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'The fruit caught between two stones': the conflicted position of teachers within Aceh's independence struggle[†]

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the challenging situation faced by teachers as professionals and members of the community in Aceh, Indonesia during the province's civil war. It reveals how teachers' sense of agency during this period was deeply influenced by the economic/material, political and socio-cultural condition at that time – conditions and experiences which today have bearing on a place for teachers in the post-conflict peace-building process occurring in the province. During the conflict, teachers struggled to balance their strategic societal positioning – as civil servants and community members – and found themselves caught in the middle of a complex range of hegemonic and counter-hegemonic forces at play. This position of constraint, we argue, limited the ability of teachers to act as peace-builders during the conflict, and continues to influence teachers' ability to function in such ways today.

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Introduction

Teachers occupy a difficult position in conflict-affected and post-conflict societies. On one hand they are key representatives and conduits of the state apparatus, and serve an important role within this system in advancing state projects of modernisation, capital accumulation and nation-building through their professional roles and responsibilities in the classroom and community. On the other, they are members of particular religious, ethnic, linguistic and cultural communities, and may have personal allegiances or ties that sit uncomfortably with their proscribed professional roles and responsibilities. Recent work by Smith, Koons, and Kapit (2014, 7) on behalf of the Global Campaign for the Protection of Education from Attack highlights how, 'Teachers have risked their lives going to work … in the past decades … caught in the middle of political, ideological, sectarian, and military struggles in conflict-affected countries.' As the title of this article suggest, metaphorically, it places them as a 'fruit caught between two stones', a metaphor that was evoked more than once in interviews with teachers in Aceh, Indonesia, conducted in various fieldwork visits by the two authors in 2013 and 2014.

The narratives and lived experiences of these educators and the ways in which they navigate this perilous terrain have only recently begun to be a topic of focus for research. Wilson (2000), in the context of Peru, documents how prior to and during the civil war, teachers throughout the country, particularly those in provincial areas, maintained ambivalent social positions within communities. On one hand, they were viewed with suspicion by such communities by 'present[ing] a particular rationality, vision of modernity and concept of pedagogy that break with and oppose indigenous

[†]This article represents the equal contribution of both authors, irrespective of the order in which names appear.

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knowledge and wisdom' (5). It positioned teachers as the conduits of a state ideology that actively promoted a prejudicial and disciplining social order. On the other hand, and particularly during the time of the military government, teachers were also seen as key local intellectuals, leaders at the community level of the popular struggle against the state. Having such conflicted, and simultaneous positions meant that teachers became, '… a kind of trickster alternating between being a community member, a representative of the state and aiding and abetting an intrusive party like Sendero' (2). For the teachers themselves, the outcome was that they often acted strategically by taking up the critical discourse of the profession as a vocation and 'adapting it to their own personal political projects and to the situations they faced in the communities where they worked' (15).

Similarly in Nepal, teachers have long been caught between the state's project of using education as a tool for national integration and identity, and community resistance to what was seen as the reproduction of deeply entrenched structural conditions in society through schooling. Pherali (2013, 57) notes that some teachers had long participated in progressive social movements against the state's project of forced integration, motivated by their own ideological positions. Others wholeheartedly endorsed the state's project of nation-building through education. This led to what he describes as a 'sensitive and cautious relationship' between the state and teacher in the period prior to the civil war, and one where various political groups attempted to gain teachers' support for their causes. During Nepal's long civil war, teachers from both sides found themselves trapped in the middle of the highly politicised and polarised landscape. Teachers who were seen to support pro-monarchy and nationalistic messages were threatened, kidnapped or killed by the Maoist insurgency, and likewise teachers seen to be Maoist sympathisers and/or activists were arrested, tortured and killed by government security forces (Lawoti and Pahari 2010). Teachers were also often victims of financial extortion by Maoist rebels, because in many rural communities they were one of the few residents who had access to a regular government salary. Complying with such demands placed significant burdens on their financial stability, but also on their role as state employees. The government interpreted such financial support, whether it was done by free will or not, as a signal of complicit support for Maoist activity and led to teachers losing jobs or worse yet, being arrested (Pherali 2011, 2013).

In this paper we seek to further explore how teachers navigate such tensions in a different context, namely that of Aceh province, Indonesia. In Aceh, conflict was most active between 1976 and 2005, and led to the deaths of between 15,000 to 20,000 people, the dislocation of numerous families and massive destruction of public and private property (Miller and Bunnell 2010). Although a full conflict analysis falls outside the focus of this paper, the conflict was driven primarily by ethno-nationalist concerns that the distinct Acehnese identity was being lost to the Indonesian nation-building project founded on Javanese values. Promises from Jakarta of making Aceh its own province, and assuring autonomy of important elements of identity such as education, customary law and religion were broken. In 1976, the Free Aceh Movement (*Gerakan Aceh Merdeka* or GAM) declared independence from Indonesia and over the subsequent 29 years, conflict ebbed and flowed between GAM and Indonesian military (TNI) and paramilitary forces (Aspinall 2009). In 2005 a peace agreement, brokered by international actors, was reached between GAM and the Indonesian government, bringing to an end violent regional insurgency. A key component of the peace accord was the designation of Aceh as a special autonomous region within the Republic of Indonesia, affording the provincial government much greater control over most matters of state, including educational provision (Shah and Lopes Cardozo 2014).

The work presented in this paper is based on exploratory, empirical fieldwork carried out through interviews and focus group discussions with representatives from government, civil society, donor agencies and teachers/school directors in Aceh in 2013. It is important to state at the outset that interviews with teachers/school directors were only conducted in Aceh Besar. This is the regency surrounding Banda Aceh, the capital of the Aceh province. This was largely a product of the limited time in which the authors had to complete fieldwork, as well as the existing connections local colleagues had into schools located in this area. Unlike Aceh's northeast coast,

which was the ideological heartland for the separatist struggle, and the epicentre of conflict between insurgency and counter-insurgency operations, the wider Banda Aceh region is one that is generally perceived to be less impacted by the conflict. That withstanding, this area was not immune to the impacts of conflict. The teachers we spoke to referred most often to events between 2000 and 2004, when following the fall of Soeharto, GAM increased its reach and recruitment into new regions, including Aceh Besar. The lack of a strong ideological commitment to the separatist struggle in places like Aceh Besar, meant that alliances were more easily bought and sold, leading to more unpredictable, volatile and shifting conditions for civil servants and community leaders to navigate (Good et al. 2006). It was during this period as well that schools were increasingly the target of attacks by both GAM and the TNI (Noble et al. 2009). The case of how a small sample of teachers navigated such circumstances from a particular region of Aceh is highlighted within this paper.

We begin by presenting the theoretical framework that we have developed to understand teachers' sense of agency through times of conflict. We then analyse the fieldwork data within the parameters of the broader context of the Indonesian education system at that time, and the nature of the conflict within the community setting. This allows us to identify how teachers' sense of agency and purpose interfaced with such conditions to establish a particular field for action during the period of conflict. This sense of agency, firmly established during the protracted period of conflict, has important ramifications for the post-conflict period which Aceh finds itself in today, and particularly for teachers' prospective role as 'peace-builders' during a period of marked social, economic and political transition. We argue that the rather limited space for manoeuvre which teachers faced during the conflict challenged their roles as peace-builders then, as it does now, in Aceh.

Conceptual framework for teachers' agency in conflict and post-conflict periods

For this paper, we specifically highlight two theoretical inspirations that have formed the backbone to our analysis on teachers' agency in situations of conflict: the Strategic Relational Approach (SRA) and our interpretation of what we understand peace-building to look like in the post-conflict period. What we present here is a framework in which we view teachers as both strategic and political actors whose agency exists in a dialectical relationship with the broader cultural, political and economic (post) conflict environment. It is based on a broader theoretical and conceptual framework we have developed in earlier work (see e.g., Lopes Cardozo and Shah Forthcoming). In doing so, we start from a critical realist ontology, that supports a stratified understanding of reality that includes the visible, lived experiences, and the invisible, underlying causal mechanisms driving and influencing such outcomes. The SRA, developed by scholars working in the broader field of sociology/political sciences, builds on this understanding and provides a heuristic tool for exploring the dialectical relationship between structures, agents and agency, as further detailed below (Jessop 2005; Hay 2002a).

Research from conflict-affected contexts makes clear that teachers' space for manoeuvre (i.e., their personal and professional agency) is bounded and framed by the conditions that conflict creates (Vongalis-Macrow 2006, 2007; Lopes Cardozo 2009, 2015; Shah 2012; Lopes Cardozo and Hoeks 2014). Using ideas from the SRA, we acknowledge that the strategically selective context within which actors (such as teachers) operate is based on structural and institutional conditions, that can reinforce the motivations, actions or strategies of particular individuals, and work against others; creating both opportunities and constraints for specific courses of action (Hay 2002a, 2002b; Jessop 2005). In response, actors at the various scales make conscious and unconscious choices based on the knowledge they hold of this context to realise particular outcomes or objectives. A significant point of SRA is that in any moment the way in which actors understand and respond to their environment can greatly vary, as can their motivations and intentions for action, leading to a plethora of potential outcomes. Thus, both the structured context within which action occurs, and the types of agency which actors exhibit, have a bearing on the outcomes observed.

In this paper we aim to adapt and apply SRA ideas to study the field of education. We assert that teachers' exercise of agency is based on an interpretation of and reflection on their context, counterbalanced by their own value commitments, personal background and sense of professional expertise (Jansen 2001). The employment of agency must be understood as strategic and selective in response to specific structural and material constraints (Hay 2002b; Vongalis-Macrow 2007). As Lopes Cardozo (2009, 412) contends, while teachers may act according to their reflexivity, rationality and motivations, their actions are embedded in a strategically selective context that creates both opportunities for and constraints to teachers' level of agency and the choices they make. The current time, place and space within which schooling occurs 'selectively reinforces particular forms of action, tactics or strategies' and provides a place within which teachers 'can be reflexive, can reformulate within limits their own identities' (Jessop 2005, 49). The SRA helps to move away from analyses that view teachers' actions as divorced from context, or simultaneously limits teachers' agency within tight structural parameters.

The SRA establishes a more nuanced and multi-layered understanding of teachers' complex, sometimes contradictory, strategies in relation to their wider socio-political, economic and cultural contexts. Specifically, teachers may have intentions and preferences, but these are not fixed but actively formed and reformed in processes of structured coupling with current cultural, political and economic realities (Jones 2010, 29–30). As Miller Marsh (2003, 8) notes, teachers are 'continually in the process of fashioning and refashioning [their] identities by patching together fragments of the discourses to which [they] are exposed'. As a result, teacher identities are not fixed, but rather are 'a complex matter of the social and individual, of discourse and practice, of reification and participation, of similarity and difference, of agency and structure, of fixity and transgression, of the singular and the multiple' (Clarke 2009). Revealing the reconciliation of roles, and of the context within which their work is framed and reframed is a focus of this article. In doing so we highlight the choices and strategies which teachers articulated to us and at the same time, reflect on how these actions dialectically relate to the strategically selective context that the conflict in Aceh created for them.

Additionally, however, we also seek to understand how such understandings of teachers play a role in post-conflict periods such as the one which Aceh is currently in. While teachers are often closely associated within a discourse of 'improving educational quality' less has been written and researched on teachers' roles for promoting peace-building in the ways defined recently through the Research Consortium on Education and Peace-building's framing of this concept (Novelli, Lopes Cardozo, and Smith 2015). Peace-building requires more than the absence of violence but the promotion of a transformative remedy focussed on redressing grievances from which conflict arose. For education specifically, it requires attempts at addressing inequalities in both access and outcomes (redistribution), greater focus on acknowledging and accepting difference (recognition), ensuring greater participation of all educational stakeholders (representation) and discussing and dealing with past, present and future injustices (reconciliation). Teachers stand to play an important role in supporting all four of these aims. Davies (2011, 47) suggests that, they are crucial to 'developing values of mutual respect and tolerance in a post-war context characterised by persisting divisions and mistrust'. Specifically, this might mean developing appropriate methods of instruction that reinforce participation and collaboration, model practices and patterns of fairness and respect, and deliver the curriculum in a fair and balanced way which acknowledges the heterogeneity of lived experiences that students bring into the classroom. That said, little has actually been written about how teachers act to promote peace in such ways. A starting premise for this paper is understanding how teachers' past experiences of navigating a period of conflict may influence the ways they then perceive their space for manoeuvre (i.e., their agency) to act as peace-builders in the post-conflict moment. Moving from the past into the present is critical in Aceh where significant attention is being given to education and educators as part of a transformative solution to society's past woes (Shah and Lopes Cardozo 2014).

To understand the prospective role teachers may play in such transformative solutions, we draw on Gramsci's ideas of cultural hegemony, and the role of civil society and cultural institutions and

actors – including educators – in understanding balances of power and processes of societal change (Bates 1975, 353; Bieler and Morton 2004, 92; Femia 1975, 30). Teachers, in Gramscian thinking, are consequently seen as important transmitters in gaining political as well as cultural hegemony, or in other cases as working as an important counter-hegemonic force. Education institutions, including schools, universities and teacher education colleges, can function as places of 'creative ideological work and as places where activist intellectual networks may be formed' (Baud and Rutten 2004, 213).

As a result, teachers can act as what Gramsci labels organic intellectuals in a number of different ways (Lopes Cardozo 2015). These include: (1) acting as 'popular intellectuals', where they borrow from standardised ideologies and transform meaning to apply to their local contexts (Baud and Rutten 2004, 208–209); (2) engaging as 'transformative intellectuals' and taking on a role of self-critique and collectively organise to struggle for their rights and status in society (Giroux 2003); and/or (3) working as 'committed intellectuals' who engage individually or collaboratively with colleagues in committed actions for social justice 'as an integral part of the always contradictory and conflictive on-going process of conscientization and educational change' (Fischman and Haas 2009, 572). We believe that understanding the strategically selective context during conflict, as viewed by Acehnese teachers themselves, is critical to making sense of the type of intellectual roles teachers in Aceh play today.

Research approach, methods and limitations

The findings presented in this paper are part of a larger study that aims to explore the role of education in (post)-conflict, and post-tsunami Aceh.[1] Data were collected in 2013 over two separate short field visits by the authors. Individual interviews were carried out with 33 representatives from the donor community, policy-makers, non-governmental organisation (NGO) staff, academics and experts. While such conversations extended beyond the scope of the study, most covered the position and role of teachers during the conflict to some degree.

Interviews with teachers were carried out separate to this and occurred in a group setting rather than individually. They were carried out at four schools located across Aceh Besar, the region immediately surround the capital Banda Aceh. A total of 37 educators, including 19 males and 18 females were spoken to. All teachers interviewed were more senior teachers who were already part of the civil service during the latter years of the conflict. Most interviews occurred in a group setting, ranging from 3 to 10 participants per group. Only two individual interviews (with school leaders) occurred outside of this group format. The small-scale, exploratory nature of this study and the limited regions from which data were collected, however, preclude us from generalising these findings to represent the experiences or beliefs to teachers in Aceh as a whole.

Focus group discussions were deemed to be the most ethically and culturally acceptable format for speaking to teachers about a sensitive topic, and allowed for them to make sense of and collectively reflect on their past experiences. This approach, however, did not allow for a discrete identification of participants' opinions as one-on-one interviews do. This made it somewhat more difficult to discern patterns of individual difference along demographic factors such as age, years of teaching experience and role occupied during the conflict. Additionally, as already noted, Aceh Besar was not the epicentre of Aceh's conflict, nor was it a particular GAM (pro-independence) stronghold. Both these factors are likely to influence the lived experiences of the teachers and school leaders we interviewed. Regardless, the narratives shared by the teachers provide clear evidence that while some areas were more conflict-effected than others, 'communities across Aceh were deeply impacted by the conflict and violence' (Good et al. 2006, 30).

Interviews and discussions were conducted by the two authors, in collaboration with two Acehnese academic colleagues from International Centre for Aceh and Indian Ocean Studies, who provided both translation and facilitation support. The fact that the research was carried out in a group setting with teachers, by a team of foreign researchers along with tertiary scholars, who are also teacher educators, may have created a normative filtering of what was stated or unstated in such

discussions. Teachers may have been afraid to voice unpopular opinions or exposed particularly political stances or positions for fear of being judged by colleagues. While attempts were made to reduce hierarchies of power within groups of teachers (by age and gender) by splitting them into smaller discussion groups where these factors were neutralised, we acknowledge that what we present later in the findings may have been pre-filtered by the nature of the research collection activity. Yet, considering that such data have been hard to collect within schools in the past, these methods did allow access into previously unnavigable research settings.

All interviews were recorded, and later transcribed (and translated to English where needed) by a student assistant, who together with the authors developed a series of codes and categories through an inductive process. It was from the codes themselves that this concept of the fruit squeezed or caught between two stones was derived and further explored.

Teachers' roles in maintaining educational access and opportunities

During the most active periods of the nearly 30-year conflict in Aceh, schools often came under attack. An assessment undertaken by the international community suggests that 4379 or 66% of schools in Aceh were damaged or destroyed, most during the final years of conflict. As the report notes,

> Schools were a particular target of both sides during the conflict. Insurgents perceived them as extensions of the Indonesian state, and the TNI damaged schools for several reasons – to cast blame on GAM, terrorise communities, and to make it more difficult for families to live in remote villages. (Noble et al. 2009, 43)

Teachers were not immune to such attacks and often found themselves deeply embroiled in various forms of violence. According to one senior official from the Provincial Ministry of Education office,

> A lot of teachers died during that time. And a lot of teachers were also injured and became disabled, their houses burned and so on. So these factors affected the teachers psychologically. These conditions significantly affected their motivation to teach.

The prevalence of violence in and around schools, led some teachers to either leave the profession altogether, or migrate to urban areas, such as Banda Aceh, that were deemed to be safer (Bailey 2008). The majority of educators, however, remained in their villages and spearheaded efforts to keep their schools open, and maintain educational access and opportunity during the conflict (Eurotrends 2009). As one university lecturer in Higher Education described,

> The issue was how to keep going … So when schools were burned, teachers and principals often [sought] alternative places for education.

A repeated theme in interviews with teachers, principals and other Ministry officials were the efforts made to support the ability of the education system to respond to and overcome adversity and adverse situations – or resilience (see e.g., Reyes 2013 or OECD 2008) in contemporary discourse – despite the conflict looming around them. For example, one teacher recalled how,

> Sometimes we would see the shooting, fighting, among the two sides in front of our school … people getting murdered, and it would shock us for a moment … but we tried to keep teaching.

The quotes suggest a considerable level of agency at individual, school and community levels to keep education going, despite the atrocities going on around the school itself. At the same time, a repeated question that arose for the research team was whether and if teachers felt compelled to discuss or speak about the conflict raging outside in their own classrooms. In general, there appeared to be a relative absence of such action when teachers reflected on their practices and approaches in the classroom during that time of active violent conflict, instead focussing on trying to maintain what Shah (2015) has identified as a 'status quo' or 'normalcy' approach to educational resilience.

Teachers recalled that there were high personal risks and challenges in discussing the conflict within their classroom. One educator noted that,

> … at that time peace was a dangerous word. I was abducted when I mentioned peace education at that time … and had a ransom of 30 million Rupiah put on me. But thanks to God, because the head of the school is my friend, he negotiated with the combatants for my release.

In general, teachers felt that they were under immense scrutiny from all sides in terms of the ideology they were promoting in the classroom (a matter discussed later). Many teachers noted that they were acutely aware that children from both of the major factions of the conflict sat within their classroom, and that they would go home and report to their families what was being taught and discussed in the classroom. For that reason, teachers feigned an air of 'neutrality' outwardly to their students. As explained by one teacher,

> During the conflict we were afraid to say anything. We did not have freedom to express ourselves … . we did not trust each other, we lost trust … we had to be very careful around our students because who knows who his or her father is … I stopped discussing many things, talking about conflict [with my students].

Tales of extortion and harassment of teachers were common amongst those interviewed. In many rural communities, teachers were one of the few salaried individuals living in that locale, and became an easy target for the extortion of levies in support of either side, sometimes leading to extremely violent measures taken against them:

> Only teachers in the villages they have a regular salary, they have money, and also they have rice fields. It means that the teacher is [considered] rich people … And [because of this] they become the target, of both military and also GAM. To have, what we call, you know, taxation … Because my brother was not able to give GAM 18 million rupiah [$180 USD] one time, because he is a small teacher, he was shot dead. Later, my oldest brother protested this situation to GAM, and the next day my brother was also shot dead by GAM … Teachers were in a very difficult situation.

Teachers also were targets by virtue of the fact that they were government employees and civil servants, and compelled to wear the standard issue brown uniform that all employees within the Indonesian government must wear (a practice which continues until present day). Given the constant threats of extortion and risks of being too visible, teachers developed creative solutions to attempting to travel to and from their work sites each day. One principal described how his colleagues were,

> … afraid to wear their school uniform in public. They would usually bring their uniforms in a bag to school and only put it on when they arrived for work. It was risky … to stand out.

Such creativity also extended to other educational officers, such as district officials and training officials, who would often need to travel by bus to reach remote villages and face risk exposure en route. One Ministry official, who at that time was a teacher trainer, recalled how,

> More than once when our trainers would go out the districts, the army would ask them to get out of the bus and then set it on fire. Other times, our trainers would be harassed by those loyal to GAM on the bus … we had to pretend like we were not civil servants … . we would not dress up, wear our sandals … and pretend we were … common people, ordinary people.

Even if the teachers quoted above did not use the pedagogical space as an opportunity to act as organic intellectuals in the midst of conflict, the fact that they returned to their jobs day after day suggests a commitment to their roles and responsibilities as an educator.

Contesting or accepting the state ideology?

A repeated concern that came up in interviews with teachers and principals was a sense that they were prevented from fulfilling their full responsibilities as educators during the conflict. Frequently teachers, like the one below, noted that,

> … the process of teaching and learning was disrupted because a lot of things interfered … There were a lot of times when nothing was happening and the children did not receive the education that they should be getting.

When probed more specifically about this, it became clear that the teaching of subjects such as PKN (*Pendidikan Kewarganegaaran* or Citizenship Education) and Bahasa Indonesia (the national language) were heavily contested during the time of conflict, because of their close connotation to the ideology and contested ruling power of the Indonesian national government. One teacher described how,

> … during the conflict [these subjects were] something that GAM tried to eradicate in the school. So there was no [teaching of] pancasila,[2] there is no teaching of [civics] or the history of Indonesia. On the one hand the teacher needs to teach to achieve the curriculum, the syllabus, but on the other hand, they cannot teach if they want to protect their own security.

Since independence in Indonesia, education has been seen to play a key role in building a nation, and was tasked with reducing ethnic, cultural, linguistic and economic diversity by inculcating students with a common language, curriculum and national ideology (Djojonegoro 1997 in Bjork 2005). Components of the curriculum such as PKN were a key component of acculturating citizens into the *Pancasila* system of national values and ideologies. GAM, which sought to challenge the notion of a single national ideology, saw the teaching of such subjects as a threat to their independence movement. According to one teacher,

> PKN became a dangerous subject to teach … because it taught students to love the country … also Bahasa Indonesia was not allowed to be taught in schools by GAM because they saw it as the language of the enemy.

What was interesting in our interviews and focus group discussions was a lack of critical introspection about the ideology underpinning this curriculum. Teachers saw their inability to teach these components of the curriculum as an impediment to their professional responsibilities, duties that had been tightly circumscribed and dictated by a hegemonic Jakarta-based national state apparatus. Their inability to meet professional duties was more a concern than the contested ideology underpinning PKN. They also saw their neglect of the teaching of such subjects as a violation of children's rights to an education. For example, one teacher expressed with concern how,

> The national law states that all Indonesian citizens have the right to get good education … [but] during the conflict sometimes we violated their right, these children's right by not teaching them perfectly, because we were not teaching them certain subjects.

The invocation of the narrow right-based discourse set under the National Constitution and promoted through Pancasila was done without acknowledgement that children's rights may be violated in other ways by a schooling experience that did not recognise their cultural, religious or linguistic identity (Tomaševski 2003). Additionally, teachers expressed relief that following the end of the conflict, they could return to getting on with their job by ensuring that they covered all components of the curriculum as they were directed to do.

This position may be partially explained by a strong culture of obedience, which has dominated the teaching profession since independence. Bjork (2005, 2006) notes how during the Suharto regime, state authority and control over teachers was so pervasive that little space was given for educators to voice critical opinions or ideas within the school. As he describes,

> … the instructor's role as civil servant was emphasised over that of educator, and his opportunities to shape school policy and practice were limited. Obedience rather than initiative was rewarded … Aware of the potential costs to be paid for displaying resistance to ideas passed down from Jakarta, teachers learned that their wisest course of action was to unquestioningly follow directives from above … to faithfully disseminate a set of ideas formulated in the capital. (Bjork 2005, 110)

In the professional context of the school, it was this message that took precedent over other obligation, and influenced teachers' perceptions on their ability and interest to voice dissent, think or act critically. The rules of the game has been established and reinforced through a hegemonic system in years' prior, leaving little opportunity for teachers to perceive themselves as organic intellectuals.

In contemporary Aceh, this has continued to influence and shape teachers' roles and purpose, and influences the ability for educators to promote the transformative discourse that is being promoted for education at a provincial level. As part of the peace accord, a Law on Governing Aceh (LoGA) was formulated. LoGA provided the province much greater control over educational financing, as well as the content and substance of educational provision. The aim was to enable educators to make schooling much more introspective, critical and contextually relevant than it had been in the past (Shah and Lopes Cardozo 2014). Simultaneous to this, processes of decentralisation and democratisation happening across Indonesia granted local authorities much greater control over educational provision (Bjork 2005). Technically speaking, this confluence of factors should then translate into schools and teachers acting in more autonomous ways and supporting community aspirations and ambitions for education – or within the framework articulated at the outset – as transformative or committed intellectuals. Yet, when the current actions and activities of teachers in Aceh are observed, it would appear little has changed. 'Flexibility' has been almost uniformly used to focus on introducing Arabic language or Islamic traditions/texts into instruction. Most of this learning is rote-based and lacks any level of criticality (Shah and Lopes Cardozo 2014). School-based management councils do not use autonomy they are afforded to promote or support democratic participation, but rather just act to validate existing government doctrine (Naylor 2014). The past conflict is not acknowledged or discussed within classrooms, with teachers feeling that unless it is placed within the official state curriculum, there is no role for them to play in discussing the causes of, or consequences of the conflict on society (Wenger 2014). Thus, similar to what Bjork (2002, 2005, 2006) has found from other parts of Indonesia, increased school-level autonomy has not translated into teachers acting in different ways, largely the historical legacy of teachers' conditioning as public servants.

Caught in the middle

As noted in the previous section, education prior to and during the conflict in Aceh was a key site for building the Indonesian nation, and working to dispel the 'myth' of regional differences. Teachers, as the messengers of such ideas, came under immense scrutiny from GAM; but were also extorted and harassed by virtue of their position as salaried civil servants, particularly in more remote regions. As one teacher described,

> We got threatened by both parties, from the military and also from Free Aceh Movement. So we were like a fruit between the two stones, with one stone pressing us from the top, and another from the bottom. We were caught in between the two conflicting parties on a daily basis.

What became clear in many of the interviews were the strategic choices educators made at that time to protect their livelihoods and their lives. This strategising took place in a number of different ways inside and outside the school setting.

The environment within the schools remained a 'small entity of the state' throughout the conflict, as one principal described. The staff serving within these bastions of the state, in cognisance of their professional and community context, selectively employed their agency, based on the particular strategically selective context they found themselves in throughout the conflict. Often this meant identifying a role for themselves within and outside the walls of the school, to avoid problems. One teacher told us,

> On one hand we showed our loyalty to the government, to the nation by saying that we are the civil servant and showing up for our teaching jobs. We would argue that our job is teaching … to educate Indonesian people, something like that. So while TNI wanted to crush the Free Aceh Movement, we protected our role in the community and ensured that they could appreciate what we were doing. And … with the Free Aceh Movement, we would say that, to get independence, we cannot only rely on the military … we also need to educate our children. So every Acehnese is contributing in different ways … I'm the teacher, you are the military and the other people as the business man, so all of us have the same aim to get the independence, but we have to do different things.

Like teachers, other local 'elites' also found themselves in a similar position of being caught in the middle during the conflict. For example, '[health] clinics during the conflict were at times sites for security forces on either side to collect information about local populations, placing doctors and nurses in the same difficult positions described by community leaders' (Good et al. 2006, 51). Like teachers, health workers were extorted for their salaries, and were under constant surveillance from the government regarding whom they treated in their clinics. Similarly, village leaders often described themselves as a fruit squeezed between two stones – and asked by both GAM and the TNI to mobilise the community behind their respective efforts (Good et al. 2006).

For teachers specifically, they articulated being caught between a professional context which expected of them full loyalty and obedience to the state, and a community context that was actively contesting such authority. Teachers strategically deliberated on this situation and responded in kind. As described by one teacher,

> As a civil servant, of course we had to show loyalty to the government. But we also tried not to offend [GAM loyalists] … . we would try not to show disagreement with anybody … we would go with the flow … just play the game.

In perhaps the most vivid example of 'playing the game' within the confines of the school, one principal described how he handled the situation of TNI and GAM forces visiting the school in the same day.

> In the morning I would lead the students in raising the national flag … usually before the military came to visit our school on patrol. They would find our flag hanging and left us alone. Later that day, GAM would come to the school, and ask me to take down the flag … so I would. We were very much caught in the middle.

Such narratives make clear the strategic manoeuvring educators undertook to keep their schools and classrooms open to students in the midst of conflict outside.

Is this experience acknowledged today?

At the outset of the paper, we specified that our conception of teachers' agency and ability to see themselves as agents of change within contemporary Acehnese society is in part a product of past experiences and structural conditions. This perspective on teachers' space for manoeuvre and change explicitly recognises that teachers need to be seen as, 'whole persons with their past experiences, emotions, commitments and concerns for their own well-being' (Pantic 2015, 763). This is particularly true in Aceh where, 'a history of violence informs every person's position and everyday practice in Aceh and should therefore properly inform and be accounted for in the development of post-conflict and all other humanitarian interventions in Aceh' (Good et al. 2006, 42).

Yet, in speaking to those from the donor community who are assisting Aceh to reconstruct and strengthen its education system, and to representatives from within the government, what became striking is how often this was ignored. For example, we spoke to a development actor whose current programming focussed on strengthening school-based management and teacher professionalism. When asked about the degree to which Aceh's legacy of conflict is recognised in their programming, he responded as follows:

> There is no impact of the conflict in Aceh now … they have built new schools, there are new teachers. There is no difference between Aceh and other provinces now. The conflict happened many years ago, and is not the focus [of our programming] because there is peace now.

The fact that most of the donor community ignores the legacy of the conflict in their programmatic interventions was readily acknowledged by another interviewee who worked on the reconstruction of Aceh's education sector after the conflict. She described how even amongst the programme she was a part of,

> I found the ignorance of people working [in conflict affected areas of Aceh] really surprising. I would get comments from some people from the [donor] in Jakarta that 'you know … it's no business of ours to be working on conflict', and I had to actually explain that you can't ignore the context in which you're working. Ultimately, I had to keep a lot of the conflict related issues very quiet.

Within Ministry circles in Aceh, it was more recognised that the conflict had an ongoing impact on the well-being of teachers. One high-ranking Ministry of Education official at the provincial level recalled how when he went out to areas impacted most acutely by conflict, he noticed that,

> Many people will see that the impact of the conflict on teachers is that they are not expressive, not open, and still afraid of authority. So for example, when I went to [a school affected by conflict], the teachers sat in their classrooms obediently … they kept their hands still and sat without making a noise, not talking at all. And when I tried to joke with them and make them smile, they wouldn't respond. They weren't expressing their feelings at all.

At the same time, from the Ministry's perspective, its concerns rest not with this loss of professional and personal agency, but rather by a need to reign in the power of the state over teachers' roles and functions once again. Another Ministry official felt that teachers had too much autonomy and control over their role:

> The teachers, they would show up to school whenever they wanted … 9' o clock, 10' clock. No one was there to check on them … now our challenge is getting them to be professional again.

Rather than acknowledging teachers' sense of duty and responsibility for keeping schools open in the midst of the threats around, their delinquency for turning up late or not covering the curriculum adequately is what was most frequently remarked on in interviews today. Such expectations and conditions for teachers may continue to preclude them from acting as transformative or committed intellectuals, and as peace-builders and brokers within their community.

Conclusion

Inspired by the SRA, our analysis reflects how teachers' agency in Aceh during the conflict was deeply influenced by the strategically selective context – specifically the economic/material, political and socio-cultural conditions – at play preceding and during that period. We found that because teachers were salaried government employees, it created important obligations and roles for them vis-à-vis the state, but also made them vulnerable to threats and extortion from separatist forces, particularly when moving to and from the school premises. However, where possible, teachers enacted their agency, or space for manoeuvre available to them, and showed creative solutions to manage these difficult situations, such as strategically hiding their uniforms or raising and then unfurling the national flag. In this period, teachers appeared to be most concerned with their commitment to maintaining a semblance of 'normalcy' in schooling rituals and practices, including teaching curriculum subjects such as citizenship education and Bahasa Indonesia (the national language), which were deeply contested because of their direct political links to the national state ideology. We observed that this desire to maintain a status quo inside the school walls appeared to be rooted in a culture of obedience that limited space for deeper reflection on the symbolic violence they may have imparted on students and communities, because of their will to maintain service delivery as government employees.

What the narratives of teachers suggest is that the attitudes, actions and behaviours of teachers maintained a sense of resilience of the education system – namely restoring or maintaining normalcy – when tumultuous change was occurring around them. Such actions raise questions about whether promoting such resilience was appropriate or acceptable in such times, when education was deeply mired in a profound ideological struggle for Aceh's identity within the Indonesian nation. Teachers, as members of the community, and often closely connected with neighbours, family members and parents of students fighting in the resistance, struggled to balance their strategic

societal positioning – as civil servants and community members – and found themselves caught in the middle of a complex range of hegemonic and counter-hegemonic forces at play. Resilience, while now used as an accepted discourse for the continuance of educational provision in conflict-affected context, may put teachers in compromised and dangerous positions as the front-line actors tasked with maintaining the status quo.

Additionally, while this discussion of teacher agency and strategy is historically framed, we believe that this has important implications for the post-conflict period Aceh finds itself in today. While changes in political, economic and social climates create new opportunities for teachers to support processes of peace-building through societal transformations, they remain individuals who have been shaped and moulded by the preceding decades-long conflict. Professional identities often take time to change and it may be unrealistic for teachers to be assumed to act as peace-builders if the underlying political, social and economic realities on which their prior (and current) work in classrooms is based is not acknowledged and addressed. Teachers face continuing and new professional constraints that limit their space for manoeuvre to act as transformative or committed intellectuals as defined earlier in the article. SRA brings nuance to the belief that teachers may be natural or central peace-builders for communities, or conversely those standing in the path of reform, by presenting the complexity which underpins a stratified understanding of reality, and the multiple, and often competing interests and choices in play. To understand how education and educators can support positive transformation, we have argued elsewhere that it is critical to understand schools, teachers and communities in light of past and present realities, and the way actors within them understand such spaces (Lopes Cardozo and Shah, forthcoming). The SRA allows us to do this. And while we have stated earlier how the SRA helps to move away from analyses that view teachers' actions as divorced from context, our analysis of teachers in Aceh during the conflict has shown that there is a need to move beyond a somewhat technical or rational understanding of teachers having 'strategic calculations' (Hay 2002a), that SRA might inspire to do. Rather, a fuller understanding of the semiotic and subjective realities of teachers, including their (hybrid, and changing) identities, motivations and beliefs, can help to uncover why and how teachers can (not) act in support or against processes of peace-building.

Finally, the analysis in this paper illustrates how the prior and actual strategic selective context of Aceh limits teachers' agency to be(come) such individuals today, particularly devoid of an explicit reframing of the profession towards increasing their autonomy, latitude and sense of place and obligation to the community (Shah and Lopes Cardozo 2014). At the same time, the fact that teachers returned to their jobs day after day despite the security situation and the threats they faced from students, the community, and armed groups, reveals a strong commitment to their roles and responsibilities as an educator, and one that should and could be better acknowledged and leveraged upon at present.

Notes

1. More information and further research outputs can be obtained from the research project webpage: https://educationanddevelopment.wordpress.com/research-projects/peacebuilding-social-justice-and-education-in-aceh-indonesia/.
2. *Pancasila* is Indonesia's national state ideology, installed since independence from the Dutch in 1945. It is included in the preamble of Indonesia's Constitution, and consists of five main pillars: belief in the one God; just and civilized humanity; the unity of Indonesia; people's authority under the system of public consensus and representation; and social justice for all people.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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