese Muslims is questioned because of their desire to break away from the world's largest Muslim country. But Indonesian authorities are not the only political actors to alternately invoke images of Islam, Aceh, violence and a larger Muslim world.

Just as some Acehnese carry symbolic *rencong* to protests and willingly claim that their practice of Islam is *fanatik*, I regularly encounter Acehnese who describe themselves and their colleagues as *keras*, despite the often negative connotations of this term. Doing so is controversial among the community that I studied in the United States. For example, I once asked Basyah, a man in his early 40s who is married with several children and who has already lived in the United States for five years, what his opinion was of Acehnese who describe themselves as *keras*. He responded quite emotionally:

Maybe (Acehnese use *keras* because) there are Acehnese that cannot actually endure. What is the meaning of this *keras*? The first meaning of *keras* is a



meaning that is meant to offend the basis of a people. *Keras* is meant to offend. But they (some Acehnese) don't endure. Sometimes they (Acehnese) say that Acehnese are hard [*keras*]... that is wrong... why don't they endure? ...from Java these hard [*keras*] words come that are meant... to offend. (Interview 24 August 2003)

A few minutes later Basyah's wife, Lisa, raised the issue of *keras* again after I had asked the couple to tell me whether or not Islam in Aceh deserved its reputation as the best in the archipelago. After much discussion and qualification the couple emphatically asserted that Islam in Aceh did deserve such a reputation but that Indonesian "propaganda" that paints Aceh as a place of "fundamentalism" is patently false. Lisa stressed that in Aceh Islam is the best in Southeast Asia; but it is not *keras*.

Others were more ambiguous. Gadi, a younger married man in his mid-thirties living in the same neighborhood as Lisa and Basyah, began an interview by explaining the pseudonym that he had selected for himself:

Gadi in Malay is *Gadai*<sup>34</sup> ... in Arabic it is *Nazar*... Acehnese are one of the people/nations [*bangsa*]<sup>35</sup> that are hard [*keras*] and do not want to be made fools of... every mother or parent that has a child, he/she wants the child... to be pawned [*digadaikan*] for the nation of Aceh. So Acehnese are more rightfully proud if their children become Acehnese for the Acehnese nation. (Interview 23 August 2003)

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<sup>34</sup> *Gadai* is a Malay/Indonesian root word that can mean "pawning" or "security" in the sense of collateral given to secure a loan (Echols and Shadily 1989, 166). By giving himself this pseudonym, Gadi is actually identifying himself as an object to be pawned. Note later that he continues to use words derived from *gadai* (e.g., *digadaikan*) indicating a pawning or selling. This is consistent with the language of the *prang sabil* (Holy War) discussed below, in which one's sacrifice of self is often portrayed as an exchange with God in return for paradise (Siegel 1979, 234-236). Yet there is one important difference. In this case, and those of the lullabies discussed below, the image invoked is that of a parent exchanging a child for the independence of Aceh while in most of the *prang sabil* literature, an individual chooses to sacrifice himself in exchange for eternal paradise. (In Siegel's discussion, the *prang sabil* literature is gendered as male. This varies slightly from Jacqueline Aquino Siapno's (2002, 144-146) experience in the 1990s when Acehnese sung lullabies based on the *Prang Sabil* literature to both male and female children.)

<sup>35</sup> *Bangsa* is a Malay/Indonesian word that usually carries the connotation of "a people," a nation in the sense of an ethnic group, or some other social entity that carries the bonds of a national collective.

My interest was piqued when I heard Gadi self-consciously describe Acehnese as *keras* and so I inquired as to what that word meant, mentioning some of the negative connotations I had already heard. He replied that *keras* did hold some negative meanings, but in a more proper sense, in the way that Acehnese should use the term to describe themselves, it meant a people who refused to be occupied by foreign powers. He referenced four such powers: the Spanish,<sup>36</sup> the Portuguese, the Dutch and the Indonesians. But when it came to Islam, Gadi also seemed to share Basyah and Lisa's concern. He distanced Acehnese Islam from Arabic Islam by noting that although Acehnese clothing for women is more conservative during prayer, this is only during prayer. He specifically noted that Aceh is "very different" than the Arab world because of Aceh's local *adat*. He was particularly proud of Aceh's reputation for "aggressive women," telling me not to "mess with them" if I went to Aceh or I might suffer consequences that he did not disclose.

But Gadi's description of Acehnese Islam was far from unambiguous. During the same interview he related a story that I have since heard repeated again and again. The story is about the justice of Iskandar Muda. This grandest of all Acehnese Sultans executed his own son because he had committed adultery and broken Acehnese *adat*. But what Gadi describes as *adat* here is quite clearly *syariat* in other versions of the tale. Many Acehnese I have spoken with remember Iskandar Muda for one of his greatest accomplishments: he was the first Acehnese Sultan to successfully implement *syariat* in Aceh. Snouck-Hurgronje (1906) records that most Acehnese at the end of the nineteenth century accredited Iskandar Muda, or the Sultanate in general, with the creation of all Acehnese *adat*, which they viewed as inherently consistent with *syariat*. In this case, also invoked by Acehnese refugees (Interview 17 January 2004), the

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<sup>36</sup> This reference to Spain interests me because I am unaware of any evidence of Spanish involvement in Aceh and since this interview I have not heard many references to Spain in the highly standardized histories told by Acehnese.

distinction between *syariat* and *adat* is little more than a division of two separate and non-overlapping spheres of life. What Gadi brushes as *adat* in this tale of Iskandar Muda's justice is just as easily brushed as Islamic law by others. Moreover, regardless of whether the guiding principle was *syariat* or *adat*, it was a principle that was "hard" enough to require one to take the life of one's own son. Later on the same day, Gadi played for me what he described as an Acehese lullaby. This lullaby, he explained, was sung to Acehese children reminding them to grow up and become heroes who die for their country. It was an example of an Acehese mother, like the one who had born Gadi through the narrative of his pseudonym, pawning<sup>37</sup> her child for the good of the nation. It was not the first time I had heard one of these lullabies. On one of my earliest visits to the Acehese in this particular city, I witnessed a woman singing one as she rocked her child to sleep in a video depicting the Acehese independence struggle (23 May 2003). I remember being jolted by the depiction of this nurturing moment and the sweetness of the voice singing the song compared with the violence of the lullaby's meaning as it was interpreted to me by one of Gadi's colleagues. It was a few months later that I began to realize that these lullabies were variations on the *Hikayat Prang Sabil*, motifs for children from the literature of the Holy War.

The various *Hikayat Prang Sabil* (*History of the Holy War*) were the last examples in a long tradition of Acehese epic poetry.<sup>38</sup> They were written during the war of the late nineteenth century and Acehese usually attribute them to a particularly devoted *ulama* who was involved in the resistance against the Dutch (Siegel 1979). In the course of the poem translated by James Siegel (1979) a young man undergoes a personal conversion and decides that he will become a

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<sup>37</sup> Gadi continued to use the language of "pawning," in both Malay and English, to describe the relationship of this ideal mother and her child.

<sup>38</sup> See Siegel (1979) for a translation of one of the manuscripts as well as an interesting and enlightening commentary on the text.

martyr in the holy war. In a dream, he experiences the glories of heaven that await him upon his martyrdom. Siegel (1979, 262) writes:

The *Hikajat Prang Sabil* was chanted before men went off to attack the Dutch. It is commonly said that listeners were dressed in the white shrouds of warriors about to martyr themselves. It is difficult to think that they listened with the same wavering attention displayed by listeners to other epics.”

Siegel (1979) offers a sophisticated interpretation of the *Hikayat Prang Sabil* refusing to allow the epic to be reduced to a work justifying violence, even defensive violence, through an appeal to religion and an afterlife. But it cannot be ignored that a group of Acehese soldiers wearing martyrs' shrouds and chanting a narrative poem about glories in the afterlife that await the martyred Muslim soldier must have presented a frightening image to anyone having to oppose these soldiers in battle. Just as in the example of Snouck Hurgronje's fanatic copyists above, it is quite likely that Acehese were aware of the emotional effect such images could have on Dutch colonials. The *Hikayat Prang Sabil* was certainly recited for the benefit of Acehese soldiers, but it is equally as likely that it was recited for Dutch colonial society as well.<sup>39</sup>

Jacqueline Aquino Siapno (2002, 144-146) treats the lullabies that derive from this literature, as they were sung in Aceh in the 1990s, as directed towards young children in the hopes that they would develop Islamic values. She notes that the lines in these rhymes encouraging children to join the *prang sabil* are “abstract and sublime: going to war to defend the country, striving in the path of Allah, defending the religion from Kafir non-believers.”

However, in my experience the invocation of these images was not necessarily abstract and the move that Siapno makes to soften their violence is problematic. On one occasion (8 February

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<sup>39</sup> Similarly, the *Hikayat Prang Sabil* was regularly recited at pro-independence rallies in Aceh in the period following the fall of Soeharto when civil and military authorities began to tolerate relatively open political activity (Aspinall 2003). Its recitation was conducted in a manner similar to how it was recited in the late nineteenth century. Leaders of the demonstration recited from a stage while masses of protesters listened or recited along while facing them. I have also been informed that at some of the smaller rallies the recitation was accompanied by an Acehese drum and dance form, called *rapai geleng*, resembling *zikir*, a Sufi meditative practice that occurs widely throughout the Muslim world.

2004) I sat down to watch a video produced in Australia. In this video the television journalist and his guides interview a woman who lives in an area of East Aceh that the narrator identifies as a “heartland of GAM recruitment” because of the horrible atrocities that the military has committed there. After the interviewer asks her about GAM activities and if she knows anyone in the armed movement, this woman, who has been holding her child throughout the interview and who stands with a companion who could be her own mother, explicitly implicates her infant son in GAM’s armed resistance. Looking into the camera she indicates that many local village men have joined the resistance and she repeats the question of the interviewer before answering: “Who supports [*mendukung*] GAM? All the villagers in this area support GAM. I support GAM and my baby supports GAM.” Those watching the video with me, all male, were very adamant that I see this part of the film and identified this woman as yet another example of the ideal Acehnese mother mentioned above. Whether or not this woman was sincere in her implicit wish, it was clear that I was to believe her. Her wish was not an abstract expression of Islamic values as Siapno argues. It was as concrete as it was disturbing.

What makes this recurring image of the Acehnese mother “pawning” her child through the lullabies of the *Prang Sabil* so remarkable is that it is one of the few self-invocations of Acehnese stereotypes that my interlocutors do not attempt to soften. On more than one occasion I have been asked by various refugees not to report on the explicitly Islamic activities in which they engage. I find these requests rather interesting because the Acehnese communities I visit do not conduct particularly frequent or flamboyant religious expressions. When compared to these violent lullabies the communal recitation of Qur’anic verses and the occasional practice of the obligatory prayers (*solat*) seem rather unsensational. More importantly, I have yet to encounter an image that more effectively invokes nearly every stereotype of Acehnese ethnic identity—

*kekerasan*, resistance, Islamic tradition—than this Acehnese mother. But despite the way in which my Acehnese interlocutors seemed to unproblematically embrace this image, the lullabies were the exception and not the rule. In most cases Acehnese represented similarly explosive images of Acehnese identity much more cautiously.

Tension in Acehnese nationalist discourse related to the role of Islam in particular was already apparent in the diary of Hasan di Tiro, *The Price of Freedom* (n.d.), in the early 1980s. It is clear that Islam plays an ambivalent and sometimes conflicted role in this work, which was first published after the events of the 1979 Iranian Revolution. In the diary Islam is invoked periodically in ways that resemble the communicative acts described above. For example, as Hasan di Tiro prepares his guerilla organization in the days following the “redeclaration” of Acehnese independence, he identifies himself as an Imam<sup>40</sup> and links Islam explicitly to war and warriors. He (n.d., 33) notes that the morning call to prayer “is a superior clarion call to victory—a most fitting means to begin the Muslim warriors’ day.” But aggressive images such as this one are quickly tempered. Two months after Hasan di Tiro’s exposition on the call to prayer one finds an episode, dated February 10, 1977, that well illustrates the difficulties Acehnese have in portraying themselves as pious Muslims but not Islamic radicals. In this entry Hasan di Tiro tells of a spy who has recently been captured and tried by a still nascent GAM-guerilla organization hiding in the mountains of Aceh:

My nephew... who was a friend of Mansur Amin (the spy) in his student’s day (Sic.), heard the news about what happened... He wrote to me to ask for clemency for his friend on the ground of mercy... This appeal for mercy was discussed in the meeting of the Commission set up to investigate the case... One member pointed out how can we associate mercy with the mission and consequences of Mansur Amin’s crime? For, if he had succeeded he would have

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<sup>40</sup> The title *Imam* (Indonesian and Arabic) simply designates a prayer leader and does not necessarily require its bearer to hold prestige or position either materially or through education. But I draw attention to it here because Hasan di Tiro does so in the text, noting that his followers would refuse to take on this role if he was present, deferring to him.

brought us... to the brink of annihilation... Are not our lives equal to one traitorous Mansur Amin? Did not the Quran say that Justice demands “life for life, an eye for an eye” and the rest... And we have no force to spare to guard him, nor do we want to do so. The more we think about it the more expensive it becomes to keep this bastard from Jakarta. We simply cannot be virtuous beyond our strength! But Abdul Wahab (Hasan di Tiro’s nephew) had argued his point of mercy rather persuasively that some members of the Commission of Inquiry were willing to go along with it. If Mansur Amin would indeed be freed, he will owe his life to his good friend (Sic.). Both of them will probably never know it. (Hasan n.d., 65-6)

In a move that resembles those that I have described above, Hasan di Tiro invokes an image of Acehnese Islamic intractability (“Did not the Quran say that Justice demands “life for life, an eye for an eye”) only to temper it with one of “virtuous” mercy. Already in the early 1980s the GAM founder was alternately invoking threatening and aggressive images of Aceh and Islam with merciful and more subdued ones.

Thus Acehnese struggle with how to represent their Islamic identity and how to recall the jolting images that are so much a part of their struggle without painting themselves as Muslim radicals, Arabs or terrorists. They play with the echoes of the histories they tell, trying to find ways to manipulate them so that their meanings are equally as ephemeral as the reflected sound waves that carry them. The stereotypes they invoke must carry enough weight that their interlocutors understand them and feel their emotional impact, but they must be light enough to be forgotten as soon as the lullaby of the *Prang Sabil* is turned off and the listener is bombarded with denials that Acehnese are anything like Muslims from “Iran and Sudan.” This is especially challenging considering the various networks in which these stories have resonance and the various audiences at which they are directed. In each of these circumstances the effectiveness of a story shifts, in some cases invoking fear, in others ethnic pride, while in others the effects of a tale many not always be clear even to those telling it. This returns me to the theme of this

section, Mecca's Verandah, and shifting historical configurations placing Aceh in relationship with the greater Muslim world.

Due to a peculiar set of circumstances surrounding Aceh's status as Mecca's Verandah, one of the worst results that Acehnese invocations of communicative acts might have would be if they echoed *for too long* with Aceh's supposed Arabness. This is evident in the ways Acehnese such as Mauwn (in the quotation with which I opened this section), Gadi (above) and Mutia (see below) specifically deny associations connecting Aceh to the Arab world. Jafar Siddiq Hamzah's two closing points in the above citation are particularly relevant here as well. Denying Aceh's similarities with Iran and Sudan, both associated with radical Islamic governments, mirrors similar moves by other Acehnese that I have interviewed who consistently and regularly deny such links to the greater Muslim world. These relationships are nearly always invoked as elements of Aceh's history, but they are never allowed a place in Aceh's present. Each and every person that I interviewed specifically on this point denied that Sayyids or Arabs living in Aceh today have any special status whatsoever (Interview 7 February 2004; Interview 8 February 2004). They are simply ordinary people (*orang biasa saja*). At one time they were considered particularly important figures in Acehnese society, but due to the "modern conditions" (Interview February 7 2004) of contemporary life in Aceh these Arabs are now simply ethnic Acehnese with a colorful family history. Nor will they ever have the same importance that they once did, even after independence. Mutia, the women's activist mentioned above in Part I, illustrated another important refrain contrasting Aceh to the Arab world:

The image of Muslims is very bad, especially in the eyes of America. But what has to be seen is that Islam in Aceh is very different than Islam in... uh, the basic teachings are the same. We study from the Qur'an and the *Hadis*.<sup>41</sup> Throughout the Islamic world the teachings are the same. But the interpretation... the way

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<sup>41</sup> The *Hadis* are collections of stories about the life of the prophet. They are used by Muslims, especially *ulama*, to aid in interpreting the law.



they see a problem... (t)he “perspective” [in English] that is used to translate the Qur’an is different... Islam in the Middle East is very influenced by their culture. Middle Eastern culture is very hard [*keras*]... And I think this is the ultimate reason why God sent down Mohammad, uh, commanded that Mohammad was born in the middle of the Middle East, because they are very hard [*keras*]. Because of this I see that Islam in the Middle East is different, Middle Eastern society is different than Acehnese or Javanese society... we are Muslims but we are democratic, not fundamentalists... We have our own “culture” [in English]... in Aceh that is also affected by Hindus that came before Muslims, before Islam... So... sometimes in Acehnese culture there is Islamic culture that “mixed” [in English] with Hindu culture. These are the differences between the Muslims. (Interview 20 October 2003)

Mutia begins her explanation by referencing anti-Muslim sentiment in the United States.

But by the end of the quotation she seems far more concerned with establishing Aceh as a member of the Southeast Asian Muslim world rather than with dispelling general stereotypes about Muslims. Her main point is that it is the Middle East that is *keras*, and Aceh is outside of the Middle Eastern cultural purview. What is most striking about Mutia’s comments, and those offered by Mauwn at the beginning of this section, is that they both associate Aceh’s Islamic culture with a Hindu base. There are plenty of examples in which Acehnese do the exact opposite, especially in a string of stories that contrasts the purity and sincerity of Acehnese Islam with the syncretism and superficiality of the Javanese. But in the above quotations one sees a rather ironic operation that mirrors that of my Indonesian friends mentioned above who claim that Indonesian Arabs “do not even speak Arabic anymore.” This statement discursively erases any unique identity that the Indonesian Arab community might claim that could rival that of the nation even while it circumscribes such an identity by naming the Arab as Arab. Both Mutia and Mauwn are more ambivalent on the subject of Acehnese independence than many of their colleagues, however, both are Acehnese nationalists and support full political independence. Nonetheless, in seeking to dampen echoes resonating within certain images of Acehnese ethnic identity that would make Acehnese more Arabic than the actual Arabs who live in Jakarta,

Surabaya or Makassar, and more *keras* than Muslims living in Saudi Arabia, Sudan and Iran, both of these Acehese nationalists are forced to rely on a discursive logic that explicitly denies the unique Islamic character that in many instances underpins Acehese images of nationhood. They both must claim, like Snouck Hurgronje before them, that they are “just like the Javanese.”

What makes such a move on the part of refugees like Mutia, Gadi and Mauwn so interesting is that it reflects an important shift in public discourses on Acehese Islam, a shift that makes it particularly difficult for Acehese to express an Islamic identity in a way that is both effective and efficacious in the long term. If Aceh is still Mecca’s Verandah, then the relevant question becomes who is sitting on the porch? For Pinto it was the Turks. Snouck Hurgronje saw Arabs and Indians. But today there are no travelers stopping in Banda Aceh and this means that it is only the Acehese who occupy this sacred space. But in some strands of public discourse explored above these Acehese look much more like Snouck-Hurgronje’s threatening outsiders than his irreverent and syncretic Acehese. Both variants of this image are invoked by my Acehese interlocutors as well as the Indonesian state, NGOs, and others involved in representing the conflict.

Some authors (Aspinall 2003, 142; Emmerson 2000) point out how Islam itself is a rather ambivalent aspect of Acehese pro-independence movements due to the fact that it is not a factor that differentiates Aceh from the majority of others living in the archipelago.<sup>42</sup> One of the things that I hope this section has shown is that Acehese Islamic identity is central to the Acehese conflict and Acehese nationalism, and that ways of thinking about and discoursing on Acehese Islam do differentiate Acehese from other Muslims in the archipelago. Acehese and others frequently point out that “Aceh is identical with Islam” (*Aceh identik dengan Islam*). A cursory

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<sup>42</sup> Jacqueline Aquino Siapno (2002) argues that Islam actually is central to these movements due to the way it provides Acehese a basis from which to seek justice in the face of state violence and oppression.

consideration of the relevant discourses and images—school girls clad in *jilbab* on the front page of Indonesian newspapers (*Suara Pembaruan* 10 June 2004), an Acehese mother singing the *Hikayat Prang Sabil* to her infant child, Acehese reclaiming their status as Hindu-ized Muslims—makes it clear the various ways in which this is true. Islam’s place in Acehese nationalism may be ambiguous, but it is secure. It is nearly impossible to reference the conflict without referencing Islam, though whether or not these references are to an Islam that is *keras* or soft, foreign or local, pure or syncretic, violent or not, depends greatly on the circumstances of the moment and the effectiveness that can be drawn from it. All of these images resonate with the echoes of historical and symbolic associations attached to an Acehese identity forged on Mecca’s Verandah. Today that verandah may be closed for renovations as years of war and political repression make it difficult to refurnish or refashion in the contemporary era, but this does not keep various actors from conjuring spirits there in the hopes that, just for a moment, such spirits might intervene in the very conflict that keeps the verandah closed.

### **Flying a Grounded Plane: The Renaming of an Acehese Garuda**

There is an airplane that was bought by “Acehese” shortly after Soekarno, Indonesia’s first president, declared the archipelago an independent state in August 1945. According to a genealogy traced for me by nearly every Acehese whom I have spoken with on this subject, this airplane was the first in an Indonesian national fleet of passenger carriers, now Garuda Airlines. I have seen Soekarno board this plane in black and white film clips, watched it take off and land several times in a recent music video from Aceh, and the plane, its double or a copy<sup>43</sup> sits outside

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<sup>43</sup> There were actually two of these planes, both bought by “Acehese.” One presumably sits, as mentioned, in Taman Mini. The other, according to one of my interview partners, sits outside the *Lembaga Adat dan Kebudayaan Aceh*, an Acehese cultural museum in Banda Aceh at the Blang Padang field (Interview 30 August 2003). But both of the planes, as well as another at Jakarta’s Halim Perdanakusuma Airport and yet another outside of a museum in Rangoon, Myanmar, are probably replicas. According to a one-page feature about the

the Acehnese style house at Taman Mini. The story of this plane, a gift to Soekarno and the young Indonesian nation, is one of the most common episodes cited by the Acehnese refugee community when I inquire about key events in Acehnese history. Usually my interlocutors explain that the plane was given to Indonesia while nothing but exploitation was received in return. Although more indirect in its accusations against the Indonesian state, typical is the following story, related to me by Teuku, a young man in his twenties who has family members in jail in Indonesia and who was targeted by the military himself before coming to the United States. As Teuku described a series of incidents from Acehnese history, nervously jumping from one episode to the next, I asked him:

Me: I have already heard a lot about... a plane that was bought by Acehnese... (at) the time of the Indonesian Revolution... I'm curious, I hear a lot about this plane but I don't know a lot about the plane's history and who bought this plane. Do you know about this plane or not?

Teuku: I know a little... That plane was a purchase of the Acehnese community, a contribution, in the time of President Soekarno.

Me: From the community?

Teuku: Yes, the society gathered money. It wasn't from one organization, or from an individual. The Acehnese community, they had a system of life that was really beautiful. They were always unified in trying to overcome problems... a problem was always brought to the council to be solved together. Continually they were always in a situation of mutual cooperation [*gotong-royong*],<sup>44</sup> a life of mutual cooperation [*gotong-royong*], helping each other. That purchase was a contribution from the community. There were contributions of gold, there were contributions of eggs, there were a lot of contributions of gold, in the time before. I don't quite understand. But that's a symbol of the Acehnese people; they were able to buy an airplane with money collected from the different states of Aceh. Differing areas in Aceh gathered money to buy a plane. And just like this, it will

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airplane in the 2003 Indonesian Independence Day special edition of *Tempo* (2003, 53), the original plane has been lost to history and was probably "cannibalized" for parts in the 1950s.

<sup>44</sup> Teuku's choice of the term *gotong-royong* is quite interesting here. Once described by Soekarno as a "genuine Indonesian term," *gotong-royong* was the word he used during the Indonesian Revolution to represent the ultimate principle on which the Indonesian state should rest. According to Soekarno, *gotong-royong* was the summation of the *Pancasila*, or five principles, which were to guide the new Indonesian nation and that became even more important symbolically under the New Order (Kahin 2003, 126).

happen again in Aceh. The Acehnese people are one, gathered together, mutually helping each other resist the colonialism that occurs in Aceh. (Interview, 8 February 2004)

That Indonesia's first airplane, named Seulawah, is such an important symbol is not surprising. Rudolf Mrázek (2002, 8) notes that already in 1898, Kartini, later to become a nationalist icon and a model of the ideal Indonesian woman, had suggested that flying machines would soon be visible all over the archipelago. Images of travel abounded in both late Dutch colonialism and the Indonesian nationalist movements of the early twentieth century (Mrázek 2002, especially 1-89). An airplane represented not only modernity and the ability to travel as Kartini imagined, but a vital necessity if the government was to administer the young archipelagic nation effectively. The airplane also evoked the mythic *Garuda*,<sup>45</sup> as the Indonesian airline was later named, an important symbol of the revolution and the Indonesian state. What is peculiar is that committed Acehnese nationalists would so often cite this airplane in their history, especially considering its significance is accepted widely outside circles of Acehnese nationalists and the history it invokes often points explicitly to the Indonesian state. It is significant that Teuku's recollection places the purchasing and exchange of the airplane during the "time of President Soekarno" (*waktu masa presiden Soekarno*). Seulawah is indeed from the "time of President Soekarno." It is impossible to reference it without also referencing this larger than life revolutionary figure, even when the referencing is done by Acehnese who, unlike Teuku, do not politely place the title of "President" in front of Soekarno's name. In most representations, both Acehnese and Indonesian, the plane and its double seem to have had two purposes: to transport Soekarno around the archipelago during the Revolution and to break the Dutch blockade by

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<sup>45</sup> The *Garuda* is a mythical bird, ridden by the Hindu god Vishnu, which sits on Indonesia's national seal and was an early symbol of the Indonesian nationalist movement.

smuggling weapons from Burma during the same period.<sup>46</sup> Soekarno is nearly always identified as the planes' chief passenger and the Acehnese role in these stories is usually limited to the buying and exchanging of the planes and the part Banda Aceh played as the site that weapons from Burma entered the archipelago before being distributed elsewhere. The Acehnese revolutionary figure and *ulama* Daud Beureueh, who is often accredited with collecting the necessary funds from the Acehnese people to support the Indonesian Revolution, rarely has as large a role as Soekarno when Acehnese tell me about Seulawah. This story, even when told by Acehnese nationalists, is not really a story about Aceh. It is a story about Indonesia and, more specifically, about Soekarno.

One possible analysis might argue that Acehnese who narrate stories of this airplane participate in the broken promise meta-narrative described above. According to this meta-narrative it is not necessary to maintain that Aceh remained independent after the Indonesian Revolution. Thus the airplane can be invoked without damaging one's argument for independence. In my experience it was indeed members of student-led organizations who embraced narratives of the broken promise and most emphatically related stories about this airplane. But even Acehnese who question the usefulness of narratives of the broken promise would eagerly talk about the plane. Many of them used it as an example of Indonesia's ill-will towards Aceh. Moreover, I am not convinced that Acehnese always invoke the image of this airplane simply to make an argument about Acehnese sovereignty. The plane is not always recalled as part of a narrative of Acehnese independence. Even when it is, it is not always clear how or why it fits such a meta-narrative. As I listened to and watched the many representations of this flying machine, I found myself wondering what it is about the airplane that compels Acehnese to continue to use it as a metaphor in the manner described above. Is it entangled in

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<sup>46</sup> Thus there is the replica in Rangoon mentioned above.

the notion of modern flight as being the possession of modern nations? Could it be a notion of the plane as a vehicle that is necessary to realize the unitary state of Indonesia, a nation of fourteen thousand islands? Is it the airplane's status as a gift of the Acehnese population that makes it significant, as Teuku's comments seem to suggest, or is it something about the gift itself, a flying machine, that makes this airplane so important?

Perhaps this airplane remains such a powerful symbol for Acehnese because of its very association with the Indonesian Revolution. Perhaps it gains its authority from the echoes of this historical period in the same way that *merdeka* does in the example offered by Siegel above. I suspect that the authority of this symbol, the way it is invoked nearly ubiquitously by Acehnese and Indonesians alike, derives in part from this association. But its role as a site of the contestation of Acehnese identity is complex and I believe it is best illustrated in the way Acehnese contest the "renaming" of the plane.

One of the most interesting aspects of my Acehnese interlocutors' recollections about this plane is that in many instances what they most emphatically recall is neither the collection of the funds nor even the successive years of disappointment and disillusionment following the exchange with Soekarno. Instead the climax of these stories focuses on the changing of the plane's name. The two original vehicles were both named Seulawah: Seulawah Inong and Seulawah Agam. Seulawah is the name of a volcanic mountain in Aceh. *Inong* and *agam* are Acehnese words denoting female and male respectively. On the map of greater Aceh that Snouck Hurgronje includes in his ethnography there are two separate peaks labeled Seulawah Inong and Seulawah Agam. Hasan di Tiro (n.d.) refers to the mountain Seulawah several times in his autobiography, and the two planes once, though he does not differentiate between *Inong* and *Agam* in either case and the mountain does not play as large a role as other mountains or

ranges where great heroes of an Acehnese past met their valiant ends. Despite the fact that according to Zul (6 May 2004) most Acehnese do not know Seulawah by its Indonesian epithet “golden mountain” (*gunung emas*), a reference to the gold collected to purchase the original plane also alluded to by Teuku in the above quotation, the symbolic combination of the mountain and the original airplane still carry enough meaning that in a recent failed joint-venture the provincial government of Aceh attempted to start its own air carrier named Seulawah Airlines. When my Acehnese interlocutors speak of these airplanes they often complain about how their names were changed to Garuda. They speak as if the name of the original planes, rather than the national airline they began, had been changed.

Neither of the planes named Seulawah, however, as far as I have been able to discern, were ever renamed Garuda as some of my Acehnese interlocutors claim. The working replica at the Halim Perdanakusuma Airport in Jakarta has the name Seulawah emblazoned under the cockpit window and the Garuda Airlines website (Garuda Airlines: The Airline of Indonesia) notes the first vehicle in its fleet by its original name. Yet Acehnese talk about the christening of the Indonesian national airline as Garuda as if the name Garuda had come to replace Seulawah on the cockpit door. The Garuda is a Hindu and Javanese symbol. It is also a symbol of the Indonesian Revolution and the Indonesian nation. When my Acehnese interlocutors turn to me and say, “And then, after the sacrifice of the Acehnese people, Soekarno changed the name of that plane to Garuda,” they enact a popular theme of Acehnese nationalist discourse: Soekarno and his conspirators took what was Acehnese and renamed it Indonesian. These stories about the renaming of Seulawah are not stories about the authenticity of Acehnese and Indonesian pasts, nor are they simply episodes in a history of broken promises and commitments. They are stories



about the exercising of authority, especially the authority to name. Citing Acehnese beliefs about naming children James Siegel (2000, 379-80) writes:

In nineteenth-century Aceh at least, an appropriate name brought good fortune. Not everyone can bear the same fortune-bringing name; it has to be suitable to the child. Thus no particular name is a bearer of good fortune simply by its signification; it is a question of its fit... When the name has to fit the child the qualities named are thought present in the infant. But to have good fortune, the child has to be given the name. The name may express qualities inherent in the child, but without the name, presumably those qualities would not develop... The possibility of adding something and making it appear that it was already there is an attribute of Acehnese proper names.

There are a series of other examples in which Acehnese regularly contest the renaming of important symbols that have come to represent the Indonesian nation through their new names. Perhaps the best example is the aversion of some Acehnese to the term *bahasa Indonesia* (Indonesian language). In the early weeks of preliminary research for this project I sent an e-mail to a potential Acehnese interlocutor and apologized for my still primitive ability in the Indonesian language. I received a jovial and prompt response that closed with these words of warning: “No need to apologize... By the way, Acehnese do not speak Indonesian (*bahasa Indonesia*). We speak Malay (*bahasa Melayu*) when we cannot speak Acehnese.” As a result of this exchange I was not surprised when on numerous occasions I later met with Acehnese who, entirely at their own initiative, spent thirty minutes or more offering detailed explanations and descriptions of the arrogance that was required on the part of Indonesian nationalist leaders to rename the Malay language, a language that had been used for centuries throughout much of Southeast Asia, including Aceh, Indonesian. The Malay/Indonesian term *nusantara* also proved problematic at times for these Acehnese nationalists. *Nusantara* is a term that refers specifically to the Indonesian archipelago and is often associated with the Indonesian nation. My interlocutors pointed out to me that *nusantara* represents the extent of Dutch conquest in

Southeast Asia (Interview 30 August 2003; Interview 17 February 2004). As such it became the boundaries of Soekarno's beloved Indonesia and some explicitly associate the term with the late Indonesian president (Interview 30 August 2003). But for all of the attention the Acehnese I studied paid to these two terms, both "renamings" in important senses, they were unable to deny their usefulness. They regularly affirmed Aceh's historical role of protectors of *nusantara* from Western colonialism, often using this very idiom. Zain once expressed to me that the term is preferable to *tanah air* (earth and water; "homeland"), which carries an even more explicitly nationalist connotation. Nonetheless *nusantara* still carries an Indonesian nationalist flavor and as a result he felt the need to define his usage of the term before we began to use it together. When not talking among themselves, members of the refugee community in the United States are often forced to use Malay/Indonesian because most cannot speak English at a practical level and the language that they most commonly share with their interlocutors is Malay/Indonesian. On more than one occasion I have finished a conversation with a refugee who has diligently refused to refer to Malay as the Indonesian language, only to turn to one of his or her colleagues who politely asks me if we can converse using *bahasa Indonesia*.

Unlike Malay, which was renamed *bahasa Indonesia* in 1926 (Kahin 1004, 97), Seulawah was never renamed Garuda. But the way my Acehnese interlocutors talk as if Seulawah had been renamed places this struggle in a collection of tales about the power to name. One thing that is particularly interesting about these stories of "renaming" is that through them Acehnese nationalists give Indonesian nationalist leaders, especially Soekarno, an extraordinary amount of power over Acehnese history. Zul's comments about the Indonesian Revolution below illustrate this point:

So, the Acehnese people, at that moment (the Indonesian Revolution), felt that because of the promises, I mean... they shared the same struggle and felt that

other people in the archipelago [*nusantara*] such as those in Sulawesi, Kalimantan, and the island of Java, were their family [*saudara*]. That was really how Acehnese felt, in a heartfelt way... The procurement of the airplane was done by Acehnese. Soekarno came to Aceh, came in front of Abu Daud Beureueh until he cried. "Please. We have to bring Indonesia back to life again. It has to shine in the eyes of the world again." So, he approached Abu Daud Beureueh so Acehnese would want to sacrifice in order to collect all of their various material wealth in order to procure the airplane. The goal in procuring the airplane was to create an overseas connection for Indonesia, a bilateral connection... (Acehnese felt everyone shared) the same fate... But then, the Acehnese were betrayed, betrayed [*dikhainati*]. Their dignity [*harkah dan martabatnya*] was disregarded [*diinjak-injak*]. There was no sense of justice. The economy was shattered as a result of Indonesia's treatment (of it). Until today Aceh's position, Aceh's condition, is still troubled and Acehnese feel until today that life is not safe, not independent [*merdeka*]. (I mean) independent [*merdeka*] in the sense of safe, free [*bebas*]. They don't want to be directed by others. They want to be directed by the Acehnese themselves, as in the earlier times, before the coming of the Dutch. (Interview 30 August 2003)

I find Acehnese tales of the Indonesian Revolution such as this one to be unique in an important sense when compared with tales of other historical time periods. In this account, the main Acehnese role is that of victim, a victim who cannot help but be duped and betrayed by Soekarno. In other stories about other periods the Acehnese are never duped as a people in this way. According to these tales neither the Portuguese nor the Dutch succeeded in accomplishing what was done by those who Hasan di Tiro disparagingly refers to as "Javamen."<sup>47</sup> But stories about Seulawah, especially Seulawah's "renaming," reveal one important thing about these "Javamen," especially Soekarno. Regardless of any of their other qualities, they had the authority to name. I suspect that this may be one of the most important factors in the propensity of Acehnese to invoke the story of Seulawah. There is no doubt that the airplane is an effective symbol of the broken promises of the Indonesian nation-state. It is usually referenced alongside admonitions that Aceh was never given the special autonomy that it was promised during the

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<sup>47</sup> This is a reference to the famous "Javaman" fossil, *Pithecanthropus erectus*, discovered on the island by Eugene Dubois in 1892. Hasan di Tiro (n.d.) regularly refers to the Javanese with this term in his autobiography in order to satirically point out the lower state of evolution that he claims marks the Javanese from other Southeast Asians.

Revolution. But when Acehnese stress the injustice that they feel at Soekarno's renaming of Seulawah they also reveal a point of contestation and possible insecurity that is present in their railings against *bahasa Indonesia* and *nusantara*. This point of contestation and insecurity lies in the possibility that Soekarno truly had the authority to name and that, despite their best efforts to the contrary, the proper names of *bahasa Indonesia*, *nusantara* and Garuda will bless the children to whom they were given by "adding something and making it appear that it was already there."

### Finding a Place for Daud Beureueh: (Dis)Claiming Darul Islam

Before, Abu (Daud Beureueh) asked us to make him a car. And that order we carried out. Then the car was transferred over to Abu. Next, Abu asked permission to become the driver. And we were completely obedient. However, what was there to say when the fate of that car was to carry the wrong passengers, then to be wrecked and smashed. Nah, now... I want to make a new car, and I as well will personally be the one to drive it. I requested this, Abu gave his blessing! (*Tempo* 2003, 46)

In beginning a discussion of the Darul Islam-Tentara Islam Indonesia (DI-TII, Abode of Islam- Indonesian Islamic Army)<sup>48</sup> rebellion and how it enters histories told by Acehnese refugees in the United States, I begin with a quotation from an article in the 2003 Independence Day (August 17<sup>th</sup>) special edition of the widely-circulated Indonesian news magazine *Tempo*. The quotation represents a rumor retold by the Acehnese sociologist Otto Syamsudin Ishak as he heard it spreading through Aceh in the 1990s when the region unofficially held the status of *Daerah Operasi Militar* (DOM, Area of Military Operations).<sup>49</sup> It represents the words of Hasan di Tiro. In the quotation the GAM leader draws explicit connections between his movement and

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<sup>48</sup> In this paper I will refer to the rebellion alternately as DI-TII and Darul Islam.

<sup>49</sup> According to Kirsten E. Schulze (2003) Aceh was never officially declared an area of military operations during this period. However, the years from 1989 until 1998 are remembered by most Acehnese and Indonesians with whom I have spoken as DOM. I will continue to use this term in order to reflect the memories and imaginings that I have encountered as well as to refuse to participate in any discourse that might seem to soften the violence of the period.

the famous *ulama* Daud Beureueh. As a rumor the quotation's origin remains unclear. It may be just a rumor in the colloquial sense, an unfounded tale that arose during one of Aceh's most violent periods. But as previous events in Acehnese history have shown, a rumor is never just a rumor.<sup>50</sup> A consideration of who invokes and disseminates this rumor in this particular magazine is helpful in beginning to understand how different people with differing stakes in the conflict claim this connection between the two resistance leaders. Otto Syamsudin Ishak represents one disseminator of this rumor as he uses it to introduce his discussion of the important similarities and differences between Hasan di Tiro and Daud Beureueh. In the same issue another article mentions that the Indonesian political scientist Nazaruddin Sjamsuddin claims that Daud Beureueh himself told the story that Hasan di Tiro came to him looking for a blessing shortly before the beginning of the latter's guerilla struggle. According to this story, after much discussion the *ulama* did offer his blessing to the GAM leader. This rumor also was popularly embraced by people living in Aceh in the 1990s according to the article from which it is cited above. Each of these invocations occurred in vastly different historical and political contexts, yet they are all located within the pages of one special edition of *Tempo* that very explicitly links the Daud Beureueh-led Darul Islam rebellion of the 1950s with the current resistance of Hasan di Tiro's GAM. There are many layers of people speaking for each other within the covers of this one magazine: editors speak for historians, sociologists speak for the masses, and friends and relatives speak for each other. The magazine, in one important sense, represents a model rumor-mill in which competing authorities (familial, popular, journalistic, scholarly) all attempt to lay claim to stories that seem to have political import, even if that import is ambiguous.

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<sup>50</sup> In addition to the discussion above of the Reuters cable that reported on the supposed coming of an Ottoman fleet to Aceh in 1873, see Ann Stoler (1992) for another example of the particularly effective role rumors have played in Acehnese-Dutch relations.

The ambiguities of the above statement do not rest solely with the question of who is the speaker and for whom and with what authority they speak. There can be little doubt that the quotation attempts to link Hasan di Tiro's struggle for Acehese independence with Daud Beureueh. However, this linkage is anything but clearly delineated. Although Hasan di Tiro seems to need the blessing of Daud Beureueh, as is suggested elsewhere in the same edition (*Tempo* 2003, 51), his request seems haughty. It was presumably Daud Beureueh who created the need for a new car by crashing the old vehicle. The statement leaves unstated how much of the blame should fall on the old *ulama*. In some places it seems sympathetic, but in others it leaves room for a subtle mockery. It is not clear to what extent the granting of the request was actually the result of Daud Beureueh's embarrassment at having crashed the original car. If this is the case, it is not so much a granting of a request but a way for the respected *ulama* to save face in what amounts to an inevitable acquiescence. All that really is clear is that Daud Beureueh was the driver, but that he has passed that role onto Hasan di Tiro.

Acehese nationalists, especially those whom most often rely on the narrative of the successor state to make claims for independence, find the Darul Islam rebellion of the 1950s a period of Acehese history that is particularly problematic (Aspinall 2002). Aceh's participation in Darul Islam seems to confirm the region's commitment to an Indonesian nation-state. Therefore, GAM claims of an unbroken line of independence and resistance to colonial rule are called into question. However, uneasiness with Aceh's participation in the Darul Islam rebellion is not limited to Acehese nationalists. Others interested in the region, from Indonesian government and media sources to international NGOs and scholars, are faced with the problem of how to place DI-TII within a genealogy of Acehese resistance. The possible reasons for this difficulty are numerous. In general Darul Islam belongs to a period of history that Indonesians

do not frequently recall, perhaps in large part due to the memories that it evokes. These memories include recollections of personal experiences of violence. The “gruesome connotations” (van Dijk 1981, 10) that the rebellion carries for many Indonesians may contribute to a general aversion to the retelling of stories from the period.<sup>51</sup> In addition Darul Islam may remind Indonesians of painful divisions within Indonesian society. Despite this uneasiness, it seems difficult for those with an interest in contemporary Acehnese politics to speak about the region’s history without referring to Darul Islam. The Rebellion of the 1950s seems to remind some of the contemporary violence, yet they struggle with the question of how to link the two periods. In what follows I will examine some of the associations and resonances within common Indonesian recollections of DI-TII in Aceh in order to explore how the rebellion might seem a logical comparison to GAM. Then I will examine particular ways that those living in the Acehnese refugee community in which I studied sometimes talk about DI-TII and Daud Beureueh in ways that subtly attempt to reclaim the *ulama* and his movement for their narratives of Acehnese nationalist history.

### Remembering “The Rebellion of the Islamic Scholars”:<sup>52</sup> Genealogies of the Holy War

On August 7, 1949, in the midst of the last months of the Indonesian national revolution, Sekarmadji Maridjan Kartosuwirjo declared the existence of the Islamic State of Indonesia (Negara Islam Indonesia) at Cisampang, West Java. By 1953 Kartosuwirjo would be joined, at least in name, by rebels from many regions of the Indonesian archipelago including Central Java, South Kalimantan, South and Southeast Sulawesi, and Aceh. Kartosuwirjo’s Indonesian Islamic

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<sup>51</sup> Jenny Gaynor (2004), in a paper explaining the variety of responses that Sama people living in Southeast Sulawesi utilized in dealing with the violence of Darul Islam, notes an exception to this general pattern for a short period following the fall of the New Order. During this time the Sama people with whom she worked were quite open in talking to her about Darul Islam and their roles in the local manifestations of the conflict. Gaynor points out that their openness was in part the result of a particular political and historical moment.

<sup>52</sup> I have taken this title from C. van Dijk (1981).

Army (Tentara Islam Indonesia) had been fighting with both Dutch and Indonesian Republican forces since 1948, and the last rebels in Sulawesi would not be defeated until 1965 (Kahin 2003, 409; van Dijk 1981). The foundation of Kartosuwirjo's armed force lied in large numbers of irregular troops, militias and armed bands that had been fighting along side the official Republican units, with varying degrees of formal recognition, since 1945 following the Declaration of Indonesian Independence. Notable among these groups were battalions of Hizbullah (God's Army), Muslim militias associated with the political party Masjumi. In 1948, as part of a cease-fire known as the Renville Agreement, Republican troops and many irregular units withdrew from West Java leaving the Hizbullah and a few other units behind. These groups of irregular soldiers refused to withdraw and eventually formed Kartosuwirjo's Islamic Army.

The rebellion spread to other areas in the late 1940s and early 1950s as the successive central governments enacted a series of policies that aimed at rationalizing the day-to-day affairs of the new Indonesian nation. In many places, notably Sulawesi and Kalimantan, demobilization of irregular soldiers seems to have been the dominate issue propelling fighters to join the Darul Islam rebels. In other areas, economic and political rationalization seems to have been the most important impetuses for rebellion. In Aceh, a group of *ulama* that had gained significantly in power after seizing the upper hand over the local ruling elite (*uleebelang*) and rival *ulama* factions during the Indonesian Revolution found itself struggling for power yet again, this time with a victorious Republican government that consolidated Aceh into the province of North Sumatra and weakened the influence of Daud Beureueh, one of the key leaders of this *ulama* group, in the process.<sup>53</sup> Meanwhile, an Indonesian-wide debate on the role of *syariat* in public

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<sup>53</sup> This *ulama* group was formed predominantly by the organization Persatuan Ulama Seluruh Aceh (PUSA, United Ulama of Aceh).



life coupled with the spreading of the Islamic rebellion had sent Soekarno on a diplomatic mission to various regions, including Aceh, in 1953. This mission fueled the fires of a long-standing debate over *syariat*'s role in society when in February Soekarno gave a speech in one of the nation's hot spots, Amuntai, Kalimantan. In response to a question from the crowd, Soekarno argued against the establishment of an Islamic state on the grounds of national unity. He also seemed to deny his earlier promise that such a state could be created with majority support in the legislature (*Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat*, DPR) and, in the opinion of the assembled crowd, he failed to distinguish between those advocating the violent overthrow of the government and non-violent activists advocating the implementation of *syariat* through democratic means.<sup>54</sup> Several weeks later he arrived in Aceh to a welcome of protesters and a hostile crowd who forced Soekarno to explain his position on the place of Islam in the state (van Dijk 1981, 256-8). In September 1953, after a series of changes in Aceh's provincial status in the previous five years and Soekarno's visit just a few months earlier, Daud Beureueh decreed Aceh a part of the Islamic State of Indonesia and took to the mountains.

In C. van Dijk's (1981, 340-396) discussion of the causes of the Darul Islam rebellions he lists Islam as the least influential. To support this claim he points to what he identifies as the "unorthodox" aspects of the rebellion such as the identification of leaders like Kartosuwirjo and Kahar Muzakar (in South Sulawesi) with the mythical *ratu adil* (just king) and the multi-faceted motivations of rebel fighters who often targeted other Muslims regardless of their personal piety (van Dijk 1981, 9, 391-6). But even if one accepts van Dijk's problematic assumptions about Islamic "orthodoxy" it is important to consider, especially when examining how Indonesians remember the rebellion today, that DI-TII took place within a field of Islamically charged

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<sup>54</sup> On May 7, after months of outcry on the part of Muslim activists, Soekarno attempted to soften his position. However, he continued to maintain that Indonesia was not a "majorocracy" and that *Pancasila* could not be replaced through the acquisition of a majority in the DPR.

symbols and debates. In West Java, regions firmly within the control of Darul Islam guerillas were identified as *suffah*, sacred areas cleansed of all enemies, and raids were carried out with “the aim... to collect tax or loot from plundering enemy property, in accordance with the Muslim law on *ghanima*, or war booty” (van Dijk 1981, 103, 105). In South Kalimantan, mosques were sites of political activity by both sides. (van Dijk 1981, 240). Republican troops as well continued to use Islamic imagery even after the beginning of Kartosuwirjo’s rebellion. Those who participated in the retreat following the Renville Agreement labeled it *hijra*, referring to Muhammad’s temporary flight from Mecca and exile in Medina before his triumphant return. This continued a tradition within certain segments of the Indonesian independence movement that labeled tactical withdrawals with this term (van Dijk 1981). The central government tried to persuade local Islamic leaders to issue *fatwa* (legal judgment) against guerilla rebel organizations (Van Dijk 1981, 252-3) and Republican troops applied pressure on *ulama* and other local religious leaders to support the Republican cause.

But perhaps no region that participated in the rebellion so easily evoked (or continues to evoke) notions of Islamic piety and authenticity as did Aceh. Daud Beureueh and other leaders of the rebellion mobilized symbols of previous Acehnese resistance and portrayed the Darul Islam movement as a continuation of Acehnese struggles for independence that had began in 1873. They identified the Indonesian state as a product of Dutch colonialism that had prevented Islam from taking its rightful place in Indonesian society and named Kartosuwirjo’s Islamic State of Indonesia as the authentic manifestation of the August 1945 declaration of independence (van Dijk 1981, 314). The Fifth Territorial Division of the Indonesian Islamic Army, the one led by Daud Beureueh in Aceh, was given the name Teungku Tjik di Tiro in honor of the famous *ulama* who had led Acehnese resistance to the Dutch in the late nineteenth century before being

martyred (van Dijk 1981, 315).<sup>55</sup> That Daud Beureueh led an inner circle of powerful *ulama* (PUSA) only furthered the impression that this resistance movement was following in the footsteps of previous generations of Acehese religious scholars who had resisted the Dutch. When the Indonesian Ministry of Information released the transcript of two speeches to the DPR by the Prime Minister in which the Minister reported that just a few days after the rebellion began in Aceh “red flags with a white star and crescent”<sup>56</sup> were raised at police stations in two East Acehese municipalities (Kementerian Penerangan R.I. 1953, 9), images of the decades long Acehese struggle against the Dutch, which Soekarno had lauded just a few years before, may have filled the nightmares of Republican troops and officials who now found themselves in the role of Aceh’s foe. It seems likely that Acehese rebel attempts to portray the conflict as one that continued the holy resistance against the Dutch were successful in linking DI-TII in Aceh to a past of Islamic resistance in the minds of at least one of their opponents. The Ministry of Information report cited above explicitly links the “Daud Beureueh affair” to the oppressive Dutch colonial order yet identifies the *ulama* of Aceh as rebellious “religious fanatics” much in the same manner as did their Dutch predecessors (Kementerian Penerangan R. I. 1953, 18-31).

Despite the best efforts of Acehese nationalist activists today to link their struggle to a past of holy resistance in the colonial period without reference to the 1950s, for some Indonesians, including some Acehese, Darul Islam seems an irresistible comparison to GAM. In July of 2003 I attended a lecture at the Universitas Sam Ratulangi in the city of Manado, North Sulawesi. The lecture, entitled “Politics and Harmony: Inter-cultural Relations in Indonesia (A Political-Economic Analysis)” (Michael 2003), was delivered by an Indonesian

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<sup>55</sup> It should be noted that certain Acehese forces incorporated into the Republican Army also took this name.

<sup>56</sup> These were Ottoman flags symbolizing Ottoman suzerainty over Aceh in earlier years. Today the flag forms the basis of the GAM nationalist flag.

social scientist to a group of American graduate students and professors. In the course of the question and answer period following the lecture, which focused mainly on Aceh and other regions of the archipelago embroiled in separatist conflicts and sectarian violence (e.g., Papua, the Malukus), the speaker raised Darul Islam, connected it to GAM, and made the claim that Darul Islam in Aceh was the first separatist movement in Acehnese history. I suspect that this assertion, offered somewhat off-the-cuff, is not unusual despite the evidence that Daud Beureueh never seriously intended to break Aceh away from an Indonesian nation-state. The special edition of *Tempo* mentioned above, distributed the week of Indonesian Independence Day 2003, is another example of note. Just three months before its circulation, fighting had resumed again in Aceh after several months of a cease-fire. The military operation that was projected to last only six months, involving the largest ever military presence in Aceh, was dragging on and high-ranking military and government officials were simultaneously praising the military's progress in Aceh and claiming that the original projection of a six month operation had been overly optimistic. The title of the issue, superimposed over a painting of a romantic battle scene representing one of the many Dutch invasions of Aceh, might translate either "Why Does Aceh Rebel?" or "Why Did Aceh Rebel?" (*Mengapa Aceh Berontak?*). The issue contains over sixty pages of coverage dedicated to Aceh including articles by Indonesian and Western journalists and academics that examine Acehnese history, culture, religion and resistance from the beginning of the Acehnese war with the Dutch until the present day. But Daud Beureueh is clearly the feature of the coverage. The first thirty pages are devoted to this *ulama* who is identified as a "small portrait of a long-standing Acehnese conflict... (His story is one) of an *ulama* that was betrayed, the story of a region's resistance to a restrictive central power" (*Tempo* 2003, 28).

What this special edition of *Tempo* so effectively points to is the multitude of public memories and echoes that makes Darul Islam so difficult to leave out of a genealogy of Acehnese rebellion and conflict. Turning to the individual stories within the pages of this edition one begins to see powerful images of Acehnese history and identity that are all presented as fitting within that “long-standing... conflict” as part of a story of a betrayed *ulama* and “a region’s resistance to a... central power.” This issue confirms what C. van Dijk (1981) points out: that DI-TII in Aceh was a “Rebellion of the Religious Scholars” led by Daud Beureueh. Aceh’s special relationship to Islam is recurrently referenced in a multitude of interesting ways. The years following independence in which tensions throughout the archipelago heightened as Soekarno became embroiled in the debate about the possible formation of an Indonesian Islamic state are given much attention in an article entitled “Beureueh, A Rebellion with a Classic Cause.” The demand of some Acehnese, especially Daud Beureueh’s PUSA, for regional autonomy as it was promised by Soekarno in 1947 is described chiefly as a means to acquire an Islamic government in the province (*Tempo* 2003, 29). Perhaps most importantly, Daud Beureueh is identified as an especially intense *ulama*. Citing a 1953 issue of a magazine entitled *Indonesia Merdeka* (Independent Indonesia), the same article points out that he was a harsh critic of those who had fallen away from Islam and that he was not hesitant to use the labels “haram” and “kafir” to describe people and practices that deviated from the faith (*Tempo* 2003, 30).

Even more suggestive of the current conflict’s connection to an Acehnese past are the graphics arranged next to a paragraph in an earlier section that introduces the issue’s coverage and beseeches Indonesians to “mull over” (*merenung*) the question of why “those who once fell in love (with the nation) then rebelled.” Superimposed over a picture of the same battlefield scene that is on the cover is another picture of Daud Beureueh holding a sword in an imposing

yet dignified pose. This image of the Acehnese *ulama* is superimposed over a larger image of Soekarno's chest and head. Both leaders gaze pensively off into an unknown distance while the battle rages behind them. Beureueh appears to be almost sitting on Soekarno's shoulder (*Tempo* 2003, 24-5). In this image it is unclear as to whether Beureueh belongs in the battle scene behind him or with the revolutionary figure of Soekarno. But it clearly marks him within the tradition of an Acehnese *ulama*-based leadership that rebelled against the Dutch for over seventy years. It also suggests Daud Beureueh's status as a "great figure that history cannot easily forget" (*Tempo* 2003, 28).

Perhaps it should not be surprising that some Indonesians draw links between Darul Islam, Acehnese resistance to the Dutch and other colonial powers, and the current separatist conflict. Playing up potent stereotypes of Acehnese ethnic identity and playing on public insecurities such as fears of national disintegration and the political mobilization of Islam, DI-TII in Aceh seems a logical link in a genealogy of Acehnese armed revolt, the opening of "the story of Acehnese resistance in the post-colonial era" that assumes a connection with a similar story in the colonial and contemporary ones. Throughout the archipelago DI-TII was especially tenacious, lasting from the final year of the Revolution until the mid-sixties, just before the rise of the New Order. It was explicitly Islamic in orientation and also invoked as its cause a theme that has long been claimed by nearly all who represent Acehnese history: resistance to an oppressive foreign authority. Not only was the rebellion in Aceh led by a charismatic *ulama* who very explicitly portrayed himself as fighting in the tradition of Teungku Tjik di Tiro (van Dijk 1981), but it was fought against a regime that Muslims across the archipelago in steadily growing numbers saw as anti-Muslim. The discourse of Darul Islam rebels, especially in Aceh, was distinctly anti-colonial. In the writings of Hasan di Tiro (1958) from this time period one

can see the beginnings of his later appeals that the various ethnic groups of Indonesia be given the opportunity of self-determination. He leveled bitter critiques of such nationalist slogans as *satu bangsa, satu bahasa dan satu tanah air* (one people, one language and one homeland) and contested this version of national unity in his argument that “each ethnic people (in the archipelago) has the right to continue their lives according to their different religions, cultures, *adat* and moral values without interference from outside factions” (Hasan 1958). Both Darul Islam and GAM have gained most of their supporters from areas of Aceh dominated by ethnic Acehnese (van Dijk 1981, 354) and as Darul Islam wore on its violence proved to follow patterns that would later reappear in the Indonesian military’s war with GAM, including the use of violent pressure against civilians by both sides (Kementerian Penerangan R.I. 1953, 10; van Dijk 1981, 103-5), military sweeps and other special operations conducted by Indonesian mobile brigades (Kementerian Penerangan R.I. 1953, 9; van Dijk 1981, 299), military reprisals against civilians (van Dijk 1981, 250) and the targeting of schools and mosques (van Dijk 1981, 394). Even contemporary claims of economic exploitation leveled by GAM at the Indonesian government seem to parallel grievances raised about the rationalization policies of successive Indonesian administrations in the years leading to Daud Beureueh’s official declaration joining Kartosuwirjo.<sup>57</sup>

These connections that Indonesians and others draw between DI-TII and GAM have varying efficacies. Dave McRae (2002, 40) has noted the propensity for Indonesian authors to compare modern separatist movements with earlier rebellions, especially Darul Islam and PRRI-Permesta (Pemerintahan Revolusioner Republik Indonesia- Perjuangan Semesta [The Indonesian Republic’s Revolutionary Administration- Universal Struggle]). This allows these authors to

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<sup>57</sup> See van Dijk (1981, 357-8) for a brief example of shifting control of Aceh’s oil fields, one example of the “economic interference” that characterized regions that joined DI-TII and that continues to be a major issue in the Acehnese conflict today (Kell 1995).

place current separatists in the category of rebellions that have already been put down, setting a precedent that builds confidence among the military and those who support their actions in the interest of the nation-state. The aversion on the part of GAM activists to telling these stories points out another reason why anti-Acehnese independence activists might want to highlight them: they explicitly reference Acehnese commitment to an Indonesian nation, even if not to the Republic. But for those who find themselves opposed to Acehnese independence there is a more frightening side to this comparison as well. As mentioned above, Indonesians do not usually recall DI-TII nostalgically if they remember it at all. The violence of the period was intense. Darul Islam can remind Indonesians of certain unsettling divisions within Indonesian history, especially those brought about by political factionalism and regionalism as well as public activism for the creations of a *syariat* governed state, concerns which have increased in visibility again since the fall of Soeharto in 1998 (Emmerson 2000). In many cases Indonesian comparisons of GAM and Darul Islam are made only surreptitiously through DI-TII's absence in references to the Aceh conflict in much the same way that the rebellion is omitted from Acehnese nationalist histories. For instance, the ubiquitous description of the violence as a "27 year conflict," at least once and sometimes several times in Indonesian newspaper articles on the conflict in Aceh, separates the current hostilities from those of the past despite the fact that in the 130 years since 1873 Aceh has only been free from political hostilities for less than thirty. A similar move is observable at Taman Mini Indonesia Indah where Seulawah sits outside a New Order-inspired traditional Acehnese house. Inside the walls of that house are rows and rows of rebellious and recalcitrant Acehnese Muslims as they were captured by colonial-era cameras. But nearly all of these examples are from the pre-revolutionary period, telling a story of Acehnese resistance that excludes both GAM and Darul Islam and that is symbolically subsumed



by the red and white Indonesian flag waving just inside the entrance of Aceh's section of the park. These representations point to the insecurities that a genealogy of the Acehese conflict that links GAM to Darul Islam might raise for some Indonesian observers. DI-TII's absence in the above examples suggests a question that is also asked in a latter section of the issue of *Tempo* discussed above. In this section, examining the role of Snouck-Hurgronje in Aceh, the author reveals that Snouck-Hurgronje may have eventually become convinced that even his own advice was doomed to fail. He feared that the Acehese may have been an unconquerable people. The article asks if the Indonesian nation might learn anything from this Dutch scholar's admission.

"It just doesn't need to be mentioned": Narrating the History of an *Ulama*-less Rebellion

Closing this discussion of Darul Islam, I now turn to some examples of the ways that the Acehese refugees I have studied attempt to reclaim the effectiveness of DI-TII in their narratives of Acehese history. Generally, Darul Islam does not play a large role in the narratives told by Acehese nationalists. As mentioned above, Edward Aspinall speculates this is because it is difficult to place the rebellion within at least one of the dominant historical frames of Acehese independence, the successor state. The refugees I have studied sometimes admit as much, pointing out that at best Darul Islam is irrelevant to Acehese nationalist history (Interview 28 February 2004) and at worst it is damaging to it (21 October 2003). But such aversion is not clear-cut or consistent. Acehese activists and their allies do periodically reference Darul Islam in their histories. A 1998 US-based NGO publication supporting efforts to identify and resettle Acehese asylum seekers in Malaysia includes Darul Islam in the publication's section devoted to the historical background of political unrest in Aceh. The publication notes that DI-TII was a "precursor to Aceh's independence movement" and even includes the problematic statement that until the founding of GAM in 1976 "the desire for an

independent Islamic state did not die” (Mason 1998, 5-6). Hasan di Tiro (n.d.) refers to Darul Islam briefly in several places in his autobiography, usually brushing it as “the 1950s revolt against Javanese/’indonesia’.” It is clear that Acehese nationalists are uncomfortable with the Darul Islam rebellion and Acehese participation in it, but this discomfort does not prevent them from periodically invoking certain associations located in the history of Darul Islam even while excluding it from their more rehearsed narratives of independence.

This seems especially the case when it comes to the person of Daud Beureueh. In writing of the Indonesian revolutionary hero Sjahrir, Rudolf Mrázek (1994, 497) offers these impressions of how Indonesians today remember the revolutionary hero:

Many of the common people... might say first that he was a “Padang man...” in most cases they would locate his name in the time of Revolution. The memory of... (his) gigantic funeral... seems to make many of the men on the street somehow identify Sjahrir with the six generals killed in 1965. Several of the people I talked to even believed that he was one of the life-size bronze figures on the generals’ monument standing now in Jakarta... Sjahrir remains misplaced. He became the only one of the Big Three of the Revolution—after all of the marginality he had lived through—who was buried at the center-stage, state-heroes’ cemetery.

To claim that Daud Beureueh lived a life of marginality would be disingenuous.

Beureueh was symbolically at the center stage of Acehese, and often Indonesian, politics from the time of the Revolution until his death in 1986. The issue of *Tempo* cited above notes that after DI-TII he was “never again a government official, never the head of a rebellion, but his influence did not decrease much” (*Tempo*, 2003, 31). Haqi, who as a small child accompanied his father at meetings of Beureueh’s friends and political acquaintances, notes similarly that:

At that time I was still little and so... I only tagged along as a small child... I didn’t come as a participant... I only just tagged along. But, they always held various meetings... after DI-TII, always... discussed political gossip in Aceh. For example... the Governor was going to be chosen, so... they discussed it.

“This military commander that’s going to come, Si ‘A.’<sup>58</sup> How will he be for Aceh?” [Haqi is mimicking the speech of those who attended these meetings.] ...they would discuss it. It was sort of like that. So although it was after DI-TII they truly... followed political developments in Aceh... (F)or the (government) posts... the central government asked the agreement of Daud Beureueh and his colleagues... It was like that. (Interview 28 February 2004)

Claims of Daud Beureueh’s power after DI-TII may be exaggerations. After the rebellion it is not clear that he held any influence at all within central government decision making circles of either the Old or New Orders. But it is clear that Daud Beureueh remained an important figure within Acehnese society until his death. He was the only major leader of DI-TII who was not killed. James Siegel’s 1969 ethnography reveals that he still held a place of esteem in Aceh and remained a PUSA leader. In 1978 he was violently kidnapped by the New Order authorities and brought to Jakarta due to fears that he might lend support to the recently-founded GAM. But today Daud Beureueh, like Sjahrir, is “misplaced.” He is misplaced because he lies unclaimed. In a tradition dating to at least the Dutch-Aceh War of the late nineteenth-century, Acehnese remember courageous *ulama* who led resistance movements against foreign invaders and oppressive central powers. Daud Beureueh consciously utilized this historical imagery in much the same way that GAM members do today. Why would he not? Whatever his personal motivations, in the eyes of many he was a courageous *ulama* resisting a foreign authority exerting power unjustly in Aceh. Daud Beureueh put himself at the center stage of Acehnese politics and history by taking on this role and it is this centrality that makes him an unclaimable and misplaced figure today. He cannot be claimed fully by Acehnese nationalists due to his commitment to an Indonesian state. He cannot be claimed fully by Indonesian nationalists, not only due to his role in DI-TII, but because of the way in which his rebellion evokes comparisons to GAM and makes him a potentially potent symbol of Acehnese resistance against centralized

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<sup>58</sup> Si A is the name of a hypothetical military commander in this example. It is comparable to saying Mr. X.

authority. No single figure in Indonesian history more prolifically echoes with all of the markers of the Acehese historical stock hero—*ulama*, warrior, reformer—yet this is exactly why he cannot be claimed by anyone. He echoes too dangerously. But despite the inability to fully claim Daud Beureueh for their political efforts, Acehese nationalists are not content to simply let this powerful symbol of Acehese Islamic resistance remain silent. They may not allow themselves to claim Daud Beureueh through a line of direct genealogical descent as they do with Teungku Tjik di Tiro, but Acehese genealogies do not always rely on claims of direct descent in order to gain their effectiveness.

One of the most common ways that Acehese attempt to reclaim Daud Beureueh as a symbol befitting their own struggle is to argue that despite the fact that he fought for an Indonesian Islamic state, his authentic intentions were otherwise:

(In 1945) without being conscious (Aceh) entered into Indonesia's bed, eh? [Ihsan chuckles for a few seconds.] And also without a referendum, without anything... just entered like that. Finished, Acehese became Indonesian. And I have not studied a lot of history after the time of '45. What I know is that there was not a war again, after that. Except eventually there was war again in Aceh, however... what year was that? ...the fifties... Ah, that was really a different style... a different form. He (Daud Beureueh) wanted to found Indonesia as an Islamic nation, following Kartosuwirjo. Even that was actually a false concept, according to Acehese history... It was wrong to found the Islamic State of Indonesia; there isn't a basis for it according to Acehese history. Because it was still within Indonesia, this was the problem. But I hear later Teungku Daud Beureueh founded the Islamic State of Aceh, however I do not really know a lot about that. But what is clear is that Teungku Daud Beureueh was someone that was not happy with Indonesia. He did not like Indonesia... And the lives of Acehese were not very good, not very good from the economic aspect... in every aspect it was not a good life. That is what the Acehese felt. (Ihsan, Interview, 17 January 2004)

In the above statement Ihsan clearly attempts to claim that Daud Beureueh may have intended to found an independent Acehese state. This claim is one that some of Ihsan's colleagues make as well. Daud Beureueh did negotiate the founding of an Acehese Islamic

Republic. But this Republic was part of a larger arrangement negotiated with other rebel groups after it became apparent that Darul Islam was failing. It was squarely within the framework of a federalist United Republic of Indonesia. Ihsan's attempt to portray this as an instance in which Daud Beureueh's rebellion came into line with the contemporary independence movement is interesting. He avidly and regularly argues for Acehese independence using the logic of the successor state. Thus, it is not surprising that when I asked him to describe the events of the 1950s and 60s he questioned the legitimacy of the process through which Aceh was incorporated into the Indonesian nation and interpreted the resistance movement of Daud Beureueh as within the tradition of an independent Aceh. But what is most interesting is that he abandons the argument that Daud Beureueh was really attempting to establish an independent state. Despite his effort to present such an argument about the unbroken and long-standing nature of Acehese desires for independence that includes the *ulama*, he finally comes to rest on a vague notion that Daud Beureueh, like other Acehese, had strong negative feelings about the Indonesian nation: "Teungku Daud Beureueh was someone that was not happy with Indonesia."

Zul is an associate of one of the student movements mentioned above and is more inclined than Ihsan to support Acehese independence through narratives of Indonesia's broken promise with the Acehese people, though he does hold that it is the "historical reasons" (*alasan sejarah*)<sup>59</sup> that ultimately and conclusively make the case for independence. The following story reflects a broken-promise narrative:

...then (following the Indonesian Revolution) Aceh was colonized just the same by other areas in Indonesia and today is known as a place called Indonesia... Soekarno, and other figures such as Hatta, they came and approached the Acehese, the Acehese leaders. So they made... an agreement with Abu Daud Beureueh so that Aceh would just join with Indonesia... join with Indonesia

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<sup>59</sup> As mentioned above, when my Acehese interlocutors refer to the "historical reasons" justifying independence this usually refers to what Aspinall identifies as the successor state narrative: Aceh has always stood alone (*berdiri sendiri*) and never surrendered its sovereignty to the Indonesian state.

because they felt that everyone shared the same fate... it was promised... by Soekarno that (Aceh) would be given special autonomy, (and) through that autonomy, would be given special rights compared to other areas... Because... his intentions were holy... his intentions were to advance Aceh further, finally, Abu Daud Beureueh proclaimed (that Aceh was) joining Indonesia... So years and years went by. What was promised by Soekarno at that time was not realized. It was all lies! So, because Abu Daud Beureueh felt betrayed and deceived, at last other Acehnese people felt deceived also. Abu Daud Beureueh was the leader of the Acehnese *ulama* at that time and people felt Abu Daud Beureueh to be a leader also... again (he) took to the mountain so that Aceh again could be as in the beginning... until finally some years into the time of DI-TII the Indonesian side tried again to reconcile with Acehnese *ulama*... They reconciled again so that Abu Daud Beureueh would come down again... So that he would return again to Indonesia (they said), "Let's build Indonesia again." They also promised the same things that had been promised at the beginning... (B)ecause Abu Daud Beureueh was already quite old, maybe he did not think... as he did earlier. Finally, in the end, this problem became lost to him. (Zul, Interview, 30 August 2003)

Two months later Zul made an addition to his story as I pressed him to explain more about the events of the 1940s and 1950s and whether Aceh had ever become a part of Indonesia (21 October 2003). After Daud Beureueh surrendered he was eventually arrested by the Indonesian government,<sup>60</sup> but even after he was arrested he remained connected to various Acehnese resistance movements. In fact his movement actually never surrendered and had gone underground in the early 1960s. Even today Daud Beureueh's movement continues to resist Indonesian rule. Hasan di Tiro, who is "like his son," (*seperti anaknya*) follows directly in his footsteps.

Zul's story parallels Ishan's in the sense that in both cases the narrators attempt to rescue the historical figure of Daud Beureueh for Acehnese history by claiming that his political goals corresponded with those of the contemporary struggle for Acehnese independence. Both admit that Daud Beureueh made a political error in joining Soekarno, who turned his back on Beureueh, and Ishan questions the *ulama*'s alliance with Kartosuwirjo whose Indonesian Islamic

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<sup>60</sup> This arrest seems to be the one mentioned above that occurred in 1978 after the founding of GAM.

State did not “correspond with Acehese history” anymore than Soekarno’s Indonesian Republic. These responses varied in important ways from Mauwn’s, the most outspoken of these refugees on the topic of Daud Beureueh and his successes and failures:

Mauwn: And they said when the grass, Daud Beureueh ordered (it) to, they (the grass) will fall... If the wood in the jungle, Daud Beureueh just said, the wood in the jungle to stand up, they (the wood) going to stand up... He’s great speaker but he doesn’t have good ideology, he doesn’t have good political.

Me: What was wrong... with his politics?

Mauwn: Too narrow... you know military... in his hand, and Aceh’s. Just like before colonialists came... In Aceh hand only... The same thing after they kicked out the Dutch, all the military like... Ibnu Hadjar<sup>61</sup> in Borneo... Imam Kartosuwirjo... And all this stuff, the people under him and under his control. So basically, the soldier of Indonesia under his (Daud Beureueh’s) hand... I don’t know what’s happened to his head. Then he over to Soekarno and Soekarno, he give chance Soekarno to build his own military by helping... he’s helping Soekarno to build his own military, and the military can attack him back. Yes, I think if at that time he take over, everything can be (his), even Indonesia. (Interview [in English] 27 February 2004)

Mauwn shows great personal respect for Daud Beureueh and seems in awe of his powers. He conjures images of the *ulama* commanding nature (grass and trees) in a mystical fashion that evokes the notion of the just king (*ratu adil*) that van Dijk (1981, 391-6) identifies as an important factor in the Darul Islam rebellions in other regions of the archipelago.<sup>62</sup> But Mauwn also reserves criticism for Daud Beureueh, though this criticism is different than that of either Ihsan or Zul. For Mauwn, Daud Beureueh’s most obvious shortcoming was not in joining an Indonesian state but in failing to dominate it. In Mauwn’s historical account Daud Beureueh had the strength to crush Soekarno and take over the entire archipelago, but he failed to do so and

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<sup>61</sup> Ibnu Hadjar was a primary leader of one branch of Darul Islam that operated in Kalimantan (Borneo).

<sup>62</sup> I find it curious that van Dijk so readily attributes the charisma of Darul Islam leaders such as Kartosuwirjo and Kahar Muzakar to the popularity of the notion of the *ratu adil* but does not suggest the possibility that Daud Beureueh also might have carried such appeal. After all, Daud Beureueh was also a charismatic leader who cooperated with these other Darul Islam heads. If the claim that Mauwn makes above is any indication, it seems that Daud Beureueh might also have been attributed with supernatural powers similar to that of the *ratu adil*, though I have no other data to support this claim at the present time.

even helped Soekarno build the army that would eventually defeat him. Mauwn did not specify what sort of political entity such a conquest would have created. But Daud Beureueh's failing to assert his power over an Indonesian Islamic State is Mauwn's primary critique. Does he imagine Daud Beureueh as a type of reincarnation of Iskandar Muda, one who could have overseen an Acehese archipelagic empire that exceeded the boundaries of Aceh's golden age or is this an alternative version of a tale which claims that at one time the promise of an Indonesian nation-state was not completely unacceptable to Acehese?<sup>63</sup> His representation strays markedly from those of both of his colleagues mentioned above.

In analyzing these and other recollections of Darul Islam, how is one to understand the various ways Acehese nationalists lay momentary claims on certain aspects of Daud Beureueh even while denying him an explicit place in their genealogies of resistance? It is easy to see how Ihsan is attempting to rescue his meta-narrative of the successor state by refusing to admit that Daud Beureueh held sovereignty over Aceh and by claiming that he ultimately decided on independence for the territory and its people. Similarly, Zul's story is well within the confines of the many narratives of the broken promise and he still manages to claim that Daud Beureueh ultimately "fathered" Hasan di Tiro and GAM. Both of these moves are reinterpretations of more common understandings of these events in the sense that they reassign the meaning and motivation of the historical figure of Daud Beureueh by questioning the conviction of his efforts

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<sup>63</sup> Aspinall (2002, 16-17) notes that GAM demands are often not specific in their description of the territorial boundaries of an independent Aceh. He points out that some, including Hasan di Tiro, have occasionally alluded to boundaries that include all territory that was part of the Sultanate of Aceh in 1873 (e.g., much of Sumatra). I have not encountered such claims among the refugees I studied though I have found them in a variety of literature ranging from scholarly works to third-party activist materials and Hasan di Tiro's *Price of Freedom*. I suspect that they are less legal-political claims to an independent Acehese state than historical claims to a grand and glorious past. I am not sure that one should differentiate between an Indonesian Islamic state dominated by Aceh and the possibility of a new Acehese empire. These two political imaginings are blurred. Mauwn is particularly interested in notions of Aceh as a leading member in an historical pan-Malay world. It is still unclear to me how this vision affects his ideas about a post-independence Aceh, which he explicitly identifies as just one of many worthy political goals.



to incorporate Aceh into the Indonesian state. But I choose to see these narratives as more than simply reinterpretations and attempts to cover-up inconsistencies in Acehese legal arguments about independence. I once asked Haqi if Acehese were ashamed of the events of the 1950s and if this is why they usually did not mention them in their histories. After a thirty minute exchange in which I continued to press him on this point because, as I pointed out to him, I did not quite believe that Acehese were not ashamed of this time period, he offered this explanation:

DI-TII Aceh, that was a mistaken political path... If they wanted to move against the center, why didn't they move directly for independence...? It's not that we don't want to mention it because it was a mistaken political attitude... but it's already happened... So we really don't have to be ashamed about it because it's already in the past... if you ask about DI-TII, if he<sup>64</sup> (the person asked) knows about it, he will talk about it too... (but) it just doesn't need to be mentioned... (Interview 28 February 2004)

This statement could easily be brushed as one designed simply to throw an unwitting researcher such as myself off the trail of absences in nationalist histories. However, despite the fact that other Acehese within Haqi's group have told me that Acehese are in fact embarrassed by Daud Beureueh's embracing of an Indonesian state (21 October 2003), his description of what would happen if I asked about the rebellion was quite accurate. While it is true that Daud Beureueh is not included in the litany of Acehese heroes that these refugees offer and that Darul Islam is usually only commented on when Acehese nationalists are asked about it, neither the *ulama* nor the rebellion are explicitly disclaimed. I have never heard nor read of an Acehese who characterized Daud Beureueh as a traitor or a collaborator with the Indonesian nationalist elites. The closest to this is the refrain, alluded to above in Ishan's statement, that in 1945 there never was a referendum and that a "small group of *ulama* do not have the right to determine the

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<sup>64</sup> In this case I have translated the gender neutral pronoun *dia* as "he" because Haqi is specifically referring to a hypothetical friend who he genders as male.

fate of a nation.” This refrain does not usually mention Daud Beureueh by name, though anyone who is familiar with the history of Aceh’s relationship to the Indonesian nation-state would immediately know that he was one of the *ulama* mentioned. Far more common are stories that portray Daud Beureueh as either duped by Soekarno, as in Zul’s commentary, or that portray the *ulama* as having missed a grand opportunity, as in Mauwn’s story. Daud Beureueh may make the Acehese nationalists that I have met uncomfortable, but he does not make them angry. He is a tragic figure, not a traitor.

Thus Daud Beureueh metaphorically finds himself displaced in Acehese nationalist accounts. As the issue of *Tempo* above argues, he is a “small portrait of a long-standing Acehese conflict.” But despite the way he evokes this comparison, Acehese nationalists are quite reluctant to invoke him in any direct way. This parallels another ambiguous aspect of the historical narratives that these refugees tell. One central trope in the history of Acehese resistance to powers outside Aceh has long been the central role played by Islam in general, and the *ulama* in particular. But my interlocutors do not usually identify the *ulama* as particularly important in their struggle.

Since the beginning of GAM’s guerilla operations one tactic that the Indonesian government and military have employed against the movement is the attempted usurpation of local Acehese *ulama* (Aspinall 2003, 142). Examples of this strategy include the incorporation of local *ulama* into Indonesian-wide Islamic organizations as well as violence and intimidation. When I have asked Acehese refugees about the role of the *ulama* in contemporary Acehese society, they often reference these moves by the Indonesian military and state (Interview 25 January 2004; Interview 25 January 2004; Interview 7 February 2004; Interview 8 February 2004; Interview 28 February 2004). But when I ask whether they or their colleagues are

concerned about the lack of *ulama* that support independence, the refugees I questioned usually indicated they were not. One group questioned the need for *ulama*-based leadership in the modern world, mirroring similar assertions that the special place of Sayyids and Arabs was only a part of Aceh's past, not its present (Interview 7 February 2004; Interview 8 February 2004). Another pointed out how dangerous it is for *ulama* to speak openly against the Indonesian state and its violence but asserted that many *ulama* actually do work in subtle ways to aid Aceh through their influence in Indonesian government circles (Interview 28 February 2004). Mauwn claimed that Hasan di Tiro is actually an *ulama*, despite the fact that he does not have an Islamic education:

My definition of *ulama* is *ahli*... doesn't matter if they economic, they still be *ulama*, intellectual too, even though he doesn't know *fiqh*.<sup>65</sup> But the definition of *ulama* I say, from the view of some people is just... (those who) know about how to pray. I don't accept this kind of *ulama*... I don't understand this *ulama*... Hasan Tiro is a(n)... *ulama*, he can be like that. *Fatwa*.<sup>66</sup> Sure. He make *fatwa*, a couple *fatwa*. Hasan Tiro, he make couple *fatwa*. (Interview [In English] 27 February 2004)

On one hand Mauwn reflects important themes in modernist Islamic reformism that have played a large role in Muslim political movements throughout the world for over a century. Many of these movements have been antagonistic towards the *ulama* and have sought to redefine what constitutes authentic Islamic knowledge by stressing the importance of Western science and scriptural rationalism.<sup>67</sup> But Mauwn's comments also make a claim about the role of Islam and the *ulama* in Acehese resistance that is heavily influenced by echoes of the past. Just as he,

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<sup>65</sup> *Ahli* is a Malay/Indonesian word meaning expert or advisor. *Fiqh* denotes the four schools of jurisprudence through which most *ulama* interpret Islamic law.

<sup>66</sup> A *fatwa* is a legal decision that traditionally can only be rendered by *ulama* trained in one of the four schools of *fiqh*.

<sup>67</sup> I should note that in our conversations Mauwn has cited Muhammad Abduh, the nineteenth-century Egyptian modernist reformer. This confirms an intellectual genealogy that includes at least one major Islamic reformer of the past two centuries.

Ishan and Zul cannot bring themselves to definitively break links that they have with Daud Beureueh, the quintessential Acehnese *ulama*, Mauwn reclaims Hasan di Tiro as an *ulama* rather than claim him as a new kind of Acehnese leader.

I am not suggesting that the Acehnese nationalists whom I have studied are preoccupied with the lack of *ulama* support for independence or even that they find particularly troubling the person of Daud Beureueh. But if DI-TII in Aceh was, as van Dijk suggests, the one branch of Darul Islam that was a true “rebellion of the religious scholars,” then GAM is the first major resistance movement in many (re)collected Acehnese histories to be a rebellion of *ulama*-less Muslims. This is no small matter, especially considering the way all sides in the conflict assume and attempt to lay claim to an authentic Acehnese Islamic identity (e.g., the debate over *syariat*). When Nazaruddin Sjamsuddin (*Tempo* 2003, 51) reveals that, according to Daud Beureueh himself, Hasan di Tiro did make the visit that Otto Syamsudin Ishak refers to as a rumor just five pages earlier, *Tempo*’s editors remind us that “Hasan Tiro... truly understood that Daud Beureueh’s blessing was very important in order to prop up his movement.” At least based on the rumors circulating around this one event alone, clearly it was and clearly it is. But how Daud Beureueh props up Hasan di Tiro’s movement is not clear, especially considering that DI-TII carries the associations of incorporation into the Indonesian nation that at least some independence supporters find so offensive and ultimately destructive to their legal claims. I suggest that it has something to do with Haqi’s observation above: “it (DI-TII) just doesn’t need to be mentioned.” In one important sense, Haqi is absolutely right. To the extent that Acehnese nationalist histories are about the Acehnese nation Darul Islam is no more an omission than the ignoring of the horrific killings of suspected Communists in 1965 and 1966, another traumatic event that could be construed as Indonesian history rather than Acehnese. But there are several

important ways in which Haqi's statement is incomplete. It fails to consider the legal ramifications of Aceh's incorporation into the Indonesian nation as an integral aspect of the Acehese nation itself. There are even more subtle yet equally as important ways that Haqi's statement fails to reflect the dynamics of Acehese nationalist histories. As I have argued throughout this paper, nationalist histories come in many forms. One is the legal argument. These arguments have no place for Daud Beureueh and Darul Islam and the *ulama* truly "doesn't need to be mentioned." Others involve the explaining of an Acehese anti-colonial heroism, the utilization of tropes of Acehese ethnic identity in strategic invocations, and the spontaneous sharing of stories simply because they seem to carry "weight." In all of these later forms Daud Beureueh finds a place in which to stand. I believe this is why I have not encountered anyone who condemns the *ulama* as a traitor or collaborator despite the notion that it was he who conducted the single most important act on which nearly all legal arguments for independence hinge: the turning of Acehese sovereignty over to Soekarno that began Aceh's ill-fated relationship with the Indonesian nation-state.

Daud Beureueh is an echo. As his name is borrowed in differing contexts but is never fully claimed by anyone, his story resonates with signifying power that no one can nor wants to unconditionally deny but that no one is able to control. Unlike Seulawah, which can and is claimed by nearly all parties to the conflict as a regular part of their narratives, Beureueh cannot completely be claimed by either Acehese nationalists or their opponents except in very cautious and ephemeral invocations. Daud Beureueh was an *ulama* and a resistor of both Dutch rule and "Javanese colonialism." But he was also the one who pledged an oath of loyalty to the Indonesian nation and was later "honored" for that loyalty in what amounted to a thinly-guised exile to Jakarta compliments of the central government. To the extent that his political visions

were within the boundaries of an independent Indonesian state and that he ultimately reconciled with the Republic, he is a symbol of Indonesian unity. Yet to the extent that he continued a tradition of Acehese *ulama*-led movements of resistance founded on Islamic discourses and that he serves as a prescient reminder of how that tradition can be turned against the Indonesian state, he is simultaneously one of the greatest threats ever posed to the Indonesian nation. He is, in many ways, as he self-stylized his troops in the 1950s, a reincarnation of the Teungku Tjik di Tiro. But one can never be sure if he is the Teungku Tjik di Tiro that appears at Taman Mini under an Indonesian flag or the one who fought as an ancestor of Hasan di Tiro in *The Price of Freedom*. He is truly a “small portrait of a long-standing Acehese conflict.”

## **Snouck Hurgronje and his Fanatical Copyists: Laughing Refugees and Effective Histories**

I opened this thesis by noting two related events—a discussion at a conference in Singapore and a particular visit to a group of Acehnese refugees in the United States—without clearly explaining how I saw those events to be related. Here I want to suggest that their relationship is also connected in some way to an anecdote mentioned above from the pages of Snouck Hurgronje’s famous ethnography. In that example Snouck Hurgronje, despite his best efforts, completely missed nearly exactly what it was that he was looking for. Searching for an authentic Acehnese ethnic identity among the pages of a literature of the Acehnese people, he threw aside as the “profusions of fanatical copyists” what at that precise moment represented the most effective expression of Acehnese identity: the prayers of Acehnese opponents scribbled in the margins of his manuscripts, perhaps intentionally left there for him to read. In the end, one might say, Snouck Hurgronje got it right. His final conclusions about how to subjugate the Acehnese relied on the very stereotyped notions that his “fanatical copyists” invoked on the blank pages of his manuscripts. But did he really?

In the above thesis I have argued that Acehnese historical narrative represents far more than an attempt to make legal claims against the backdrop of international law and the international community. Of course these attempts are common and they have come to structure much of Acehnese nationalist discourses. But Acehnese historical narratives, their collection and narration, are much more complex. They are not simply the privy of Acehnese nationalists, despite nationalist claims to the contrary. Nor are these histories always put to explicitly nationalist purposes by Acehnese nationalists. Yet they are an inescapable part of Acehnese nationalist experience, perhaps because the discourses associated with them seem an inescapable aspect of a whole group of Acehnese identities.



This raises an important question about one of the most potent of those Acehnese identities discussed above: the supposed Acehnese propensity for violence, especially violence in the name of Islam. It was partly on the assumption of such an Islamically inspired propensity for violence that Snouck Hurgronje made his recommendations to the Dutch colonial authorities. Such notions continue in the present. On more than one occasion I have heard Acehnese and Westerners refer to an Acehnese “*syahid* (martyr) mentality” in attempts to describe the psychological basis of Acehnese violent resistance. It is true that the *syahid* is an ideal that has underpinned expressions of Acehnese resistance for over a century. This much is clear from my own discussion of the *Hikayat Prang Sabil* above. But I worry about labeling these expressions as examples of a “mentality,” especially when such a label is meant as a psychological explanation for violence committed by Acehnese. In addition to the essentialist analysis that such references rest upon, analysis so obviously stereotyped that it should have very little place in academic discourse, I worry about this notion of an Acehnese “mentality” for more important reasons. For one, it ignores the complicated histories of power and colonialism that have intertwined for centuries with conceptions of Acehnese identity. It also ignores a complex history of the concept of *syahid* itself, especially as this concept has been recalled in a series of Acehnese conflicts over a vast period of time. Most importantly, and most relevant to the work in this paper, it robs Acehnese histories of their dynamism by making the same mistake that Snouck Hurgronje did in his classic work: it misrecognizes an effective identity for an authentic one.

I have illustrated above that Acehnese effective histories are far from consistent. They involve a multitude of meaningful symbols that are often contradictory. In many instances the same Acehnese invoke both the meta-narratives of the broken promise as well as the successor

state idea. Frequently they elaborate profusely on the airplane named Seulawah, despite the fact that in their own recallings Seulawah was a Garuda before it ever became a symbol of an Acehnese nationalist identity. They invoke tropes of “hardness” (*keras*) even after they have denied them. And often their elaborations of Acehnese history owe just as much to Indonesian historical texts and terms as to a self-proclaimed “revival” of Acehnese nationalist sentiment. But in the moment these stories are individually invoked, what matters is their effectiveness, not their consistency.

This is not to say that Acehnese who tell such effective histories are short-sighted. The well-crafted consistency in certain instances of nationalist public expressions, such as those designed to be consumed by an international audience, points to the contrary. But when I reflect on my Acehnese interlocutors’ laughs at the comments of Sydney Jones in the anecdote above, I now find myself wondering if they laughed because they thought that she was missing the point all together. This returns me to the May conference and countless other discussions, news stories and scholarly works about Aceh and the “Aceh problem.” What I find most intriguing about these various discussions and forums is the way the very images that I have explored in this paper are employed and avoided by various participants. Some openly embrace them, but in a superficial manner, such as the reams of newspaper reports that begin with such sentences as, “Aceh, the most Muslim of Indonesia’s provinces...” Some discredit GAM uses of history as propaganda or fantasy, despite the fact that in many ways GAM histories mirror well-established Indonesian histories, in some cases exactly. Other analysis focuses on what might be called the “root causes” of the conflict—economic exploitation, human rights abuses, negative center-periphery relations—and imply that historical narrative is simply a means either to mobilize support within Aceh or make an emotional or legal argument to a generally apathetic

international audience. Some analysis completely ignores these images, some denies them, and others are based on them.

Like the effective histories that Acehnese tell, Acehnese nationalism is neither simply the product of a set of circumstances or a contextless allegiance to an ideal. It is entangled in a series of discourses spoken about, by, for and against Acehnese of all political persuasions. These discourses are not the authentic identities that Snouck Hurgronje searched for nor the *syahid* mentality identified by contemporary commentators, but neither are they simply empty stock characters that are cynically manipulated to effect a particular end. These identities and the histories that evoke them can be effective precisely because they can be strategically recalled and denied yet still carry enough “weight” to be believable, though for whom they are believable, in what senses, and in what contexts is of no small import. Despite the sophistication of some of the work mentioned above, none of it interrogates these very conceptions of Acehnese ethnic identity—Islam, *syahid*, violence, *syariat*, rebellion—that so often find their way into the discussions of activists, journalists and academics alike. But our very discussions often mirror the words of the Acehnese refugees in this paper as they alternately invoke and deny particular perceptions of Acehnese identity. This points to the reality that those of us who study Aceh are also inextricably entangled in the very same webs of discourse as those we study, a realization that should not be surprising in any case, but especially in this one in which Snouck-Hurgronje looms over our work and Acehnese activists read it and in many cases participate in its creation. Such a recognition might prove useful if it helps to introduce new ways of thinking about Acehnese nationalism that do not posit analytical poles such as root cause versus ideology, instrumentality versus sincerity, and others.

In what is written above, I show that one place in which one can see the inadequacy of such poles is in the echoes of Acehnese effective histories. Neither simply a means to an end, as much of the literature on Acehnese historical narrative suggests, nor monolithic and universally accepted models of Acehnese ethnic identity, Acehnese nationalist histories are both strategic and spontaneous, sincere yet instrumental, long-standing yet ephemeral. The Acehnese nationalist histories that I have collect, histories that in turn have been collected elsewhere at other times, continue to echo in effective strings of tales that never quite recur in the same way twice. This may be why they have remained in circulation for long periods, in most cases being recalled in different conflicts and political contexts. But this is also why they remain conflicted and short-lived. Neither nationalist Acehnese nor their opponents are quite able to make their histories unambiguously fit larger meta-narratives that suit their long-term political goals. These histories are too lively and reference too easily a plentitude of political associations. Acehnese nationalists must deal with the possibility that some of the very same stories that indicate their dissatisfaction with central authorities from outside of Aceh also may indicate the possibility of an Acehnese commitment to the Indonesian nation-state. Those opposing Acehnese nationalism must acknowledge that the very images of Islamic “hardness” that perhaps justify a violent response to Acehnese nationalism also suggest the frightening possibility that they may become the latest in a string of occupiers who cannot help but endlessly do battle with the *fanatik* Acehnese Muslim. This is why all sides must rely on the effective echoes of Acehnese history to make claims on Acehnese identity within the context of the current conflict. These claims gain tremendously from their echoes, as I have shown above, but they can only be made effective momentarily before the very echoes these narrators rely upon turn against them. Perhaps therein lays one of the reasons for the laughter of my refugee interlocutors at the comments of Sydney

Jones. Maybe her response indicated that she was listening to the wrong echoes on her side of the cavern.

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8 February 2004, Teuku

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<sup>68</sup> All names listed here and elsewhere in this paper are pseudonyms.

