

Aceh: verandah of lost opportunities

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Introduction

Major donors and governments involved in Aceh tend to deem both the post-tsunami reconstruction and the peace process quite positively. After the recent local elections in which the conservative ex-GAM leaders' *Partai Aceh* (Aceh Party, PA) won a landslide victory, an editorial in *Jakarta Post* (April 25, 2012) summarised what mainstream actors seem to agree on: 'Such a significant percentage of support from the Acehnese should be more than enough (...) to start programs and most importantly keep the province peaceful and stable.' Accordingly, for instance, the European Union has concluded its engagement in the peace process; and the Crisis Management Centre (that brokered the peace talks chaired by President Ahtisaari), has 'lauded Aceh's "stable" peace' (*Jakarta Post* May 25, 2012).

Obviously, things could have been much worse in Aceh, but **this end-of-history perspective is out of proportions**, possibly reflecting instead the need of major donors', diplomats' and dominating actors' in Aceh, Jakarta and the markets to justify their policies and investments. Because in reality, to start with the reconstruction, even the donors' own evaluation from 2009 that discussed everything except the crucial political factors, – even this evaluation concluded with regard to the links between relief, rehabilitation and development that there had been 'lack of planning and overall analyses', 'little to no linkage between tsunami recovery planning and broader development issues including, fundamentally, conflict mitigation', a narrow focus on "disaster-affected" groups (...) rather than vulnerable populations in general' and poor 'local capacity building', which has 'resulted in a service-driven orientation to recovery in which affected communities are disempowered from articulating their own needs and participating in their own re-building' (A Ripple...2009: 5, 11, 13, 35). And when it comes to the issues of politics and conflict, it remains a fact, whatever the currently dominating actors prefer to remember, that it was agreement on a local democratic system that would be inclusive of all interests and ideas which was crucial for both the very truce and its implementation – but that several groups began to be excluded again from around 2008, breeding new distrust and conflicts. **And as will be shown, nothing of this was inevitable but rested largely with the priorities of the currently jubilant actors.**

In other words, the old verandah of Islam in Southeast Asia has also become a verandah of lost opportunities. This calls for further analysis of how the internationally unique and renowned process was hollowed out and the possible implications. I am drawing on

Törnquist 2011 and Törnquist et al. 2011, the relevant references in them, follow up conversations with the ‘Post Script Analysis Team’ involved in the third edition of the anthology, Avonius et al. 2012 and discussions with researchers, informants and partners behind that report, in addition to my own notes from studies and support of democratisation in the province.

Roots and character of the democratic peace

The agreement in Helsinki on August 15 2005 about de facto self-government in Aceh through democratisation was unexpected. Indonesian liberalisation after May 1998 had facilitated reforms and peace initiatives in Aceh too, but of no avail. The efforts at local state building in the province had contained some of the identity politics that undermined peace and reconciliation in other disturbed parts of Indonesia, but this was primarily after the agreement on Aceh, while early state building had also fostered separatism with ethnic overtones. It is also true that an important reason for why the Free Aceh Movement (GAM) engaged seriously in the peace negotiations in early 2005 and relinquished its demands of full independence was its territorial losses during 2003 and 2004. Yet, civil and armed rebellion had continued; and the Indonesian Government was short of a political victory. Finally, indeed, President Yudhoyono and Vice President Kalla had created political space for negotiations by developing power sharing agreements with local political and economic elites around the country within the framework of Indonesia’s comprehensive decentralisation. Yet, senior GAM-leaders had refuted various offers to share power with Jakarta.

In short, liberalisation in other parts of Indonesia, state building in Aceh, GAM’s territorial losses (but also Jakarta’s shortage of a strategic political victory), and the greater space for local politics (but also contained power-sharing agreements) were crucial factors behind the initiation of the Helsinki negotiations in late 2004. And the following tsunami certainly made the same talks even more imperative and feasible. But none of these factors explains why it was possible to overcome the well documented deadlock in the peace talks by the end of February 2005 – when the parties insisted in independence and subordination respectively – by opening up instead for a discussion about de facto ‘self-government’ inside Indonesia through more substantive democratisation in the province than elsewhere in the country, so that all groups and interests would stand a fair chance to be included.

The feasibility of this option was even more unexpected. When the truce had been settled in August, the mainstream position was rather that progress towards peace and democracy in Aceh remained unlikely, given the legacy of oppression, exploitation, predatory practices and violence – framed by ethnic, religious and rival national identities; not to mention the natural disaster. Given that the Helsinki agreement in itself did little more to alter these destructive dynamics and relations of power than the elite-

driven political and economic liberalisation in other parts of the country since 1998, it was easy to conclude that the accord was insufficient (c.f. Aspinall 2005). But the combination of the accord and a number of contextual factors in Aceh differed in three crucial ways from the conventional global idea of elitist crafting of liberal democracy and peace; agreements that contained non-reformists as well as radical popular movements and focused on building liberal economic and political institutions that most actors were expected to adjust to. (For the crafting of democracy in Indonesia see e.g. Liddle 2001, Törnquist 2004 and 2012, Priyono et al. 2007, Samadhi et al. 2009; on liberal peace, see e.g. Paris 2004 and Stokke 2011)

Firstly, by contrast to this elitist model, advocates of more inclusive democratisation were present in the very negotiations, in and around the GAM delegation. These individuals gained further importance, moreover, by having close relations to civil society organisations outside GAM and being able to formulate relevant proposals that were acceptable to Ahtisaari; for whom constitutional arrangements on freedoms and democracy were more vital than, for example, for the Norwegian negotiators in Sri Lanka.

Secondly, the agreement and its implementation very much reduced the power and special role of the Indonesian military. The independent Aceh Monitoring Mission (AMM) was vital in this context; and it was possible, thus, to implement the reconstruction work comparatively independently of the military and its business associates, with crucial freedoms and rights on part of development workers and a variety of political actors.

Thirdly, it is true that agreement on democratisation in Aceh was confined to the conventional liberal institutions; but as compared to the elitist Indonesian framework there were vital additions to guarantee real political equality, including for various GAM leaders and followers and other dissidents. Originally this was at the expense of power-sharing agreements and attempts to rely on NGOs. The regulations provided opportunities for independent candidates in the first executive elections to counter the hegemony of established, moneyed and elite-dominated parties. Further, the regulations also opened up for the participation of local political parties in legislative elections. This was to enable Aceh-based parties to run without having to build the otherwise required next to impossible presence in other provinces and districts, or to strike deals with already existing 'national' parties. This provision on independent candidates even strengthened the country-wide pro-democracy campaign for all-Indonesia implementation of the same rules; a campaign that was successful and thus made the regulation permanent in Aceh too.

These regulations reduced the number of actors that could have opposed the agreement, as in so many other cases, including Sri Lanka. In other words, it was not only an

agreement between the government in Jakarta and the GAM establishment. In addition to various other political leaders and parties with a presence in Aceh, reformists within GAM could draft their agenda and run in the elections; and there was a chance for a number of more independent civil society actors too to engage and vitalise politics. In fact, it was even possible for a coalition of reformist former GAM leaders and related CSO activists to launch an almost full slate of candidates for the 2006 and 2007 local elections – and to win the contest for governor and as well as majority of the heads of districts. Other CSO activists did less well, but there was real space for alternatives policies, and a number of ideas and projects were suggested. This was a crucial achievement as compared to the political marginalisation of the democracy movement and the civil society activists in particular in other parts of Indonesia (c.f. Prasetyo et al. 2003).

The three factors in the above thus began to alter the power relations in Aceh in favour of more extensive and substantive democracy; and it would have been possible to launch additional reforms to increase the democratic capacity of ordinary people and dynamic producers. So given that such transformative politics is the hallmark of the successful social democratic oriented projects in both the Global North and South (Stokke and Törnquist 2012), it was even suggested to the conference in early 2009 that this book emanates from that one could see the contours of a social democratic alternative to the liberal peace doctrine, even if it had already begun to fade away in Aceh itself.

Backsliding

Hence, the main puzzle to be discussed in the following is not why there were remarkable initial advances but why most of the opportunities were lost. Why is it that seven years after the road had been paved for democratic peace and transformative politics, and six years after the landslide victory of a coalition of reformist ex-rebels and CSO activists in the local elections, Aceh is mainly left with ‘negative peace’ (the absence of violence) and little of what Galtung and others have labelled ‘positive peace’ in terms of the building of trust among people, the creation of social and political systems that serve the needs of the whole population, and the constructive managing of various remaining conflicts?

We shall return to the details, but for example, why have there not been more extensive policies to foster democratic ‘good governance’ at the expense of favouritism, clientelism and corruption? Why have there been almost no reforms to institutionalise popular participation from below on the basis of people’s and dynamic producers’ own interests and ideas? Why did not the coalition of reformist leaders and CSO activist build alternatives to GAM’s old command structures, including a progressive party? Why have CSO activists focused primarily on influential positions and their own groups and parties? Why has so little been done to enhance the position of women? Why has there

been so little emphasis on the human rights aspects of the Helsinki agreement? Why has priority been given instead to the fostering of customary institutions dominated by local elites, with a sultan-like former GAM leader at the helm? Why has orthodox Islamic law been fostered rather than reduced to the private sphere of peoples' lives? Why have there only been clientelist and top-down populist social welfare measures? Why did most GAM leaders give priority to the exclusion of competing local leaders and parties from the political system? How was it possible to argue that peace would be at stake if P.A. leaders did not win elections?

In the general international literature (e.g. Paris 2004, Jarstad and Sisk 2008, Stokke 2011, Mansfield and Snyder 2007) there are two paradigmatic answers to similar problems. The liberal peace thesis is that there was not firm enough economic and political liberalisation. On the contrary, a number of illiberal actors (such as former guerrilla commanders, religious and customary leaders and rent-seeking actors) have gotten the upper hand, while human rights, civil society activists and related politicians have not been sufficiently facilitated. **If this is correct, the setbacks must be related to the dynamics of such illiberal forces, while attempts at supporting economic freedoms and liberal democratic institutions and groups must have been promising but contained.** The second answer is that economic and political liberties are premature in cases such as Aceh and may even be destructive and abused, before enlightened powerful actors have built strong enough rules and regulations, especially with regard to the rule of law and 'good governance'. In this view, the advances in 2005 and 2006 were thus too liberal and too early – so backsliding was inevitable. **If this thesis is correct, the setbacks must have been related to economic and political freedoms, while enlightened attempts at building promising strong judicial and administrative institutions must have been attempted at but prevented.** Let us discuss the extent to which these two perspectives contribute to an understanding of the Aceh setbacks and when necessary search for better answers.

Hijacked liberties

The **international argument that backsliding in cases such as in Aceh is due to insufficient liberal institutions makes only partial sense.** In short the liberal perspective has no convincing explanation for why the comparatively impressive institutions of freedoms, rights and elections as well as related and supposedly progressive actors did not really contribute to inclusive democracy.

The first problem relates to 'good governance'. It was generally (and quite rightly) assumed that economic freedoms would open up for the typical Indonesian symbiosis of businessmen, bureaucrats, officers and politicians. Hence there was a need for regulation, and *Badan Rehabilitasi dan Rekonstruksi* (the Agency for the Rehabilitation and Reconstruction of Aceh and Nias; BRR) became a major instrument to this end.

Similarly, there was a need to contain favouritism and corruption with regard to economic support for the ex-combatants; and again BRR but mainly *Badan Reintegrasi Damai Aceh*; (the Aceh Reintegration and Peace Agency; BRA) were vital instruments in this regard. Yet, an unresolved issue was how these attempts to contain abuse would be implemented, take root and foster ‘good governance’, also when donors’ funds were not at stake and also in the future.

This was certainly not at first hand a managerial problem but mainly a political dilemma. Indonesian authorities put up restrictions, including on the separation of development and reintegration; and bureaucrats and politicians defended their privileges. There was widespread agreement among liberalisers to make GAM leaders and followers as well as other influential leaders reasonably satisfied irrespective of liberal principles. And critical actors in civil society ought not to be supported to the extent that it would upset the pact-making elite. In fact, the liberal argument did not generate a clear answer as to what liberal institutions and sympathetic social and political forces would be capable and worthy of support to really foster ‘good governance’ – without undermining the compromises between the moderate elites that were central to the liberal strategy itself of crafting democracy and peace.

One exception was agreement on the need for skilled and reasonably impartial technocrats and intellectuals, such as Kuntoro Mangkusubroto of BRR and M. Nur Djuli of BRA. But the former left with the closing down of the BRR and the latter was dismissed by Governor Irwandi in order to please P.A. In any case none of these and similar officials had sufficient political and social backup.

A major problem, then, was how to counter and facilitate alternatives to illiberal actors such as within the GAM networks and its command structure in *Komite Peralihan Aceh* (The Aceh Transition Committee; KPA), the military, the business sector, the bureaucracy and politics. There were certainly a number of proposals and measures; for example to facilitate better implementation of the institutions towards free and fair elections, support independent political education of former GAM followers (including women), back up a number of watch dogs and media and of course to encourage the peace-agreements on human rights. But when such actors really tried to stand up against illiberal leaders with roots in GAM and other elites with clientelist networks, the pro-democrats and their supporters were not very strong and short of a genuine social basis, especially outside Banda Aceh. And from the point of view of the liberal idea: what would happen to the compromises among the moderate sections of the elite if their critics became too strong? In fact, the moderate elites were quite involved in favouritism, corruption, the flirting with Islamists and more. And they certainly did not want any consistent reformists to gain external support for, for instance, supporting independent women and electoral education. Unfortunately quite expectedly, such attempts were thus sabotaged by the conservative sections of GAM in particular and largely abandoned

by even the most principled international advocates of liberal democratisation. Finally little was done to support liberals and social democrats in building alternatives to P.A's successful attempts to marginalise dissidents in the 2009 parliamentary elections and to temper with the rules and regulations in the local elections in 2011 and 2012.

The major outcome was thus hesitation. On the one hand support was provided to formal liberal economic and political institutions such as freedom of speech and organisation in addition to free and fair elections. On the other hand remarkably little support was provided for seeing to it that the institutions were not bent and abused. In order not to counter their own interests and creating conflicts and unrest, liberal democrats themselves obviously set aside on several occasions their own analyses of how democracy and peace should go together.

In short, the general argument that backsliding in cases such as in Aceh is because of insufficient institutions for economic and political liberties may well be generally valid, but at least in Aceh there was little in the same perspective to suggest how the very supporters of liberal change would prevent the liberal institutions from being hijacked and used to counter the very idea of democracy, especially the basic idea from the Helsinki agreement about political equality.

Institutional involution

On the face of it there is more to the second international argument for how to explain the dynamics of backsliding in cases like Aceh: that liberal institutions are premature and may be abused before firm rule of law and 'good governance' is in place thanks to pacts between enlightened powerful sections of the elite. As we already know several of the liberal rules and regulations were no doubt captured and abused. The only problem is that those allowing this to happen and those abusing liberalism were largely the same as those powerful actors who were expected to build strong institutions for rule of law and 'good governance'. In short, those with access did not develop new and better institutions but turned to involution: the donors protected their 'own' funds and the others made the 'local' institutions complicated and fought about sharing the spoils.

In Aceh the roots of the general Indonesian phenomenon of KKN (corruption, collusion and nepotism) are deep and complicated, but in this context we should focus on who took advantage of it and who tried to fight it. Having won the local elections in 2006 a major question for the new coalitions of reformist GAM- and related civil society leaders was if there were any alternative mechanisms to KKN that would (a) sustain and at best expand their electoral base and (b) be possible to create without, again, undermining their support. Hardly anywhere was there to my knowledge a positive answer. At times a number of individuals such as the then Governor Irwandi and a few heads of districts and related civil society activists and officials in the public administration as well as BRR and

BRA did try to stand up against the dynamics of KKN, but almost all conceded. Initially Irwandi and his coalition were also facing problems of managing the existing assemblies, bureaucracy and (of course) Jakarta; and the finalising of the law on local governance of Aceh was painfully slow.

After the 2009 elections when P.A. became dominant in parliament and turned openly against Irwandi, the latter did try some alternatives. One was to intensify populist welfare and education measures and top down funding for local development, to bypass local clientelism and create his own support base. But there were also a number of deals to sustain his links to businessmen and ex-commanders in KPA with funds and other resources. There was little follow up in terms of popular organising and the development of sustainable local institutions. And in this context the civil society activists had little room of manoeuvre on their own, given their weak social and political basis and need to adjust to the priorities of the donors, who anyway financed most of the activists' organisations.

Meanwhile P.A. in particular, but also all-Indonesia parties with a following in Aceh, put the blame for most problems on the Governor, launched black campaigns and strengthened their social and political machines, their clientelist networks and thus also their chances of exchanging services. P.A. put special emphasis on its control of the command structure of KPA but also on its capacity to deliver votes (against favours) to Jakarta based parties and candidates in the 2009 parliamentary and presidential elections. In this respect, P.A. thus returned to similar ideas about power-sharing and cooperation with all-Indonesia parties and politicians that its own leaders had abandoned in the Helsinki agreement. The same roadmap was followed in P.A.'s successful tampering with the electoral rules in face of the 2011 and 2012 local elections. This was to weaken its opponents by threatening people in Aceh and the elite in Jakarta with unrest if it did not win and were able, thus, to guarantee 'stability'. And Jakarta adjusted, even much of its intellectual elite. The pattern reminds of the Indian horse trading and power-sharing agreements between parties with a national and central level presence and those with crucial strongman basis in separate states. One may say much of the way in which this pattern generates shady deals and the abuse of power, but the Indian democracy is not entirely undermined as long there are competing locally rooted parties. This does not apply to Aceh where even a basic prerequisite for a functioning competitive liberal democracy is missing. In addition P.A. gained cultural hegemony by taking the lead in fostering customary law and putting its own people on top of it. In the main it was populism versus clientelism, and the winner took it all.

In short, the powerful local elite's will and capacity to develop strong institutions in favour of the rule of law and 'good governance' were not up to the expectations in the argument about how it would be possible to build such institutions; but what of the enlightened international actors? One may have thought that the huge international

engagement in the post-tsunami rehabilitation and reconstruction would have made a difference. Initially it did. As already noted, it was a remarkable success to reduce and delay much of the otherwise common Indonesian symbiosis between officers, bureaucrats and politicians from taking full and immediate advantage of the massive inflow of money into Aceh. The main problem was rather the relative disinterest and inability of the donors to combine their engagement to prevent immediate abuse and looting with the development of local and ideally democratically oriented 'good governance'. This applied to much of the civil society oriented efforts too. Must illustrative, even the massive all-Indonesia World Bank sponsored *Kecamatan* Development Program deliberately avoided the main local governance on the province and district level by fostering instead new-public management on the non-elected and administratively weak sub-district level. Hence it abstained from the chance to support actors that might be able to affect and use the fledgling democratic institutions to foster further advances. (C.f. Sindre 2012)

There were certainly exceptions. A number of advisers, practitioners and activists tried their best. But the problem applied generally; and it became increasingly obvious when the donors pulled out and when many of the locals critics were abandoned.

Abandoned transformative politics for gradual advances

To summarise so far, the backsliding in Aceh is no doubt related to the weakness of liberal institutions; but it remains to explain why they were weak in the first place. The same applies to weak rule of law and 'good governance'. This too explains the backsliding, including the abuse of liberal institutions. But once again it remains to explain why these institutions were so weak, especially since not even the actors that were assumed to generate them really did so.

How shall one best explain, then, the weakness of both the liberal and the hard-core constitutional rules and regulations? The answer is concurrent with the general critique of the elitist crafting of democracy and peace (e.g. Carothers 2004 and 2007; Harriss et al. 2004, Törnquist et al. 2009, Törnquist 2012 and in Indonesia e.g. Priyono et al. 2007, Samadhi et.al 2009 and Mietzner 2012). As we have seen, the liberal institutions were only partially compatible with the core interests of the moderate elite that should form a pact towards democracy and peace. The same applies to the constitutional and administrative institutions: the enlightened sections of the already dominant elite that were supposed to foster such rules and regulations very rarely did so; even the donors hesitated.

More remarkably and less predictable: it must also be acknowledged that even though the kind of transformative gradual politics and related actors that have been suggested as an alternative (e.g. Carothers 2007, Webster et.al 2009, Stokke and Törnquist 2012) were at

hand, most of them did also not put up a consistent fight for liberal institutions and 'good governance'. Four critical turning points may illustrate this conclusion.

The first critical juncture (which has already been pointed to) is that after the local elections in 2006 (and 2007) neither Governor Irwandi nor almost any of the new associated leaders in the districts used their new positions to develop alternative non-clientelist politics and policies (including in relation to the KPA and in development planning) that might have opened up for broader support. General experiences from such attempts, from Brazil to India and the Philippines as well as in some Indonesian districts were not deemed particularly interesting and feasible as sources of inspiration. Rarely were there effective measures towards 'good governance' too. Consistent reformists and civil society activists were not able to make a difference.

Secondly, neither were there any organised attempts to facilitate new popular organising and interest based representation. Certain individual civil society leaders were of course appointed from above. But there were few if any openings that could have made new and broad mobilisation and organisation a viable proposition among various stakeholders. On the contrary most civil society activists either sustained their own groups and networks or began to form a myriad of political parties, from among student groups and NGOs. And the former GAM leaders who tried to reform their own movement did not even build a functional alternative to KPA and a party to this end but relied instead on networks and personalities to compete over KPA's command structure in the hope that the old quite 'traditionally' dominated movement and structures would be possible to retain and perhaps turned slightly more democratic with themselves on the top.

Thirdly, even the principled international donors hesitated in providing effective support to those actors in politics and administration and civil society who most consistently fostered the inclusive democratisation that was initiated with the Helsinki accord. One argument was that politics was not to be combined with the reconstruction work. Another was that one did not want to take a stand in internal politics and disputes. A third (related to suggested support for democracy studies and research) was that this would imply support for Muslim dominated higher educational institutions. A fourth was that there was too little interest in the donor's own country.

Fourthly, in face of the 2009 elections even Governor Irwandi abandoned reformist supporters and civil society activists in favour of trying instead to get support from the old GAM leaders in P.A. He thus contributed to the elimination of any viable local political party besides P.A in the election. Not even after the election when Irwandi was abandoned by the autocratic P.A leaders did he and his followers give priority to the building of a real alternative in terms of broader organisation and policies among the reformists and civil society activists that had been marginalised within organised politics

– aside from some efforts to include various supporters in Irwandi’s personal campaign in face of local elections 2012.

The common denominator behind this weakness and hesitation is obviously the poor popular capacity beyond the supposedly alternative elite itself to demand and use functional democratic institutions. In terms of the five most crucial benchmarks of political capacity (inclusion rather than exclusion in deciding and managing public affairs, ability to transform different roots of power into political authority and legitimacy, ability to put vital issues on the agenda and to mobilise and organise followers as well as to gain and develop representation; Törnquist 2012), the reformists in and outside GAM, and most civil society activists too, obviously lost out after the successful elections in late 2006 – primarily with regard to the social and political basis among a majority of the population. Such a base seems to have been taken for granted as part of the nationalist movement, dominated by GAM and supplemented by a number of democracy-oriented civil society organisations. Some were less cocksure, of course. But even those who wanted to listen and read into experiences from other parts of Indonesia, the Philippines, India, South Africa or Brazil or even from the history in Scandinavia, deemed that serious strategies towards widening and reforming the movement, and adding interests of class and women and more, would be deemed disloyal by the GAM associates or unrealistic by the alternative political groups and civil society activists. In fact, very few actors made serious attempts to build new institutions and popularly rooted policies. The main focus with regard to GAM was how to reconcile the movement behind what leaders – more or less autocratic and reform-oriented. In addition the alternative political groups and civil society activists were only able to provide policy proposals and their own inevitably poorly rooted organisations. Meanwhile most of the civil society groups that distanced themselves from GAM and its associates did not even try to gain a broader following but focused on liberal middle class issue activism and development work, usually in particularly close cooperation with international donors; international donors that often talked to but very much hesitated to really support reformists that challenged the autocratic GAM leaders and wanted to develop transformative politics.

Past and Present

One possible conclusion, then, is that serious progressive alternatives in contexts like Aceh are simply not possible without long term work for decades to build up social movements and organisations and parties, such as in Brazil or South Africa or the Indian state of Kerala. If this is correct, civil society organisations and international donors cannot learn much from the celebrated participatory policies that have been initiated in such cases, until left of centre governments have been generated and are able to provide support for progressive policies (c.f. Manor 2012). There is much to this. But it is also possible to argue that well designed transformative politics and policies were decisive in the renown cases too. All the favourable conditions were not generated organically from

below and for decades. Moreover, there have been **policies to open up for progressive initiatives even under much less favourable circumstances**. In fact, Aceh itself was a very good illustration of this between 2005 and 2007. The inclusive democratic institutions agreed upon in Helsinki and then sustained for some years did open up for a remarkable alliance between reformist rebels and civil society activists. This stands in sharp contrast to the immediate decline of the Indonesian democracy movement after 1998. **The less defeatist conclusion, therefore, is that crucial opportunities were at hand in Aceh but that they were lost by the GAM-reformists, the civil society activists and the doubtful international donors.**

In short, Aceh is not a success. Negative peace and the fact that that ‘everything after the tsunami could have been much worse’ are important achievements, but the acclaims remind of the normative assertion in peace and democracy studies and support that elitist crafting of either liberal institutions (like freedoms, rights and elections) or conservative (with a focus on the rule of law and governance) is so correct that all one needs to do is to point to the deficits that the elites can fix with a little help from their international friends. In reality, Aceh is yet another illustration that this approach rarely works. On the contrary there is a need for close empirical studies of when and how the defective institutions can really be implemented. Worst: the unique transformative politics that was initiated with the Helsinki accord could have been followed up (by GAM-reformists and civil society activists) with gradual measures – but the opportunities were neglected, even by the supposedly most progressive donors. Thus Aceh become a verandah of lost opportunities.

The current situation is different. Much of the unique opportunities have been wasted and must be reshaped under harsh conditions.

Most international actors seem to assume that peace has been ‘normalised’ and that if the hegemonic local party, P.A., is not deliver to people’s expectations there will be public critique and political alternatives will appear and P.A. will be voted out of power. But as Sidney Jones of the International Crisis Group concluded about P.A. in a comment dated April 19 on the recent elections: ‘with an absence of checks and balances, combined with an ability to direct significant resources to members, the party may be difficult to dislodge’. (<http://crisisgroup.tumblr.com/post/21383905217/how-will-partai-aceh-govern-sidney-jones>, accessed 02/07/2012) The strategy on part of the P.A. leaders and their associates to rebuild and institutionalise clientelist politics and policies reminds me in part of how the Hun Sen government and the People’s Party in Kampuchea adapt to internationally endorsed decentralisation to strengthen their positions, and in part of how local strongmen-parties in India negotiate shady power-sharing deals with powerful central actors.

Ironically, the ex-separatist GAM autocrats have thus firmly integrated Aceh into the most problematic aspects of Indonesian development after Suharto. This practice has

triumphed against Irwandi's self-assertive post-clientelist blend of populism and patronage with some openings for impartial programmes and poorly organised civil society initiatives. **The prime need, therefore, is to reconsider how it would be possible to reshape the kind of democratisation with inclusive political freedoms and equality that was agreed on in Helsinki, and which served so well until being abused and abandoned. The minimum is a functional democratic opposition and some space for independent critical debate and participation.**

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