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Title: Social and Spatial Vernacular Memory and Politics of Post-Disaster Counterpublics in Aceh, Indonesia

Abstract
The slogan ‘building back better’ became widely used by organisations and governments involved in the reconstruction aid after the Indian Ocean tsunami and the earthquakes in 2004 and the peace agreement signed in 2005 in the province of Aceh, Indonesia. Aid organisations state that the importance of reconstruction process is “in rebuilding lost and damaged values and norms” (United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and Pacific 2005, 9). Understanding of reconstruction includes more than the quality of the reconstructed infrastructure, it also includes reconstructing ideas, ideals, and norms and therefore, it could be argued that one of the aims of the reconstruction aid is to re-establish the ‘normaley’ through agendas such as ‘build back better’. Attempts to produce new master narratives for national identity make the traumatic experience invisible and restore the symbolic order of the national self (Edkins 2003).

The paper discusses some of the preliminary findings of a postdoctoral ethnographic study conducted in 2012-13 in the streets of provincial capital Banda Aceh, aiming to map post-disaster memoryscapes, i.e. the social and spatial vernacular memory (Hoelscher and Alderman 2004) as an site of struggle: provoking norms in relation to gender, class, caste, ethnicity, sexuality, and religion, in particular through normative calls for piety and propriety. It focuses on the liminal spaces of religious, gender and sexual minorities, and punks, and the attempts by the provincial and town government to normalise subjects in accordance with their visions, such as *ahklah dan aqidah* (morality and belief) and pious adolescence.
Introduction: street as my teacher

Tribute to Museum street punks
video with Beck: Volcano
See: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mXNwcIhMwzU

I've been walking on
These streets so long
I don't know where they're
Calling me anymore

But I think I must have seen a ghost
I don't know if it's my illusions
That keep me alive
I don't know what I see

Was it all an illusion?
Or a mirage gone bad, oh?
I'm tired of evil
And all the things that I don't know

And I've been drifting
On this wave so long
I don't know if it's already
Crashed on the shore

And I've been riding
On this train so long
I can't tell if it's you or me
Who is driving us into the ground

I don't know if I'm sane
But there's a ghost in my heart
That's trying to see in the dark, oh

I'm tired of people
Who only want to be pleased
But I still want to please you

And I heard of that Japanese girl
Who jumped into the volcano
Was she trying to make it back
Back into the womb of the world?

I've been drinking
All these tears so long
All I've got left
Is the taste of salt
In my mouth

I don't know where I've been
But I know where I'm going

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1 Detail that most punks in Aceh give as the formal education in Facebook (alam raya sekolahku). Alam raya translates literally as the great nature, or universe.
These are the lyrics of the soundtrack of a video and I recorded and edited one day after I had eye-witnessed a civilian clothed military police using a branch of a tree to beat up the Museum Street Punks at the Tsunami Museum in Banda Aceh at the end of June 2013. Walking an alley from the main mosque Baiturrahman towards the Tsunami museum. I made the video initially to speak of the political violence targeting the punks and ‘punked’ bodies in Aceh. Watching it retrospectively two months later, however, it seems also to be a narrative of a bone-tired researcher involved in researching gendered aesthetic subjectivities and the embodied and affective encounters the post-conflict city entail.

This paper aims at reflecting upon theoretical and methodological considerations by articulating and situating them into my current on-going research entitled ‘Social and Spatial Vernacular Memory and Politics of Post-Disaster Counterpublics in Aceh, Indonesia’. It is my first attempt to verbalise, and visualise, my research endeavour vis-à-vis gendered political violence, resistance, temporality and spatiality in a post-conflict city of Banda Aceh with the aim of brainstorming, rather than nailing down, the analytical and thematic debates my research seems to be talking to/about. But perhaps even more importantly, I am also using this opportunity to reflect upon, what would ethico-political research approach look alike when it breathes through encounters with the post-conflict town, people, and their stories. One important aspect of it is to find new ways of narrating these encounters, which are, thickly embodied, at times grousing, embarrassing, and sometimes, with traces of hallucinations.

This paper will first locate the research at hand within the wider literature on post-disaster governmentality, contextualise post-disaster town of Banda Aceh vis-à-vis biopolitics and reconstructing its citizenry, and then focus on the ethnographic encounters with Museum Street Punks, one of the many subcultures or liminal urban groups I had a chance to interact with during my two stays in Aceh in September 2012 and June 2013. These young adult punks become part of global (social) media
circuit two years ago after their arrest and ‘re-education’ in December 2011 and who have ever since gained a status of local street celebrities. Both the global English-speaking media circuit, but discourses by the local government portray the events of December 2011 in binary: the media narrates the story as a threat of Shar’a law, crackdown of punks in the name of Islam, and the local authorities repeat the story of punk being a Western phenomena, inherently alien to Islam, Islamic and Acehnese way of life. Finding the repetition of this narrative rather boring and well-rehearsed story of our post-9/11 and post-tsunami reconstruction debates, I became more interested in exploring, what could one learn from this spectacle other than re-production of West-East/Islam dichotomy (For a discussion on punk and Islam, see e.g. Fiscella 2012). What kinds of life worlds does the retelling of the December 2011 arrests - to journalists, and researchers alike - or the repetitious watching of youtube video clippings, singing of well-known Indonesian anarchist and punk songs in the streets of Banda Aceh, create and enable? What kinds of stories do their songs, DIY patches and t-shirts, and daily routines tell of the complexities, precariousness, and gendered, embodied politicization of urban post-conflict and post-disaster, and (post)-colonial yet global imaginary (For previous analyses of punks in Indonesian context, Jakarta, Bandung and Bali, see Baulch 2007; Martin-Iverson 2011; Pickles 2007; Wallach 2005; Wendoh and Wallace 2005)

**Bibliography**


