The ‘Global IDP Project’ Revisited:
Governmentality, Displacement and Politics

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**Introduction**

In the aftermath of the Cold War, the ‘internally displaced person’ – or ‘IDP’, for short – has emerged under UN auspices as a distinct concern of ‘global governance’ in the wider field of international humanitarian and development assistance. As the post-Cold War era spelled changing ‘realities on the ground’, in terms of the dynamics of conflict, violence, displacement, and, not least, international humanitarian access to affected populations, the figure of the IDP came into sharper focus. In 1992, the U.N. Secretary-General appointed the first Special Representative on internally displaced persons, and in early 1998, the *Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement* were published for wider dissemination by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and other UN agencies, and a number of other – academic and advocacy, policy and practitioner – institutions. Ten years on, at the so-called ‘GP10’ conference held in Oslo in 2008, the role of ‘civil society organisations’ was stressed in promoting the Guiding Principles, monitoring national governments, and forming ‘partnerships’ with international humanitarian agencies and development agencies.¹

To date, common conceptions of the so-called ‘IDP regime’ tend to resonate with more celebratory formulations evident in much early writings on ‘global civil society.’² Unsurprisingly, given the marked policy- and practitioner-driven concerns reflected in the production of knowledge on humanitarian and development issues in general, there is also ample evidence of a close affinity for ‘the (good) cause’ of assisting and protecting ‘IDPs,’ and the champions thereof. Moreover, suggestive glimpses from the existing international relations literature on ‘epistemic communities’ and ‘transnational advocacy networks’ have added further momentum, if also complexity and nuance, to the notion of an emerging normative framework for the global governance of IDPs.³

Much as such notions of the IDP regime point away from the kinds of insights suggested by more critical international relations scholarship focused elsewhere, the

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¹ See, for example, the shortened version of the Chair’s Summary, “Achievements, challenges and recommendations,” *Forced Migration Review* (Special Issue) December 2008, pp. 6-7. For the full text, prepared by the Norwegian Refugee Council/Internal Displacement Monitoring Council see www.internal-displacement.org/gp10.
³ Alexander Betts, WP
recent call upon ‘civil society organisations’ to aid and abet in the wider circulation of the \textit{Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement} suggests a similarly benign, even celebratory, notion of the role and significance of such formations in (trans-)national politics and society. Perhaps reflective of the participatory turn in development discourse, the drive for local partnerships and capacity-building focused on ‘IDP issues’ seems to proceed as if oblivious to the effects noted elsewhere of such initiatives upon social hierarchies and relations, political access and representation, and, in this case, the production of knowledge about the proper or rightful place of the displaced in the “national order of things.”\textsuperscript{4} In situations where IDPs, while retaining their formal citizenship, may find themselves excluded from the very (local) space of sociality within which a set of institutionalized political mechanisms and practices mediate the exercise of (national) citizens’ rights, and, arguably, obligations, the recruitment of civil society organizations into situations of (privileged) access and representation underscores the importance of recognizing civil society not so much as a ‘thing’, but rather more of a contested terrain, or a field of struggle.

While the more benign or celebratory notions of (global) civil society, and its role and significance for ‘promoting democracy,’ have received further scrutiny in recent revisionist scholarship focused elsewhere, there is little evidence to date of similar efforts to interrogate more critically what may be referred to as the ‘Global IDP Project.’\textsuperscript{5} The aim of this paper is to open up a theoretically informed conceptual space for such an exploratory investigation. To that end, it draws on by Michel Foucault’s writings on governmentality which help illuminate the very problematisation of ‘IDPs’ as a new target population for global governance inscribed within humanitarian expertise and technical knowledge. It is also informed by the critical insights to be gained from Antonio Gramsci’s writings on civil society as a site of struggle for a more rigorous investigation into the contested dynamics of recognition and representation within which actual existing ‘IDPs’ find themselves embedded. In this draft from, the paper draws on empirical research from Indonesia which, by 2001, counted the world’s most numerous IDP population, with particular focus on the contested province of Aceh which, in the

\textsuperscript{4} Lisa Malkki, \textit{Purity and Danger}.
\textsuperscript{5} See, however, Cecile Dubernet, \textit{The International Containment of Displaced Persons: Humanitarian Spaces without Exit} (London: Ashgate, 2001).
wake of the Asian Tsunami, attracted unprecedented international attention and resources, involving a proliferation of civil society organizations in large-scale, multi-donor relief, reconstruction and conflict resolution efforts. The revised final paper will also include some comparative references to other cases.

**Foucault, Governmentality and Global Governance**

To date, the powerful insights to be gained from a Foucauldian perspective on the “global IDP project” can be gleaned from research focused on international development and refugees studies. For example, such a perspective informs studies that, looking beyond the much-noted “failures” of particular development projects, have instead examined the wider effects of international development as a discourse and a set of practices rendering some (but not other) ‘problems’ and ‘populations’ visible targets for interventions. In a similar vein, a Foucauldian lens illuminates how the problematising of refugees, and the solutions proposed to their plight, by those most publicly concerned with the wellbeing of such populations not merely in international humanitarian policy and practice but also in refugee studies, remain deeply embedded within nationalist discourses and territorializing concepts of identity.

In a similar vein, a Foucauldian perspective points to the importance of exploring the genealogy of the figure of the IDP as a relatively recent addition to the categories or populations of official concern to international humanitarian discourse and practice. By contrast with narrative descriptions emphasizing the benign, voluntary, and uncontested role of “normative entrepreneurs,” “epistemic communities” and “transnational

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6 This research spanned several field visits and related research between February 2005 and December 2007. It involved the collection of local newspaper articles, and a range of other published and unpublished documents, as well as numerous and sometimes repeated interviews and visits with displaced persons and other concerned parties, including representatives and employees of national and local governmental and international organizations, as well as journalists, researchers, and many others from a wide cross-section of Acehnese society. Serendipitously, moments of collective action in the name of the internally displaced materialized during the course of research, thus also allowing for an occasional first-hand glimpse on the unfolding of a critical challenge in the cogs of the post-tsunami “anti-politics machine.”

7 See, especially, James Ferguson, *The Anti-Politics Machine* and Tania Murray Li, *The Will to Improve*.

8 Malkki, article

9 Of course, longer history of such involvement, but on ad hoc basis, without the formalization of knowledges on the IDP elaborated since the 1990s. See, for example, David Lanz, *Subversion or Reinvention? Dilemmas and Debates in the Context of UNHCR’s Increasing Involvement with IDPs.* *Journal of Refugee Studies* 21(2), pp. 192-209.
networks” in the conceptualization and dissemination of the *Guiding Principles*, Foucault’s genealogical method instead allows for a more critical exploration of the linking up of international humanitarianism and internal displacement as a practice, or a “regime of practices.” Such a perspective illuminates the proliferation of new practices for identifying, mapping, and targeting IDP populations for international humanitarian assistance and protection so as “to show its origin, or more exactly, to show how this way of doing things… was capable of being accepted at a certain moment as a principal component of the [UN] system, thus coming to seem an altogether natural, self-evident and indispensable part of it.”¹⁰

As the figure of the IDP thus comes into sharper focus so do the mentalities, rationalities, and techniques – what Foucault referred to as “governmentality” – associated with knowing, ordering, and administering to such populations. Departing from the emphasis upon sovereign power and territoriality more prominent in contemporary understandings of (trans)national politics and international relations, Foucault’s notion of governmentality instead points to practices working “to arrange things in such a way that, through a certain number of means, such and such ends may be achieved.”

"The things which government is to be concerned with are men, but men in their relations, their links, their imbrication with those other things which are wealth, resources, means of subsistence, the territory with its specific qualities, climate, irrigation, fertility, etc… men in their relation to that other kind of things which are customs, habits, ways of doing and thinking etc."¹¹

As elaborated further in Foucault’s writings on “bio-politics,” governmentality is thus concerned with the well-being of populations. As noted elsewhere, bio-politics refers to “the specific strategies and contestations over problematisations of collective human vitality, morbidity, and mortality; over the forms of knowledge, regimes of authority, and practices of intervention that are desirable, legitimate and efficacious.”¹² Viewed through a Foucauldian prism of governmentality and bio-politics, the *Guiding Principles*

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¹¹ Foucault, “Governmentality,” p. 11.

¹² Rabinow and Rose.
represent the articulation of a truth discourse about the “vital” character of a particular population (i.e., the internally displaced), about the regimes of authority (e.g., UN specialized agencies, the Brookings Project), and the practices of intervention (e.g., humanitarian, psycho-social).

Against the grain of common conceptions of the emerging “IDP regime,” as well as more scholarly efforts at theorizing international regimes and norms, Foucault points beyond assumptions as to their essential benevolence, voluntarism, cooperation, and legitimacy. That is, he helps focus analytical attention on “patterns of understanding and organization which may not be shared by all but around which an order may be construed.” A Foucauldian perspective thus invites the examination of the notion of an emerging “IDP regime” as an attempt at organizing and realm of action without overlooking contestation.13

To date, Foucault’s writings have proved scant inspiration for efforts at theorizing political contestation and struggle, especially compared to the proliferation of studies citing his work that focus on the normalizing and depoliticizing effects of knowledge/power. To date, Chatterjee’s writings on the “politics of the governed” constitute perhaps the most influential attempt to explore the often overlooked implications of power, and its productive effects, as theorized by Foucault.14 That is, for Foucault, it is mistaken to view the effects of power, as exercised through the mentalities, rationalities and practices of governmentality, as primarily negative, or repressive. Instead, he argues powerfully, they are productive of new subjectivities which, in turn, as knowing subjects, may present claims on the basis of the very governmental relationship within which they have been inscribed.

**Gramsci, Hegemony, and (Global) Civil Society**

If Michel Foucault’s writings invite further critical reflection on the genealogy of the IDP in international humanitarian discourse and practice, a Gramscian perspective upon the contested terrain of civil society brings into sharper focus the political processes,

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13 Keely, pp. 90-91.
practices and struggles within which the populations with which such discourses are concerned remain embedded. In contrast to the Tocquevillean concern with the tyranny of the majority, the puzzle of minority (i.e., bourgeois) rule under conditions of formal democracy informed Gramsci’s writings on the significance and role of a ‘dense’ civil society in complementing and reinforcing the coercive state under capitalism. That is, rather than viewing civil society as a limit upon or a counter-balance against state power, Gramsci argued that “the ensemble of organisms commonly called ‘private’” – including civic associations, religious institutions, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs, also often referred to as ‘CSOs’, civil society organizations) – helps to maintain the power of the bourgeois state by facilitating rule through the mobilisation of consent, or, in his terminology, _hegemony_, perhaps most commonly defined from his writings as “the spontaneous consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group.” Thus, Gramsci drew attention to the role of schools, churches, and what are often referred to as secondary associations as transmission belts for the assertion of universal leadership by what he called a “dominant” or “historic” bloc of social forces.

In contrast with the Tocquevillean tendency to reify – and to celebrate – a unified civil society, moreover, Gramsci’s writings describe the zone of associational life and activity identified with civil society in terms of class formation, domination, and conflict. Indeed, the geography or density of such associational activities at any particular time in history reflects, in Gramsci’s words, “the degree of homogeneity, self-awareness, and organization attained by the various social classes.” A Gramscian framework thus anchors the politics and discourse of civil society in a field of contestation among and within secondary associations, whose identities and activities are structured by patterns of class formation and the continuous movement of an expanding dominant bloc.

Such contestation concerns not merely access to political institutions and economic resources, but also attempts to project universalist leadership, especially at

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moments of crisis. A Gramscian analysis, as I have argued elsewhere, thus helps illuminate the emergence of mobilization “in the name of civil society”\textsuperscript{18} within a context of acute contestation wherein which, ultimately, what counts as “civil” and who represents “society” is at stake. It thus prompts more critical questions about the modes of recognition and representation made possible through the circulation of the ‘IDP regime’ on the, often acutely and even violently, contested terrains where actually existing internally displaced persons, who also retain national citizenship, find themselves in encounters with international humanitarian agencies and their local partners from civil society organizations.

From a Gramscian perspective, such encounters involve “[a] particular ideology born in a highly developed country…disseminated in less developed countries, impinging on the local interplay of combinations.”\textsuperscript{19} In this vein, some Gramscian scholars of international relations have suggested, new social forces are incorporated within the orbit of what has been described as a “transnational historic bloc.” Such a bloc, it has been argued, has been deeply embedded in “governmental and social institutions and civil societies of a number of countries, including weak states … [and thus] the alliance of social forces it comprises is seen as ‘natural’ and legitimate by most of its members.”\textsuperscript{20}

Transnationalism, it has been noted, has been the American mode of expansion since the mid-twentieth century, characterized “not by the acquisition of new territories but by their penetration,” requiring “freedom to operate” rather than “power to control.” Alongside the liberal stress on freedom has been a concomitant emphasis upon pluralism in the promotion of this US-led transnational bloc. Indeed, “US expansion has been pluralistic expansion in which a variety of organizations, governmental and non-governmental, have attempted to pursue the objective important to them within the territory of other societies”\textsuperscript{21} In the promotion of global liberalism, this bloc has been at

\textsuperscript{18} Eva-Lotta E. Hedman, \textit{In the Name of Civil Society: From Free Election Movements to People Power in the Philippines} (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai’i Press, 2006).


work, whenever and wherever possible, “not to suppress but to penetrate and conquer civil society in intervened countries, that is, the complex of ‘private’ organizations such as political parties, trade unions, the media, and so forth, and from therein, integrate subordinate classes and national groups into a hegemonic social order.”

The U.N., ‘IDPs,’ and Guiding Principles

Since their publication in early 1998, the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement have been disseminated by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and other UN agencies, as well as the Brookings Project on Internal Displacement, and a large number of other – academic and advocacy, policy and practitioner – institutions. They also received early public endorsement by the so-called Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), thus signaling the support of major relief and development organizations within the UN system, and of key NGO consortia. From the original (and ‘authoritative’) version in English, the Guiding Principles have subsequently been translated into some 35 languages, including Indonesian (see further below).

Addressing the specific needs of internally displaced persons worldwide, the Guiding Principles serve to “identify rights and guarantees relevant to the protection of persons from forced displacement and to their protection and assistance during displacement as well as during return or resettlement and reintegration.” In lieu of a legal definition, the Guiding Principles presents a “descriptive identification” of internally displaced persons:

[I]nternally displaced persons are persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations

of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized State border.26

As observed elsewhere, several of the thirty Guiding Principles echo the language of existing human rights and humanitarian law instruments, and each Principle reflects an effort to align such general provisions to the specific situation of internally displaced persons.27 Thus, despite the noted confusion regarding its legal status as a “non-legally binding instrument to which state consent to be bound has never been expressed,” the Guiding Principles, one recent study shows, nonetheless enjoys a relatively strong anchoring in existing international human rights and humanitarian law.28

A notable outcome in its own right, the declaration of the Guiding Principles was also part and parcel of a wider process, which enjoyed the active support of the UN Secretary General and gained increasing momentum within the UN during the 1990s. This process developed in a broader post-Cold War context where ‘new internal wars’ and changing dynamics of (forced) migration anticipated the forward movement in ‘international humanitarian interventions,’ on the one hand, and the rearguard action on asylum- and other entry regimes, on the other hand. One important dimension of this process involved the mobilization of what has been referred to elsewhere as “transnational advocacy networks,” including activists from church and human rights organizations.29 It also saw the activation of so-called “epistemic communities,” featuring in this case an impressive range of legal, operational and other expertise on forced displacement and humanitarian action.30 A key aspect of this process was the search for a “normative framework,” involving in this case an extensive inventory of existing international humanitarian and human rights (‘soft’) law.31

26 Guiding Principles, (para 2).
28 Ibid., p. 73.
31 See Phuong, The International Protection of Internally Displaced Persons.
While the role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in campaigning on behalf of internally displaced persons remains largely unexamined in scholarly research to date, there is anecdotal evidence, including from participant-observers of the wider process, to suggest the significance of church and human rights networks. For example, as church groups affiliated with the World Council of Churches (WCC) encountered mounting challenges in their work with growing numbers of displaced persons within state borders in Africa (e.g., southern Sudan), Asia (e.g., Sri Lanka) and Central America (e.g., El Salvador) by the late 1980s, their concerns also contributed to shaping discussions at the WCC’s UN office in Geneva about the human rights and humanitarian needs of such displaced populations.32 Prior to the appointment of a Special Rapporteur on Internal Displacement in 1992 by the Secretary-General of the UN, moreover, the Quakers Friends World Committee for Consultation had been actively calling for such a position with a mandate to prepare draft principles for the protection of internally displaced persons.33

Viewed from the perspective of existing scholarship on transnational advocacy networks, the World Council of Churches and the Friends World Committee appear as examples of the kinds of “non-traditional international actors” who work internationally on an issue, “bound together by shared values, a common discourse, and dense exchanges of information and services.”34 In seeking “to persuade, pressure and gain leverage over much more powerful organization and governments,”35 such networks, it has been argued, also engage in the strategic mobilization of information as part of specific issue campaigns. A closer examination of the role of the World Council, the World Committee and other “non-traditional international actors” may thus provide further insights into the dynamics involved in the production of knowledge about the category of internally displaced persons (or ‘IDP’), and the problematization of the issue of (humanitarian assistance and protection for) IDPs.

32 See, for example, Thomas G. Weiss and David A. Korn, Internal Displacement: Conceptualization and Its Consequences (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 17
34 Keck and Sikkink, Activists Beyond Borders, p. 2.
35 Ibid.
While the nature and direction of the wider campaign on behalf of IDPs remain under-theorized to date, the role of networks featuring an impressive range of legal, operational and other expertise on forced displacement and humanitarian action has been celebrated in several accounts. For example, the United States Committee on Refugees (USCR), a Washington-based private voluntary organization, provided the first authoritative public account of the number of people in “refugee-like situations within their own countries” in its annual worldwide refugee survey, estimating a total of 1.2 million in 1982. The 1988 issue of the USCR World Refugee Survey also featured an early formulation of the nature and scope of the problem of “internal refugees.”

The linkage of refugee and human rights issues evident in the emerging IDP campaign also crystallized around the specialist networks emerging from the Washington-based Refugee Policy Group (RPG), a think tank established in 1982, to the Brookings Institution, a non-profit public policy organization in D.C. This campaign gained added momentum with, for example, the 1990 RPG paper titled Introducing Refugee Issues into the United Nations Human Rights Agenda, and with the Brookings-based Project on Internal Displacement (PID) set up specifically to support the Representative of the U.N. Secretary-General on internally displaced persons (the Special Representative), appointed in 1992. Drawing on specialist knowledge of international humanitarian and human rights law, and working with institutions of higher education such as the Ralph Bunche Institute for International Studies at the City University of New York, and the Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS) at Johns Hopkins University, these networks thus appear not unlike so-called “epistemic” or “knowledge-based communities” – “both politically empowered through their claims to exercise authoritative knowledge and motivated by shared causal and principled beliefs.”

36 Check original source for wording, and cite.
38 This paper was authored by Roberta Cohen, a former executive director of the New York-based International League for Human Rights and, under the Carter administration, deputy assistant secretary in the State Department’s Human Rights Bureau. Cohen, together with Francis Deng, was also one of the founders of the PID at the Brookings Institute.
The objective of these networks, it has been suggested, was “the development of a normative response to the protection and assistance needs of the internally displaced.”\textsuperscript{40} To that end, the Special Representative, with assistance from the American Society of International Law, the International Human Rights Law Group, and the Vienna-based Ludwig Boltzman Institute of Human Rights, undertook a comprehensive inventory of existing humanitarian and human rights legal instruments and their application to internally displaced persons. After a two year process, which revealed and eventually combined the different approaches to ‘hard’ international law across the transatlantic divide, the findings were submitted in a 200-page report to the Commission on Human Rights in 1996. To supporters and critics alike, the making of the Guiding Principles thus suggests an example of “norm entrepreneurship” and, indeed, an emerging normative framework, or “international IDP regime.”

\textit{Governmentality, Displacement and Politics: A Witches Brew in Post-Tsunami Aceh}

From their inception within the orbit of the United Nations in the 1990s, the Guiding Principles found early dissemination in Indonesia, which reportedly had the single largest population of internally displaced persons – 1.4 million – in the world by 2001.\textsuperscript{41} In the Indonesian context of transition from authoritarian rule, the dissemination of the Guiding Principles proceeded against the backdrop of the (old) state as an institution, inclusive of a pre-existing bureaucratic machinery for transmigration. At the same time, it underscores the effects of the mobilization of (new) society in Indonesia in the 1990s – including local, national and transnational human rights activists, organizations and networks – for the wider circulation of the Guiding Principles, as a discourse, in the context of conflict, violence and displacement in the Outer Islands, with particular focus on Aceh.

\textsuperscript{40} Simon Bagshaw, \textit{Developing the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement: The Role of a Global Public Policy Network} (UN vision Project on Global Public Policy Networks, n.d.), p. 5. This case study can be found at \url{www.globalpublicpolicy.net}. This paragraph draws on Bagshaw, ibid., pp. 18-21.

\textsuperscript{41} See, for example, Eva-Lotta E. Hedman, ed., \textit{Conflict, Violence and Displacement in Indonesia} (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Southeast Asia Program Publications, 2008).
As documented in numerous reports, surveys, and documentaries, the destruction to life, landscape, livelihood and property left in the wake of the December 2004 tsunami was enormous, and nowhere more so than in the embattled Indonesian province of Aceh, close to the epicenter of the earthquakes that set off such massive waves across the Indian Ocean. After the first few days, the Indonesian government broke the initial deafening silence and called for international support for emergency relief and reconstruction efforts, thus bringing to an end the pre-tsunami virtual lockdown of Aceh, a province where some 40,000 Indonesian troops had been engaged in counter-insurgency campaigns while foreign journalists, human rights observers and other concerned parties remained effectively barred from entry since the declaration of martial law in May 2003.42 In addition to the unprecedented mobilization of international resources and expertise to assist tsunami survivors across affected areas, Aceh saw a groundswell of local relief efforts, ranging from initiatives by university students and company employees, to missions by religious organizations and political parties. Breaking Jakarta’s isolation of Aceh, individual citizens, national governments and foreign militaries, as well as charity, faith-based and other non-governmental organizations from the region and beyond, arrived en masse to contribute to the relief efforts.43

In the years that have passed since the December 2004 tsunami struck, Aceh’s political and social landscape has undergone an extraordinary and far-reaching transformation. As the peace-process gained ground in 2005 and the contestation for hearts and minds came to focus on local elections in 2006, the new Aceh witnessed the resurgence of political activism from a wide spectrum of peasant, farmer, worker, student, women and religious groups and movements. While the lives of hundreds of thousands remained, in important respects, defined by their displacement during much of this period, the mobilization of collective action in the name of the internally displaced, inflecting familiar repertoires of protest with a rights-based discourse, also emerged as a distinct phenomenon in this new political context.

43 For early glimpses, see, for example, Edward Aspinall, “Indonesia after the Tsunami,” Current History (March 2005), pp. 105-109.
Awaiting further scholarly analysis into the nature and direction of wider – political, economic, social, and cultural – change in the new Aceh, this section of the paper explores the emergence and significance of a more specific phenomenon – collective action in the name of the internally displaced. To that end, it examines two separate campaigns, each of which involved thousands of people framing local protest in a universalist language of (individual) rights and (government) responsibilities that resonated with the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement. As instances or ‘cases’ of entangled encounters between, on the one hand, the novel forms of governmentality introduced to regulate and improve the lives of ‘IDPs’ in post-tsunami Aceh and, on the other hand, their intended ‘beneficiaries’ or subject populations, these campaigns help illuminate the ways in which something new is created, or how “a difference is introduced into history in the form of politics.”

While Foucault’s notion of ‘governmentality’ is an important and obvious point of departure for exploring the effects of post-tsunami programs of interventions ostensibly aimed at the amelioration of ‘IDP’ welfare, a closer look at forms of contestation brings into sharper focus political processes, practices and struggles that point beyond such improvement schemes. Recent revisionist scholarship on development in Indonesia has already explored similar dynamics of governmentality and the “practice of politics,” and offers further points of reference for the present paper. By focusing on ‘IDP protest,’ the paper also points to ways of engaging – in theory and method – important questions about the politics of representation and displacement. More generally, it reflects a deeper concern that (the relative silencing of) the voices and experiences of actually existing displaced persons inform forced migration studies, practice and policy.

**Governmentality After the Tsunami**

In sharp contrast to the enforced isolation that characterized the province during the militarised conflict in the years leading up to the tsunami, Aceh has since attracted unprecedented international attention and resources as the focus of large-scale, multi-donor relief, reconstruction and conflict resolution efforts. In what appeared to be record time for organizational responses to complex humanitarian emergencies, Bappenas (*Badan Perencanaan dan Pembangunan Nasional*), the Indonesian government national planning board, in collaboration with key international donors, made public two “technical” reports on January 19, 2005 to provide a “Blueprint” that expressed their intention “to start making decisions on setting priorities and considering how to develop a strategy for reconstruction.”

While the Jakarta government’s own so-called “Master Plan” for the rehabilitation and reconstruction of Aceh and other affected areas was not released until April 2005, draft versions of this document, or certain aspects thereof, were in circulation at least as early as February of the same year, thus anticipating, perhaps in crucial ways, its eventual release in April.

Indeed, a series of government statements, reports, and initiatives focused on the reconstruction of Aceh stressed the need for continued strict state control of relief efforts, with repeated public calls for centralized coordination and official registration of all concerned actors and activities. This push for a kind of hypercentralization of humanitarian relief and reconstruction efforts also revealed a pervasive concern with control and surveillance in Aceh, where Indonesian civilian and military officials displayed considerable anxiety about the arrival and activities of international humanitarian organizations, other I/NGOs, foreign volunteers, reporters, and militaries.

Such anxieties were also evident in regard to the problematization and representation of displaced persons in the aftermath of the tsunami. From the outset, it emerged that the “labeling” of persons who had been forced to leave their homes would

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48 Republic of Indonesia, “Master Plan.”
prove a critical issue in post-tsunami Aceh. As discussed below, such labeling reflected pervasive concerns to circumvent or delimit the very category of the (displaced) subject and, thus, the actual scope for (humanitarian) intervention. It also served to point away from the concerns outlined in the *Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement*, in ways that, while not without challenge, nonetheless left enduring legacies for displaced persons in Aceh.

Since their initial publication in 1998, the *Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement* have offered an obvious point of reference as they serve to “identify the rights and guarantees relevant to the protection of persons from forced displacement to their protection and assistance during displacement as well as during return or resettlement and reintegration.” Widely disseminated by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and other organizations within the UN system, as well as without, the *Guiding Principles* outlines the following “descriptive identification” of internally displaced persons:

Internally displaced persons are persons or groups of persons who have been forced to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized State border.

Despite the prior circulation of the *Guiding Principles* in Indonesia, including in Indonesian translation, and among government officials, however, the government

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52 *Guiding Principles* (paragraph 2).
53 *Mereka yang Mengungsi: Komik tentang Prinsip-Prinsip Panduan Pengungsian Internal* (Jakarta: Baris Baru dan Oxfam GB, 2002). This booklet includes the “Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement,” written in Bahasa Indonesia, in an appendix. The cover and the main section of the booklet are in the format of a comic book, featuring fleeing and frightened civilians, glimpses of (disembodied) military boots and weapons, courageous human rights workers, and assorted perpetrators of violence, ranging from masked men with automatic weapons to local thugs engaged in intimidation and worse. In addition to Oxfam, this publication was sponsored by UN-OCHA (Indonesia), and Internal Conflict Monitoring Centre
remained notably reluctant to recognize as internally displaced persons, or ‘IDPs,’ the hundreds of thousands forced from their homes and unable to return in the aftermath of the tsunami in Aceh. Instead, it often referred to the “homeless,” or to the “people who lost their homes because of the tsunami” in public discourse, including in meetings convened by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

Much as the prompt mobilization of an official discourse on homelessness and the homeless remained notably silent on the very questions of individual rights and government responsibility emphasized in the Guiding Principles, the Indonesian government’s first plan of action targeting tsunami-affected populations also pointed away from concerns for the needs and protection of internally displaced persons emphasized in international humanitarian and human rights legal and normative frameworks. That is, in the early aftermath of the tsunami, the Indonesian government moved with great speed to announce its relocation program, with particular emphasis on temporary “barracks” rather than the rehabilitation or construction of permanent housing.54 Having first identified a target number of twenty-four barrack camps that would be constructed to house some 35,000 IDPs in “phase one” of this project, the government promptly revised these figures upwards, to thirty-nine such temporary relocation sites built to accommodate 35,000 households, or some 140,000 displaced persons.55 The swiftness and ease with which the Indonesian authorities involved UN agencies and NGOs in a “Joint Liaison Unit” to further this project appeared remarkable, not least in the face of considerable apprehension in humanitarian circles regarding the encampment of displaced populations. There was also evidence of concern and even outright opposition to the proposed barracks solution from the outset among affected and other concerned local people.56 Indeed, against the backdrop of counterinsurgency

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56 See, for example, “Indonesians Wary of Relocation Centers,” Washington Post, January 31, 2005. At Kreung Sabe, south of Calang on the West Coast, for example, villagers were reportedly “determined to go
campaigns in Aceh, which had featured large-scale forced displacement of civilian populations, sometimes as a deliberate strategy of war under martial law, it was hardly surprising that, in the immediate aftermath of the tsunami, there was little rush to join in the barracks relocation initiative.\footnote{Saiful Mahdi, “IDPs and the Problem of Poverty: Evidence from Aceh Conflict and Tsunami IDP Mobility.” Paper presented at The 8th Indonesian Regional Science Association (IRSA) International Conference, 18-19 August 2006, University of Brawijaya, Malang, East Java, Indonesia.}

Thus, while the official discourse on displacement did not remain unchallenged, it nonetheless served to put would-be partners in international humanitarian relief and reconstruction on notice that translating their respective “will to improve”\footnote{Tanya Murray Li, The Will to Improve: Governmentality, Development and the Practice of Politics.} into actual programs, as urgently required by organizational mandates and budgets, necessarily involved the demarcation of what Ferguson in another context has referred to as an “intelligible field”\footnote{Ferguson, The Anti-Politics Machine.} for improvement in a particular context (e.g., a ‘barracks’ camp). The laying of such a field, in turn, anticipated the leaning into the future of certain kinds of expert or technical interventions (e.g. the mapping and provision of ‘watsan,’ or water and sanitation). In the same vein, it pointed away from other forms of expertise and interventions less easily “rendered technical,”\footnote{Li adapts the term “rendering technical” from Rose and refers to it as a shorthand for a set of practices concerned with representing “the domain to be governed… [and] assembling information about that which is included…..” Rose, Powers of Freedom, p. 33, cited in Li, The Will to Improve, p.7.} or, in other words, nonpolitical (e.g., the mapping and provision of protection). In the context of Aceh—an area affected by natural disaster \textit{and} protracted militarized conflict—it also served to distance from humanitarian and political consideration thousands of people whose displacement pre-dated the tsunami.

Such interventions also shaped understandings about the transformation underway in post-tsunami Aceh. In particular, countless needs assessments, mapping surveys, and annual reports were produced by myriad (government/UN) agencies and (international/nongovernmental) organizations in the few years following the tsunami. Unsurprisingly perhaps, the ‘problems’ thus identified often anticipated ‘solutions’ in keeping with organizational mandates and practices. Similarly, the recommendations

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offered have typically focused on meeting programmatic ‘targets.’ Not unlike other parts of Indonesia, moreover, post-tsunami Aceh also emerged as a busy hub for a kind of transnational cottage industry specializing in the assembly of ‘data’ on conflict and violence, thus adding additional momentum to the production of certain (but not other) forms of knowledge.61

In as much as internationally funded projects continued to draw into their orbit local university lecturers and students, as well as a wide spectrum of ‘organic intellectuals’ in Acehnese civil and political society, the wider effects of such projects on the production of knowledge may remain far-reaching for years to come. Inevitably, the international demand for local participation in such projects, typically in a designated ‘junior’ role, has centered on Banda Aceh, and served to reorient the focus of many a (full-time) lecturer, teacher, student, and organic intellectual in the aftermath of the tsunami. Their ranks were already depleted as the tsunami claimed large numbers of victims among campus colleagues and classmates, NGO activists and workers. Unsurprisingly, the post-tsunami deluge of international experts, advisors, consultants and technicians also allowed for large multi-donor budgets to trickle down to local academic and other researchers, thus contributing to the channeling of such energies in Aceh.

**Entangled Encounters**

While the drive for a hypercentralization of relief and reconstruction efforts in early 2005 had powerful and perhaps lasting effects, it never formed a seamless web for representatives of the Indonesian government, international humanitarian organizations, or, indeed, affected local populations. Other competing dynamics also influenced the parameters of interventions in early post-tsunami Aceh. First of all, Indonesian political processes and institutions—ranging from the rivalry between the president and his vice president to the expanded legislative powers of the parliament and the enduring influence of the military (including in business corporations)—exerted discernible influence on the nature and direction of responses to the disaster. Moreover, while mindful of their

61 Note WB and ICG reports here.
respective official mandates, and the limitations thereof, international humanitarian organizations at times demonstrated a capacity for constructive engagement with (local) official authorities, and, as a result, perhaps gained a surprising measure of discretion in implementing relief and reconstruction assistance. Finally, the relative weakness of organized civil society in pre-tsunami Aceh notwithstanding, there was early evidence of considerable activism among survivors, who found themselves in a peculiar place where they had, on the one hand, lost nearly everyone and everything, and thus perhaps felt that they had little left to lose, while, on the other hand, they had gained renewed recognition as “internally displaced persons” with specific rights and needs under international humanitarian and human rights law. In this regard, the return to Aceh of some of the best and the brightest, who had left during the brutal repression of student, human-rights, and other civil society movements in 2000–01, further added to the “social capital” available for local affected populations in post-tsunami Aceh. In short, it was not only government, but also politics, that contributed to shaping relief and reconstruction in post-tsunami Aceh.

As the novel modes of governmentality introduced ostensibly to improve the lives of displacees gained momentum, the wider and more dramatic transformation of a province re-emerging in the wake of protracted militarized conflict and sudden natural disaster also held out the promise of a new kind of politics, including challenges to dominant post-tsunami problematizations and representations of the ‘internally displaced person.’ Such challenges surfaced as Aceh once again leaned into the future of contested elections, anticipating the reordering of local political dynamics, including in many communities affected by displacement. They differ from the myriad project evaluations of ‘successes, failures, and lessons learned’ by pointing beyond the common terms of reference – or what may be referred to as the constitutive exclusions – inscribing projects and evaluations alike. At the same time, they direct attention to a meta-discourse on rights and responsibilities in situations of internal displacement, thus articulating a critical position ‘in the name of the internally displaced.’

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In the cases examined here, IDP collective action emerged in the context of this wider political shift in the province, articulating ways of belonging in the new Aceh. While framed in a discourse of rights familiar from the Guiding Principles, such challenges also pointed beyond displacement as a defining condition, reconnecting it to lived histories and transcendent futures through collective action. On the one hand, the right-to-return campaign recalled a murkier past in the present crisis, pointing to the continued legacies of local militarized conflict and violence, and reasserting old solidarities associated with the lived experience thereof in pre-tsunami Aceh. On the other hand, the barracks-protest campaign summoned a brighter future in the present emergency, stressing the novel opportunities for greater social justice, and affirming new socialities forged in the context of displacement in post-tsunami Aceh.

“Conflict IDPs and the Right to Return”

This promise of a new kind of politics was exemplified by the emergence of a campaign that challenged the very discourse of displacement in the aftermath of the tsunami in Aceh. As noted above, the circumvention of the IDP discourse in early post-tsunami Aceh pointed towards certain (and away from other) understandings of the nature of the ‘problems’ of displacement and the displaced. Indeed, the disregard for so-called ‘conflict IDPs’ and, moreover, for the complexity of—recurring, multiple, and/or secondary—displacement remained pervasive in international humanitarian practice into the post-MoU period in Aceh, and also served to reflect and reproduce official government discourse. In the context of wider political changes, however, thousands of Acehnese whose displacement pre-dated the tsunami launched a ‘right-to-return’ campaign, thus, in effect, articulating a critical challenge to the constitutive exclusion of ‘conflict IDPs’ from dominant humanitarian discourse and practice in the aftermath of the tsunami.

After several unsuccessful attempts by individuals and families to return to their communities in central Aceh, a collective effort was launched on 10 December 2005 by some 4,500 to 5,000 people who had previously found sanctuary from conflict and
violence in Pidie and Bireuen, two adjacent northern districts. As transportation promised by local government officials failed to materialize on the day it was scheduled, this planned collective return was transformed into a protest march. Taking their first stop at Abu Beureueh mosque in Beureuneun (Pidie), a prominent site of resistance and refuge alike in the social imaginary of many Acehnese, the marchers continued some ten kilometers on to Lumputot (Bireuen). There, they eventually boarded trucks and buses headed for the interior highlands of central Aceh, accompanied by yet more would-be returnees joining from other host communities in Bireuen, and stopping to set up large makeshift tent camps by the mosques at two locations known as Km 60 and Ronga-Ronga.

This mobilisation of a collective return to the highlands by thousands whose displacement due to conflict and violence pre-dated the tsunami presented a critical challenge against the silence on “conflict displacement” inscribing international humanitarian practice and local political ambition alike. On the one hand, this protest action seemed to have caught the “international humanitarian complex” camped out in Banda Aceh in the aftermath of the tsunami by surprise, prompting a brief flurry of fact-finding missions and roundtable discussions, and, not least, considerable consternation about this departure from the more familiar script of the displaced as “speechless emissaries” of suffering, or grateful beneficiaries of humanitarianism. As speculation of a less public nature focused on the hidden hand and political motivations “behind” this protest campaign, it is perhaps unsurprising that contemporary reports emphasized the humanitarian nature of the difficulties encountered by these would-be returnees, spotlighting the plight of people who had reportedly collapsed from exhaustion and starvation within the first week.

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63 According to the Center for Humanitarian and Social Development (CHSD), a local NGO in Pidie working with the IDPs, some five thousand names were collected at the outset of the return march. Author’s interview, Pidie, January 11, 2006.
64 See, for example, “Pengungsi Kembali ke Koloni” AcehKita, December 12–18, p. 10, 2005.
On the other hand, there was ample evidence of other kinds of impediments to the safe return of these (former) conflict displacees, many of whom had fled their villages in the central highlands in 2000–2001 during a period of especially “high-intensity” conflict involving not only GAM and the Indonesian military, but also Javanese (trans)migrants and so-called anti-separatist militia groups. Indeed, many of the difficulties encountered by would-be returnees suggested a ready local reaction and swift (extra-) political response to this collective campaign. First of all, would-be returnees were required to produce formal verification of “IDP status” with the signatures of local government officials in the village where they had taken refuge and in their home village, without any commensurate government guarantees of security on their return, thus catching these (former) conflict displacees in something of a double-bind. Moreover, local civilian government officials also intervened in ways that seemingly aimed at silencing any would-be collective “IDP voice” (for instance, by holding meetings without IDP leaders or other concerned parties present) and at undermining any united IDP front (e.g., by calling for further dispersals of IDPs to different subdistrict locations and individual villages). In addition, there were reports of intimidation and assault at the hands of the Indonesian military and police. On January 8, 2006, military and police entered the makeshift camp at Ronga-Ronga, and IDPs were made to board buses and trucks as uniformed officials shouted out destinations: Timang Gajah, Rimba Raya, Pinto Rime Gayo, all in Bener Meriah. Finally, there were reports of violence targeting returning IDPs and/or their property, as well as cases of fighting with local youths or former militia, in places where local leaders refused to provide security guarantees. In a village in Ketol (Aceh Tengah), for example, eight IDPs trying to secure the signature of the village head were beaten up and had their motorbikes destroyed by local residents.

68 Author’s interviews with representatives from the Center for Humanitarian and Social Development (CHSD), the Aceh Monitoring Mission (AMM), the local government in Takengon, and with numerous conflict IDPs from Pidie and Bireuen at locations in Aceh Tengah, including at 60K, Ronga-Ronga, and Laut Tawar, as well as with other concerned observers in Banda Aceh. January 10–15, 2006.
These entangled encounters and the kinds of “friction” they produced served to disrupt the dominant discourse on “IDPs” in post-tsunami Aceh by directing attention to the issue of (former) conflict and displacement. That is, having been displaced by conflict during the previous militarized campaigns of the counterinsurgency, IDPs who sought refuge with host communities had remained largely invisible in the wider context of early post-tsunami Aceh. While some 1,800 conflict IDPs were reportedly still in camps only days before the tsunami struck, there was no corresponding figure for those who had sought refuge from militarization and violence with relatives or friends. This is not surprising, given the informality and fluidity of such arrangements compared to the official registration and regulation of IDPs in designated shelter areas. Nonetheless, conflict IDPs who had found shelter in host communities outnumbered by a considerable margin their encamped counterparts at that time.

In as much as the attempted collective return of (former) conflict IDPs targeted a particular mode of governmentality and displacement in post-tsunami Aceh, it also revealed something of the conditions under which such a critical challenge may emerge. In this regard, it is important to recognize the extent to which local political conditions shaped the horizon of “conflict IDPs” living in host communities during the early implementation of the MoU in Aceh. Not only did such conditions influence IDP efforts and prospects of recognition, but also their possibilities for return. For example, it was only in the aftermath of the peace agreement and its implementation—including, notably, the demilitarization of host-community areas—that conflict IDPs in Bireuen and Pidie were able to organize their collective return to the central highlands of Aceh, a region formerly governed under a single administrative district, Aceh Tengah, which in 2003 had been divided by the (contested) creation of a second district, Bener Meriah. Moreover, since the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement (COHA) had broken down in 2002 following an attack on the Takengon local office of the international monitoring body, it was perhaps no coincidence that these conflict IDPs had remained displaced for so long. As noted above, their original flight from violent conflict had taken place as long

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ago as May or June 2001. Nor was it surprising that IDPs eventually seized on collective action in their efforts to secure a return to central Aceh, where so-called militia groups had gained particular notoriety. These groups were significantly not included in the MoU, but they still enjoyed the backing of local businessmen, as well as civilian and military officials.\textsuperscript{71}

If the demilitarization of host-community areas allowed for new forms of collective action by (former) conflict IDPs in Pidie and Bireuen, a political campaign advocating the division of Aceh underscored the urgency of returning to the central highlands lest administrative remapping were to render such return even more uncertain. Indeed, the timing of the attempted collective return movement on December 10 followed on the heels of a December 4, 2005, rally in Jakarta, when seven local \textit{bupati} (regent) unilaterally declared their secession from Aceh and their proposal to establish two new provinces: “Aceh Leuser Antara” (ALA), which would be forged out of the districts of Aceh Tengah, Aceh Tenggara, Aceh Singkil, Gayo Lues, and Bener Meriah, and “Aceh Barat Selatan” (ABAS), which would be formed from Aceh Barat, Aceh Barat Daya, Aceh Jaya, Nagan Raya, and Simeulue.\textsuperscript{72} While less immediate, the scheduled termination of the EU-led Aceh Monitoring Mission in mid-March 2006 also threatened the prospects for safe return in what remained, in many respects, an unreformed outpost of the “new” Aceh.\textsuperscript{73}

Such were the conditions facing displacees from earlier rounds of (para-)militarized conflict in the Central Highlands as they mobilized a collective return movement in December 2005. In doing so, it is important to recognize, they inscribed their protest within a distinctly universalist language of legitimization resonating with the \textit{Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement}. In this vein, they also posed a critical challenge against the efforts at containment of the very universalist aspirations held out in

\textsuperscript{71} See, for example, Imparsial Team, “Report Post-MoU Monitoring on Aceh, Aug. 15–Oct. 15, 2005,” October 2005. With the establishment of the Aceh Peace-Reintegration Agency (BRA) in February 2006, anti-separatist groups were included as beneficiaries eligible for government-funded reintegration programs, as were “conflict-affected persons” in general, and also GAM supporters who had surrendered prior to the MoU.

\textsuperscript{72} “Pemekaran Aceh Idak Jadi Prioritas”, acehkita.com, December 7, 2005.

\textsuperscript{73} In mid-March, the AMM cut back its staff of 220 monitors by almost two-thirds, but also agreed on a three-month extension with the government. After a further extension, the AMM finally departed from Aceh in December 2006.
Guiding Principles in their application to tsunami but not conflict-related displacement in Aceh.

“Tsunami IDPs and Barracks Relocation”

A second example of this promise of a new kind of politics emerged with another IDP campaign targeting the governmentality of displacement. The promotion of so-called “temporary relocation shelters” or “barracks” in early post-tsunami Aceh also left enduring legacies on the nature and direction of efforts to improve and regulate the lives of displaced populations. As the “international humanitarian community” was drawn into the orbit of various “solutions” (but not others), moreover, those solutions gained added momentum. In this regard, the materialization of barracks as a preferred mode of governmentality anticipated the institutionalization of needs assessments and aid delivery focused on such camp-like relocation complexes. However, the introduction of novel government regulations on resettlement in 2006 served to differentiate among barracks populations according to (unequal) pre-tsunami property relations. As the news of such regulations spread precisely at a time when the much-awaited local election campaign held out the promise of (equal) political franchise, it is perhaps unsurprising that the barracks themselves emerged as a new field of struggle for the displaced.

With tens of thousands displaced by the tsunami still residing in such “temporary location shelters” in 2006, the mobilization of protests centered on the barracks faced quite different circumstances from the collective campaign to return to the Central Highlands discussed above. On September 11, an estimated two thousand people joined in a major demonstration at the offices of the BRR (Badan Rehabilitasi dan Rekonstruksi [NAD-Nias], or the Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Board) in Banda Aceh to refocus attention on the situation facing the IDP barracks population. According to reports, this first demonstration remained entirely orderly and resulted in a negotiated agreement to review BRR regulations affecting the resettlement of what, in fact, has remained a considerable proportion of the barracks population—renters, squatters, and the landless.74

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On September 19, and continuing until the following day, the BRR once more became the target of a major demonstration focused on government regulations and the resettlement of barrack IDPs. This time, the demonstrations, which again involved an estimated two thousand people, also featured a blockade of the BRR. As the police moved in to disperse the crowds, some protesters reportedly threw rocks in their direction, damaging a police car.\(^75\) According to the BRR, three attempts at negotiating a settlement with the leaders of the second demonstrations failed, as demands had escalated “to include unrealistic requests,” including the transfer of money into an NGO account. However, aside from “some loud, well-orchestrated cheering and chanting,” the BRR concluded in its update on these events, “both demonstrations have been conducted peacefully.”\(^76\)

As noted above, these demonstrations emerged against the backdrop of new regulations on resettlement issued by the BRR in June 2006. In brief, these regulations made new provisions for displaced populations not covered by the resettlement schemes developed for those who had owned their land before the tsunami, that is, for renters, squatters, and the landless. According to contemporary estimates, these groups comprised the majority of the 70,000 to 100,000 people displaced by the tsunami who were still living in some 150 government barracks located across different parts of Aceh.\(^77\)

As the new government regulations of June 2006 served to “unpack” and differentiate between the displaced on grounds of pre-tsunami property relations, they also, invariably, set into motion new forms of contestation over the nature and direction of post-tsunami resettlement. In important respects, they thus reflected and reproduced a shift away from the “humanitarian needs” discourse and practice within which the barracks—and their residents—had remained inscribed since the early post-tsunami months of 2005. That is, as the new regulations made distinctions among different categories of displaced persons, many of whom had encountered each other as “IDPs” in

\(^{75}\) See, for example, “Protesters Attack Aceh Tsunami Reconstruction Office,” Reuters, September 20, 2006. According to Banda Aceh deputy police chief Dede Setyo, the police “decided to disperse the crowd because they had been staying outside the BRR offices beyond the timeline that we gave them.” Ibid.


\(^{77}\) In September 2006, BRR cited the figure 70,000 (in BRR, “Special Unit on Barracks”) and 100,000 (in “BRR International Update”). See BRR International Update, “Special Unit on Barracks,” September 2006.
the context of the barracks, it was not merely “confusion” and a “simmering crisis” that resulted, but also the opening up of a space for a new politics of recognition.\(^78\)

This new politics of recognition gained momentum as a result of the local elections on the horizon and the voter registration drive underway in 2006, including among IDPs in barracks and elsewhere. In the context of a highly contested election campaign, with local parties and so-called “independent candidates” running against the national party machines of Golkar and others, widespread collective action re-emerged, with local communities and groups further expanding an already impressive repertoire of protest. Such protests have focused on a range of reconstruction-related issues, and have targeted not only the BRR, as noted above, but also the BRA (Aceh Peace-Reintegration Agency), which was established in February 2006, with government funding to establish reintegration programs whose beneficiaries would include (former) militia groups, GAM supporters who had surrendered prior to the MoU, and “conflict-affected persons” throughout all rural communities.\(^79\) Protests have also directed attention to the electoral process and, in places, the outcome of the elections.

While it is hardly surprising that the BRR and the BRA—the key coordinating and implementing government agencies focused on post-tsunami and post-conflict reconstruction—have been targeted by IDP protests, it is noteworthy that, in the post-election months of 2007, the local parliament in Banda Aceh emerged as a new site of collective action in the name of the internally displaced. Within days of another round of protests involving hundreds of IDPs and, once again, Forak (the Inter-Barrack Communications Forum) at the BRR on April 9, 2007, the Acehnese Alliance of Youth and Students (Alee) called for an international audit of the BRR in a demonstration at the parliament in Banda Aceh. A few months later, on July 30, the parliament building was occupied for some thirteen hours by (former) conflict IDPs from Bener Meriah and Aceh Tengah, where tensions over the mismanagement of reintegration benefits by the BRA have remained acute, and where the elections were marred by comparatively high levels

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\(^{79}\) Although the politics of reconstruction and aid delivery demands more careful attention than is possible here, the assessments produced by donors and “partners” frequently mention the following “problems”: the slow pace of delivery, the lack of transparency in identifying recipients, the absence of checks on contractors, and the corruption of funds.
of fraud and violence. In this vein, challenges in the name of the internally displaced have joined the wider repertoire of protest in the new Aceh.

**New Beginnings**

As the broader political landscape underwent dramatic transformation in the aftermath of the December 2004 tsunami, some of the earlier concerns for the protection and the rights of internally displaced persons perhaps seemed to have been unwarranted in the first place, or, at the very least, now appeared dated to some observers and practitioners. However, as suggested above, the containment of the IDP discourse and the promotion of temporary relocation shelters in early post-tsunami Aceh pointed towards certain (and away from other) understandings of the very nature of the “problems” of displacement and the displaced. While not without critics from the outset, these new modes of governmentality focused on displacement met their most critical challenges through the entangled encounters with the very (excess) populations who, in important respects, rejected their own constitutive exclusion (as ‘conflict IDPs,’ or as ‘squatters, renters’ etc.) from the schemes adopted for the ostensible improvement and regulation of the displaced.

These encounters also revealed, in word and deed, a deeper critique of such schemes as cogs in the wheels of the “anti-politics machine” of post-tsunami reconstruction. That is, as actually existing displaced persons evoked the *Guiding Principles* as a “public transcript” of sorts, identifying the proper roles and relations of concerned parties in situations of internal displacement, they also challenged national and local government officials, as well as international humanitarian organizations, to recognize the promise held out by a universalist (trans)national discourse of rights and responsibilities. Having presented a critical challenge to the intelligible field of post-tsunami displacement problems, these protests also anticipated the search for new solutions, as evidenced by the search for reforms of existing schemes to improve and regulated the lives of the displaced in post-tsunami Aceh.

On the one hand, the mobilisation of a collective campaign demanding the “right to return” for (former) conflict IDPs evoked an alternative narrative of pre-tsunami Aceh,
recalling a politics of displacement and belonging fueled in part by militarized conflict and violence. Indeed, in challenging the governmentality of displacement in the language of (de)legitimation offered by the *Guiding Principles*, the thousands formerly displaced by conflict in the Central Highlands also, in effect, ruptured the (empty) categories of ‘IDP’ and ‘post-tsunami’ through their very insistence on the past in the present crisis. On the other hand, the emergence of the barracks as a site of contestation presented another kind of difference against the governmentality of displacement in Aceh. That is, in challenging the shift towards a policy of differentiation among barracks populations, once again in terms resonating with the *Guiding Principles*, protests centered on the barracks and their populations, in effect, focused attention on larger questions of social justice and property relations. While aimed at government regulations for resettlement in the post-tsunami period, these protests also suggested a revisionist critique of a more far-reaching political kind, rejecting a return to the ex-post-ante of pre-tsunami social and economic relations on principle. In distinct ways, then, the protests examined here served to rupture the expert discourses that have inscribed humanitarian relief and reconstruction efforts in the aftermath of the tsunami that hit Aceh on 26 December 2006. In this vein, these protests also point beyond the production of knowledge anchored in a governmentality of displacement.

As suggested above, a focus on protest can prove illuminating in exploring the conditions under which governmentalities of displacement encounter critical challenges that they cannot fully contain. Moreover, it directs attention to moments when the targets of so-called “expert schemes” articulate their own critical analysis of the situations with which they are faced. This line of inquiry about the dynamics of displacement and protest thus recasts familiar questions of ‘agency,’ ‘voice’ and ‘participation’ in the field of refugee studies. Finally, an examination of particular forms of contestation, such as protest, also helps identify the kind of friction produced when, through the formation of novel subjectivities, and, as a result, the possibility for a new politics.

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