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Education and social change in post-conflict and post-disaster Aceh, Indonesia

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1. Introduction

"*Four years after the signing of the Helsinki memorandum, Aceh is transformed. The tsunami provided a unique opportunity to pursue peace and resulted in billions of dollars of aid…Cementing peace, however, is an ongoing long-term process. International experience shows that post-conflict societies face immense challenges and the ongoing risk of relapse into violence."* (Utomo et al., 2009, p. 171)

For nearly 30 years, the province of Aceh was embroiled in a separatist struggle against the Indonesian government. This conflict was the product of a long-standing belief of Aceh as 'distinct' to the rest of the country historically and culturally; as well as tensions over the spoils of the province's immense natural resources. With the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between separatist rebels and central government in 2005, Aceh officially emerged into a post-conflict 'moment' where, for the first time in nearly two generations, there was real hope that peace could be sustained. Public expectations were that the peace accord would redress long-standing grievances regarding social injustices that had left the province lagging behind other parts of the country in terms of social and economic development. As part of the post-conflict peace settlement, education came to occupy a critical role in helping the provincial government to meet high public expectations of improved service delivery, and the redistribution of entitlements and opportunities which had traditionally been in the hands of a privileged few (Barron et al., 2013). Within the provincial government's first educational strategy plan of 2008, specific mention was made of education serving a transformative role in Acehnese society by redressing past inequities caused by conflict, and working to (re) build a peaceful future for the province (Bailey, 2008).

In recent years, it has been clearly shown that conflict-affected communities place high value on education and perceive it as one of the few protective measures in situations of insecurity or instability externally (see for example, Smith and Vaux, 2003; Smith, 2005; Winthrop and Kirk, 2008; Save the Children, 2013). Great importance has been given and continues to be given to the restoration of education provision due to its visible and important role in restoring/reconstructing state legitimacy and the important function as a "peace dividend" it can play (Rose and Greeley, 2006). Education has often also been noted as having an important role in reconciliation goals, through the messages and shared valued it can promote—in essence promoting a form of social cohesion that can be often lost during conflict (Tawil and Harley, 2004). Each of these rationales has shaped the role of education in the post-conflict/post-disaster 'moment' that Aceh continues to be in.

Yet research in the past decade has clearly proven how particular educational aspects (such as equity, relevance, and management considerations) and conflict dimensions (such as security, economic factors, and political representation) operate in mutually constitutive and contingent ways in conflict-affected settings; often leading to outcomes that sometimes challenge education's restorative and transformative qualities in such contexts (Bakarat et al., 2008; Paulson, 2008; Davies, 2010, 2013). New conceptual and methodological approaches that draw from critical theoretical positions are helping academics and practitioners to map these associations (Novelli and Lopes Cardozo, 2008; Novelli, 2011; Novelli and Smith, 2011). Ultimately the goal is to understand, how, if and why education might

effectively promote social cohesion, improved levels of trust between the state and citizens, and rebuild a better society after crises or internal conflict. Much of this work is founded on a shift away from grand narratives towards more contingent, specific and contextually driven understandings of how educational processes, decisions and actions unfold in such settings. The scholarship in our paper is representative of this.

In this paper we illustrate how the complex relationship between education and a sustainable peace can be better theorised and represented using the context of the case of Aceh, Indonesia.[1] We begin by suggesting how we conceptualize the complexity and contingency noted above, using the methodological lens of Cultural Political Economy (CPE) analysis and the Strategic Relational Approach (SRA). We then move to demonstrate how we apply this framework to understand the context within which education operates in Aceh, showing its relevance not only for academic research but also its added value to the world of policy and practice.

In recent years, political economy of education approaches have been strongly advocated for by actors such as the World Bank and DFID for its usefulness in identifying the upstream factors that might impede systemic education reform. Analysis has tended to focus on political mechanisms that might impede effective governance of the education system. A shortcoming of this type of analysis has been neglect of structural and systemic inequalities produced through economic regimes (namely neoliberalism) or historical precedent (colonialism/neo-colonialism) that effect not only political practice, but also systems of exchange, and relations and notions of education, the state and the citizen in such contexts. Some scholars have noted that it is imperative that political economy analysis of education make visible that which might otherwise remain invisible, namely the tensions, contradictions and inequalities that are part of education's relationship to economic, social and political regimes (Boak, 2011; Novelli et. al, forthcoming).

We aim to show the usefulness of combining a CPE analysis with a Strategic Relational Approach (SRA), to achieve this aim. We argue that these tools help to uncover the dialectic between structured contexts and the range of stakeholders and actors (in-)directly involved in the field of education, reconstruction and peacebuilding. In doing so, we work to expose the divergent logics, agendas, actors, levels of power/funding, and role of vested power interests across the humanitarian, development, and diplomatic sectors in conflict-affected/disaster-affected settings, and the often differing objectives underpinning humanitarian, reconstruction and

[1] The research presented in this paper is part of an ongoing collaboration between academics and postgraduate scholars at the University of Auckland, University of Amsterdam and the International Centre for Aceh and Indian Ocean Studies, which commenced at the beginning of 2013. Funded by both universities, the objective of the collaboration is to make methodological, theoretical and empirical contributions to researcher and practitioner communities' understanding of education's role in promoting peaceful, socially just and sustainable development in conflict-affected settings. Ethics approval has been granted by both respective universities, and the project has an ongoing commitment to knowledge dissemination by making all outputs produced accessible on the project webpage (http://educationanddevelopment.wordpress.com/research-projects) as well as through regular seminars, presentations and workshops to policy-making and research communities.

rehabilitation interventions (Novelli & Smith, 2012; Winthrop and Matsui, 2013; Novelli et al., forthcoming).

We also uncover the discursive and material struggles engrained in Aceh's strategically selective context on education transformation at present. We do so through our own adaptation of Nancy Fraser's (1995, 2005) social-justice framework. Specifically, we examine how the post-conflict/post-tsunami cultural political economy has positioned education discursively, ideologically, and materially in terms of Fraser's notions of redistribution, recognition, and representation. We contend that these aspirations are central to any credible effort at building a sustainable peace in the Aceh province. The paper summarises findings from a critical analysis of research literature and policy-documentation along with preliminary themes that arose out of an initial visit to the field in February 2013 by the two authors.

2. Theoretical positioning: critical realism and cultural political economy

A key assertion of those employing a critical theoretical perspective to the field of education and conflict is that education has multiple faces and dynamics in relation to conflict and reconstruction, and does not exist devoid of the broader (political, economic, and religious) structures and institutions within society. Education is deeply embedded in the context, history and cultural norms of societies, as well as current socio-political realities, making observed outcomes contingent, dynamic and inherently partial within the full realm of possibility. In an attempt to make sense of such contingency, we argue that a critical realist ontological lens is best suited within the broad field of critical theory to doing so. The role of the researcher is to investigate and identify relationships and non-relationships, respectively, between what we experience, what actually happens, and the underlying mechanisms that produce the events in the world, through what is labelled a process of *retroduction* (Danermark et al. 2002, p. 21). Critical realism differs from positivist forms of enquiry in its explicit focus on *how objects work in relation to their context*, acknowledging that structures and institutions of society do, in fact, matter in a myriad of outcomes. As Sayer (2000, p. 15) describes, "critical realism acknowledges that social phenomena are intrinsically meaningful and hence that meaning is not only externally descriptive of them but constitutive of them." The contingent and spatio-temporal nature of education's relation to society in post-conflict society comes to the fore, largely because analysis becomes situated in the relationship between events and underlying mechanisms (structures, institutions, discourses, and beliefs/values). According to Fairclough (2005), this study of discourse and the beliefs/values which underpin them, help us to understand the politics of knowledge production and its dissemination within society. They construct 'truths' about the social and natural world with the aim of becoming taken for granted definitions and categories, legitimating power structures and the position of individuals within society (Luke, 1996, p. 10). In sum a critical realist epistemology and ontology works to, "establish the presence of [processes and mechanisms], how they work and with what outcomes" (Robertson and Dale forthcoming, p. 5), with the aim of revealing how hegemonic conditions might come to be.

Concretely, we draw on Bob Jessop's work on CPE and Susan Robertson's and Roger Dale's (2012b; 2013a/b) *critical* application of this to *education* (CCPEE) to inform

our analysis. The CPE approach developed by Bob Jessop and colleagues at Lancaster University takes "the cultural turn" in political and economic research seriously (Jessop, 2004b: 160). It stresses the importance of including semiosis in political economic analysis, with semiosis being defined as "the intersubjective production of meaning", including narrativity, rhetoric, hermeneutics, identity, reflexivity, historicity and discourse. Robertson (2012b: p. 3) contends that Jessop's interpretation of culture as purely semiosis or discourse is too narrow, and that to fully comprehend the complexities of the field of educational governance and practice, we need "a more generous understanding of the cultural to include how worlds, meanings and consciousness are formed". Doing so extends the cultural to a mutually constitutive component of the political economy of society, and education more specifically. Consequently, CCPEE helps us to see "education as part of societies; it does not sit outside of it" – by not simply 'adding' education to CPE, but by *critically* viewing education as being both constituted by and connected to cultural, economic and political dynamics and processes (Robertson 2012b: p. 4).

Building on the critical realist recognition of the importance of identifying visible and invisible structures and mechanisms that lead to that which we empirically observe, the objective is to examine the ways in which the relationship between education and peacebuilding is articulated discursively and materially through social relations, experiences, and practices (the cultural), the ways in which education and peacebuilding fits into relations of production, distribution and exchange in society (the economic), and finally the fashion in which an agenda promoting education's links to peacebuilding has been determined and subsequently governed (the political). Doing so helps us to locate education in Aceh within cultural scripts in which it is constructed and mediated, as well as to understand the relationships it holds (political, economic and social) with actors and institutions at the supra-national, national, and sub-national scales. We contend that this approach is paramount if the goal is to locate the tensions and contradictions in what Robertson and Dale (2013b, p. 2) label the "education ensemble". By doing so, we can begin to critically analyse possibilities for education to transform Acehnese society after conflict and disaster.

3. Analyzing the multiple faces of education in post-conflict Aceh: a strategic relational and social justice approach

The specific task of this paper is to uncover the strategically selective context within which education operates in the province. What makes Aceh an intriguing case at present is the perceived break from historical cultural, political, economic and social conditions of the past. This moment of 'crisis' is driven by a combination of a broader democratisation project at the national level, widespread destruction caused by both conflict and disaster, and the granting of special autonomy to the region following the signing of a peace accord in 2005. In combination, discursive claims on education's role and function and society have had to be reconsidered, and relocated into a new framework that attempts to legitimate existing social configurations. Some discourses, practices and beliefs are becoming consolidated and hegemonic, in Gramscian (1971) terms, while others remain contested and disputed. We note that the discursive and material selectivity created by the cultural

political economy within which education in Aceh is located at present offers a field of opportunity and constraint for actors, and shapes the conditions under which agency is employed.

By doing so, we embrace the SRA-inspired view that "agency and structure are dialectically shaped in relation to fields of strategic and selective selectivity" (Robertson, 2012, p. 10). This means that structures and agents are treated analytically as separate entities, but are seen to simultaneously have a contingent and dialectal relationship (Hay 2002b; Jessop 2005). Specifically, structures are seen as *strategically selective*. Within the confines of particular temporal periods and spaces, specific structures and structural configurations can selectively reinforce the action, tactics, activities and strategies of actors (also defined as their *agency* and discourage others. All actors have tendencies, or preferences for action, but the structural spaces they operate within may allow only certain tendencies to be realised. The social, economic and political spaces in which actors operate are "densely structured and highly contoured" which presents an "unevenly distributed configuration of opportunity and constraint to actors'"(Hay 2002a, p. 381).

Our analysis of the strategically selective context looks carefully at the politics of education—namely how an agenda for education has being established in the post-conflict/post-disaster moment—as well as the moments of educational politics and practice, which then translate this agenda into problems and issues for policy and practice (Dale, 2005, pp. 139–141; Robertson and Dale, 2013b). In thinking about the level at which discourses and ideas about the purpose, functions and roles of education are formulated, and subsequently interpreted and enacted, Dale and Robertson (2009) compel us to think beyond the state level, and consider how other actors such as private agencies, international organisations and local institutions are increasingly involved in such dynamics. To avoid what they identify as "methodological nationalism", there is a need to explore the relationships between the various scales, spaces and levels of educational decision-making and policy production.

Our framework is also informed by Nancy Fraser's (1995, 2005) delineation of the cultural (recognition), political (representation) and economic (redistribution) dimensions of social injustices, and scholarship that acknowledges the relational and multi-scalar nature of education (policies, politics and practice) and social justice (Young, 2006; Keddie, 2012; Connell, 2012; Robertson and Dale, 2013a). Socially just education would also meaningfully work to cover the four A's of Tomaševski (2003): available, accessible, acceptable, and adaptable educational experiences for all children. Linking Fraser's framework to that of Tomaševski's, redistribution would include education that is both available and accessible (safe); and recognition and representation are deeply connected to the notion of an education that is both acceptable and adaptable. In the context of CAFS we argue that, if education is to serve a transformative role, it must actively seek to:

1) Redistribute access to *safe and secure* educational opportunities and resources;
2) Recognise cultural (linguistic, religious, ethnic) diversity through relevant curricula and pedagogy;

3) Ensure fair and transparent representation and responsibility in educational governance.[2]

It is important to note that although these dimensions are separated out for analytical purposes, they strongly interrelate to each other when it comes to outcomes observed—a matter we take up in the conclusion when we take the analytical parts and connect them back to the whole. What is important about the utilisation of Fraser's framework is that it challenges the current paradigm of what peace or stability constitutes in the post-conflict moment. Recent years have seen the field of education and conflict push towards an agenda of supporting "resilience" or advance activity that "does no harm". This limits the role of education to restoring the status quo, rather than pushing for it to be part of what what Fraser (1995, p. 86) has termed a "transformative remedy". This implies, "the absence of structural violence, the presence of social justice and the conditions to eliminate the causes of violence" (Galtung 1975, in Smith et al, 2011, p. 12-13). In the vein of building a positive peace, peacebuilding becomes an ongoing process of active social repair and reform. As noted by Novelli and Smith (2011, p. 7):

> "peacebuilding is essentially about supporting the transformative processes any post-conflict society needs to go through, and these changes unfold over generations. Developments through the education sector represent a very important part of this transformative process, with huge potential to impact positively or negatively on underlying conflict triggers in the medium to long-term."

It is important to note that half of the global population of children who are out of school are living in conflict-affected societies (UNESCO, 2013). For post-conflict situations, a focus on transformation is arguably vital to ensure that the short-term peace dividend on which educational access is often restored is not diminished by the longer-term reemergence of conflict triggers of which education may play a part.

4. The role of 'discursive struggle' in Acehnese educational governance

Coming back to our earlier made point on how CCPEE is useful in examining the role of semiosis (e.g. discourses, motivations, ideologies) in educational governance from a critical theoretical perspective, Robertson (2013) reminds us how education is a key site of cultural production and social reproduction. In addition, there is a need to view education as a complex economy in its own right, with elements of it being "heavily commodified" and more and more privatised while other sections depend on a "gift economy" (Robertson, 2012, p. 3). Therefore, we should view education "not as a pre-given container or universal and unchanging category of social

[2] We are conscious that an analytical framework that includes a multidimensional social justice lens should not be about simplifying a complex reality. In addition, social justice should not just be conceptualised as a means "to education" (access), but also "in and through" education – or how teaching and learning processes and outcomes reproduce certain (socio-economic, cultural and political) inequalities. Perhaps obviously, each context requires a specific approach, which will consequently influence the ways in which equity is addressed and prioritised in terms of redistributive, recognitive or representative measures (Keddie, 2012, p. 13–15).

relations and life-worlds, but as a complex terrain and outcome of discursive, material and institutionalized struggles over the role of education in the social contract" (Robertson, 2014, p. 2). In sum, CCPEE helps us to disentangle and disclose the complex (and contradictory) ways in which education is being re/constituted in particular ways by discourses/ideas/imaginaries (such as development, reconstruction, peacebuilding, social justice or cohesion), actors/institutions (such as the central and provincial government, international organisations, state and religious schools) and material capabilities/power (resources, aid, information) (Robertson, 2009, in Jones, 2010).

This section focuses on the discursive struggles that underlie the strategic, selective context of education in contemporary Acehnese society. It outlines how four key (political) discourses/narratives/idea(l)s are influential in Aceh's context and how these four areas relate to the social-justice framework sketched out in the previous section, including: 1) redistribution of educational opportunities and access; 2) recent efforts to decentralise control of schooling to local communities under the guise of more transparent representation; 3) national and provincial recognition of diversity and how this results in 'Islamic politics of education' in Aceh; and 4) the divide between short term rehabilitation/reconstruction and longer term peacebuilding agendas. While focusing on how these discourses take shape in the Acehnese context, we also explore the emergence and engagement of such discourses with other scales.

4.1 Redistribution of educational opportunities and access

In the context of Aceh province, a long-standing history of conflict with outsiders, a series of recent natural disasters, and a legacy of recent external intervention in reconstruction have deeply shaped the present nature of education access and opportunity. The province has dealt with conflict for several centuries—largely involving successive attempts by European powers to settle and/or colonize the territory—but following Indonesia's independence in 1945, in a nearly 30-year separatist struggle against the Jakarta-based government (Aspinall, 2006; Reid, 2006; Riddell, 2006). This conflict, which raged most actively between 1976 and 2005, led to the deaths of between 15,000 to 20,000 people, the dislocation of families and massive destruction of public and private property (Miller and Bunnell, 2010 in Samuels, 2012, p. 21). Although a full conflict analysis is beyond the scope of this paper, earlier studies outline how this conflict was the result of the benefits of Acehnese wealth—driven by exploitation of its immense natural gas reserves—being skimmed off by central government, and employment opportunities granted to transmigrants from other parts of Indonesia rather than to the local population (Kingsbury and McColloch, 2006; Sulaiman, 2006). The Free Aceh Movement (*Gerakan Aceh Merdeka* or GAM) sought secession from Indonesia based on these structural injustices and grievances, as well as a belief that Acehnese religious identity, founded on orthodox Islam, was incompatible with the secular vision of Islam promoted in post-independence Indonesia (Milligan, 2009).

The nearly thirty-year conflict in Aceh province prevented the delivery of minimum services in the worst affected areas. Estimates suggest more than 600 schools were destroyed or damaged as a result of the conflict, leaving about 55,000 children with

reduced educational opportunities. Many children displaced to IDP camps (numbers reaching 16,352 students at one point) and had to quit school, at least temporarily. Teachers were also victims and many moved to urban areas (Bailey, 2008). Reports suggest that, despite the threats directed at schools and school actors, the education sector remained functional with robust leadership by principals and local communities often keeping schools open, and parents, teachers and students maintaining their commitment to working in or attending school (Eurotrends, 2009).

Disasters in late 2004 dealt an additional blow to a system that was already reeling from the impacts of conflict. A 9.0 earthquake on December 26, 2004 off the coast of Aceh and the tsunami that followed, left over 122,000 dead or missing and displaced more than 700,000 (Feener, 2012). Estimates are that over 2000 schools were destroyed, 2,500 teachers killed, and 160,000 students were left without a school to attend as a result of this series of disasters (Commonwealth of Australia, 2008).

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 local and provincial governments much greater control over most matters of state, including educational provision. This agreement, later legislated through the Law of Governing of Aceh (LoGA) included a commitment to increase local government's revenue share of Aceh's mineral wealth as a way to redress past injustices over how financing for education and other basic services disadvantaged the province (Pan, 2005 in UNESCO, 2011, p. 223; Feener, 2012, pp. 279–281).

Acknowledging the widespread destruction and damage which conflict and disaster have caused in the province, Aceh's Qanun (Law) on Education, passed in 2008, prioritized improving educational access and resources, and sought to redistribute wealth accumulated through natural resource extraction to educational provision. As part of Aceh's special autonomy arrangement (detailed in LoGA), Aceh is entitled to retain 70% of the oil and gas revenues generated within its borders, compared with the other provinces (except Papua), which receive 15% of oil profits and 30% of natural gas revenues (UNDP, 2010). Within this arrangement, LoGA requires Aceh's provincial government to spend at least 30% of its increased budget on education. As a result, public spending on education has quadrupled in recent years, and Aceh has the second highest per capita education expenditure in Indonesia (World Bank, 2008, p. 42). Provisions in LoGA also guarantee all graduates of secondary schools and universities competitive access to the global, regional, and national labor markets (International Development Law Organisation [IDLO], 2009). The Qanun also recognizes the disadvantages in educational quality that have plagued rural parts of the country, and provides extra monetary incentives to teachers who choose to work in such settings (ibid).

Some have argued that LoGA has effectively worked to address the province's relatively poor educational outcomes in relation to the rest of the country, and to address the acute issues faced in conflict-affected regions of the province. As evidence of this, they point to Aceh's higher than average participation rates across early childhood, primary, pre-secondary and secondary schooling when compared to other provinces. Examination results for the province are now close to national

averages, suggesting improvements in quality. Data also suggests that the four most conflict-affected (Aceh Besar, Pidie, Birieuen, East Aceh) districts of the province have enrolment rates and examination results either at, or above, the provincial average (Eurotrends, 2009). Other evidence suggests, however, that new barriers to access and opportunity in education have arisen. Enrolment rates and examination scores for the districts that are in the lowest poverty quintile are significantly below the provincial average. The quality of teaching and school facilities continues to vary greatly, largely as a product of poverty and remoteness (Evans/UNDP, 2010; Government of Aceh, 2012). This is despite the province now spending the second highest per capita on education in the country (Government of Aceh, 2012). Questions have been raised about inefficiencies within the education system, and whether such resourcing is being squandered due to corruption, clientelism and nepotism (Sudaryama, 2011). Patronage politics coupled with a highly decentralised education structure (discussed in the next section) have led to matters like resource deployment being left in the hands of a few powerful political actors at the local level, namely former GAM combatants that have become part of the ruling elite. Educational resourcing has become a tool to extend favours and benefits to colleagues, and exclude those in discord of prevailing political beliefs.

Concerns also remain about the province's macro-economic and social landscape, particularly given that LoGA links education explicitly to access to employment and livelihood opportunities. Measures of Aceh's provincial per capita gross regional domestic product (GRDP) suggest the relative wealth of the area, but per capita spending shows the Acehnese are amongst the poorest in Indonesia. The Acehnese economy has an uncertain and fragile future for several reasons: the oil and gas reserves are shrinking rapidly; due to the decade-long conflict there has been very limited (foreign) investment; and currently, most international donors have ended post-tsunami reconstruction aid programs and jointly "left the building" (Evans/UNDP, 2010, p. ix). Increased educational access, but diminished employment opportunities have led to a rise in highly educated but unemployed youth, who remain trapped in poverty (ibid).

4.2 (Mis)representation through local governance

Since the fall of Suharto in 1998, Indonesia has seen progress towards promoting democracy throughout the archipelago, and education has been a bell-weather for this trend. The push for decentralization of service provision was deemed a "make or break" issue for the post-Suharto nation, according to the World Bank (Schwartz, 2000). Globally, and being part of a wider global agenda of neoliberal inspired reforms, recent times have seen increasing discursive calls for 'stakeholder participation' or 'citizen voice' in educational decision-making, often through incentives that decentralize mechanisms of funding, control and delivery at local or regional levels. On one hand, effective mechanisms for stakeholder participation in schooling can promote citizenship skills and social inclusion, which can then be mirrored in wider societal practices. Alternatively, when such participation is perceived to be restrictive or tokenistic, it can promote distrust and intolerance between citizen, community and state (Kirk, 2007; Bakarat et al., 2008; Dupuy, 2008). As a result, in many situations, such reform has led to excessive fragmentation and rising inequities within the national school system, which represent a significant

threat to the social contract between state and citizen (Malen and Ogawa, 1988; Evans and Davies, 1990; Angus, 1993; Deem, 1994; Gorostiaga and Paulston, 2004; Lewis and Naidoo, 2004). This is of particular concern in conflict-ridden and fragile states where a recent research synthesis revealed that decentralized governance schemes have led, in many cases, to education actively or deliberately reinforcing conditions of fragility or maintaining the status quo (INEE, 2011).

Education Law 20/2003 transferred the principal responsibilities, the authority and the resources for delivering education in the non-Islamic school sector to a minimum service standard to sub-national levels of government, and in some cases, to schools themselves. Estimates are that 57% of all public education funding is now channelled directly through the 491 districts of the country and is intended to localise control over school staff, maintenance, and operational costs, as well as professional development activities (Commonwealth of Australia, 2010). It is at the district level where important decisions on additional resource allocation to impoverished schools are now made. The result is that the *Bupatis*, or district administrator, wields significant power, yet have varying levels of interest, oversight and/or capacity to ensure that education serves a transformative agenda. As a culture of patronage politics seeps into decisions about educational resourcing that could potentially make a difference to student outcomes, questions mount about how and on what grounds such choices are made. Additionally, even when district administrators have the will to use educational resources towards equitable ends, they may lack the human resource within their own offices to do so effectively. According to one report, "a source of fragility is the uneven technical and administrative capacity within the 22 districts, to formulate operational plans and financing strategies aligned with the agreed provincial education priorities and strategies"(Eurotrends, 2009, p. 10). The fact that financial and human resources remain unequally distributed across the province's districts has precipitated migration into urban, coastal centres and fuelled growing concerns of a two-state development trajectory.

Under the same decentralization laws, community-managed school committees were delegated significant authority in the running of government-funded schools to increase accountability between district educational offices, schools and their constituent local communities. These committees were granted authority to develop, approve and monitor the annual action plan and budget for the school. In 2005, they were granted more responsibility, with the government's introduction of a direct operational budget support (BoS) to schools.

Some suggest that the establishment of these committees and BoS have helped to: (1) make parents accountable for school attendance; (2) stmulate stronger school/parent accountability for use of funds; (3) promote transparency in school funding formulae; and (4) provide an incentive for school/district enrolment information flows (Eurotrends, 2009). But the more commonplace perception is that these committees remain unevenly distributed throughout the nation, and there continues to be a perceived lack of transparency over how school grants and annual plans are administered and utilised (Commonwealth of Australia, 2010; USAID, 2012; Naylor, 2014). Several donors—including Australia, New Zealand, UNICEF, Japan, and the United States—have invested heavily in to trying to ensure that these committees function better, under the logic that they are key to quality-focused

improvements to schools though close levers of accountability (Commonwealth of Australia, 2010; USAID, 2012).

In the context of Aceh, interest in the establishment of effective and operating committees has also been driven by the view that: (1) rebuilding effective relationships between schools and citizens, and between the community and district education offices is a critical component of the post-conflict recovery period; and (2) bringing together varying factions, interests, and agendas in such committees provides a venue for local residents to practice the settlement of disputes, in a peaceful and collective fashion (Bailey, 2008). Yet, given what research from other parts of Indonesia and post-conflict Cambodia have indicated—that these committees are prone to elite capture, and that despite being given authority, citizen-actors are either afraid, unwilling or unaccustomed to challenging professional educational actors—the ability of this governance arrangement to constructively build a sustainable peace must be brought into question (Bjork, 2006; INEE, 2009). A number of school committees located in and around Banda Aceh indeed follow this pattern of elite capture, as committees are largely comprised of those with higher education and social/professional status within their community. Hence, poorer groups and women are underrepresented in the school committees, raising questions about the degree of a 'genuine' fair representation (Naylor, 2014).

4.3 National and provincial recognition of diversity – a politics of Islamic education

Since independence from the Dutch in 1945, Indonesia's broad ambitions for education have drawn heavily from *Pancasila* state ideology. The ideology is contained 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. The adoption of this ideology within the contemporary national-level education discourse is represented in the country's current education strategy:

> "Education is a fundamental right of every Indonesian citizen and thus, each one of them is entitled to have quality education in line with their respective talent and interest with disregard to their social status, economic status, ethnicity, race, religion, and gender. Equal access and educational quality improvement will make Indonesian citizen[s] achieve their life skill[s] in order to support the comprehensive human development and modern society embed[ing] Pancasila values…"[3] (Government of Indonesia, 2010, pp. 1–2).

The philosophical foundations of mass educational provision in the Republic of Indonesia are founded on the belief that "education is an effort to empower students to develop into a complete/whole Indonesian," (Government of Indonesia, 2010, p. 2) serving to reinforce the nation's commitment to national unity, social harmony, and social justice. For the Indonesia government and associated international actors, education is increasingly viewed as a vital component of maintaining the state's peace dividend with its citizens, and ensuring a level of social

[3] *MoE Indo*nesia, Strategic Plan 2010–2014, http://www.acdp-indonesia.org/files/attach/MoNE_Strategic_Plan_2010-2014.pdf

cohesion amongst the population during reconstruction and peacebuilding efforts (Mollet, 2007).

A key challenge in a state as diverse—economically, socially, culturally, historically, and politically—as Indonesia, is ensuring that an education system helps to build social harmony and respect for diversity without it indoctrinating or excluding one group or another. While during Suharto's New Order regime (1966–1998) Pancasila was often interpreted as a mechanism for acculturating students into a singular national identity—often ignoring cultural, religious and social diversity in the country—contemporary interpretations of these ideals have sought to build national unity by acknowledging and allowing for its diversity (Noerdin, 2002; Baidhawy 2006, p. 28).

Some authors, including Qodir (2005, p. 16), refer to Indonesia's diverse make-up and argue for a multicultural education curriculum for junior and senior high schools in existing courses such as Social Sciences, Indonesian Language, History and Citizenship. But *whose* diversity should be taken into consideration is, of course, a political question, and one that touches a sensitive area in the case of Aceh: should the national diversity of Indonesia be at the core of a multicultural curriculum used in Acehnese schools, or should a multicultural education primarily focus on provincial diversities *within* Aceh? In 1994, a Local Content Curriculum (LCC) program began requiring all primary and junior secondary schools to allocate 20% of all instructional hours to locally designed subject matter and tailor instruction to the unique environments of their immediate communities. The program was a direct response to calls to make schooling more accessible and available (i.e. relevant) to the diverse populations residing in the archipelago nation, yet research has found that school-based actors, on account of their conditioning as public servants, have failed to utilize this room for maneuver within the curriculum (Bjork, 2002). Instead, in many circumstances, the LCC component did little more than to repackage content from other subjects that had been "lost" under the reforms (due to rationalization to free up 20% of time). According to Bjork (2005, p. 128), "the substance of what is taught [in Indonesian classrooms] remained remarkably stable".[4]

4.3.1 Islamic politics of education in Aceh

The issue of recognition of diversities in the autonomous province of Aceh portrays a rather specific picture, where religion plays a crucial role. When mentioned in international circles, Aceh province nowadays is often connected to its strong Islamic identity and its adaptation of *Sharia* law. In 2001, a decision was made by the Indonesian central government to enable Aceh to adopt *Sharia* law. By placing greater authority in the hands of the *Ulama* (traditional religious leadership), the government in Jakarta believed that it could usurp the dominance of GAM (McGibbon, 2004). This has been interpreted by some scholars as a strategic attempt to label GAM as orthodox Islamists, despite the fact that GAM at that time sought to strengthen international ties that did not necessarily use this Islamic identity

[4] At the time of writing a new national curriculum focussed on character building as its central premise, is in its early stages of "socialisation". This makes up an important area of future study, especially considering the critical reactions of teachers and experts alike in the media (Jong, 2013).

(Samuels, 2012; Feener, 2012). The *Ulama* themselves saw it as a way to emphasize a shared conviction for social welfare and justice, and empower Acehnese communities by reinforcing regional customs, traditions and cultural values based on Islam (Miller, 2010).

Advocates of the *Sharia* societal ideology and judicial system in contemporary Aceh proclaim a "future-oriented social transformation, insisting on the need to move beyond 'traditional' understandings toward a vision of Islam that actively engages with modern developments in fields including education, economics and medicine" (Feener, 2012, p. 286).[5] According to Feener (2012, p. 310) there is a need to understand the "underlying ideology and institutional logics" behind Islamic law, to value how it can potentially work as a "tool for social engineering […] within the broader context of social reconstruction in the post-tsunami/post-conflict period". However, the implementation and enforcement of such laws have also been a concern to both outside observers and more secular segments of Acehnese society, who see the laws being interpreted in ways that may do little to advance the well-being of all segments of society and instead reinforce or exacerbate power hierarchies (Miller, 2010). This rather specific socio-political and judicial Islamic orientation in Aceh makes up a distinct aspect of the strategic selective context where local and provincial level education policies and practices are shaped and practiced.

The LoGA (Law on Governing Aceh) specifies that the education system in Aceh should remain part of the national education system, but that it can take into account Islamic-based values (based on the Quran and Hadits), as well as the social and cultural values of Aceh. As part of this legislation, it is stipulated that every Muslim learner in basic education in Aceh is obliged to understand basic knowledge of Islam and must be able to read the Quran and perform *Shalat* (prayer) (Government of Aceh, 2007). This has largely been implemented through the 20% local content component of the curriculum discussed earlier, and the government of Aceh has made a commitment to training 5,000 teachers of Islamic religion who will be deployed to every school in the province. Irwandi Yusuf, the Governor of Aceh, stated: "Since [*Sharia*] is a special characteristic of Aceh, [the Quran] shall be referred to as a local content of Aceh" (IDLO, 2009). Consistent with our view of education being closely connected to (reproducing or transformatory) processes of social justice and peacebuilding in Acehnese society, Feener (2012, p. 305) argues we need to consider this "pedagogic realm of modern Islamic discourse"—both as being part of what some would call "identity politics" but also in terms of its power to socially engineer a new version of society.

[5] Supporters of this modernizing movement attempt to redefine local conceptions of Islam in relation to Acehnese identity, which according to Feener (2012, pp. 306-307), are in line with a developmentalist discourse. This remaking of Islamic Aceh "bears a markedly revivalist character that attempts to transform the province through the implementation of a form of Islam believed to be complementary to modernizing aspirations of discipline, strength, and economic prosperity. One key feature of this reform agenda is the emphasis on "purifying' Islamic belief and practice of corrupt and superstitious innovations".

In Aceh province, between 15-20% of the population are enrolled in *madrasah* that follow the national curriculum and are under the oversight of the Ministry of Religious Affairs (MoRA). An additional 3–5% of children in Aceh attend Islamic boarding schools (*Dayahs* or *Pesantren*) that do not follow the national curriculum and have little oversight from government (Eurotrends, 2009). These privately run but (in the case of Aceh) publicly funded Islamic boarding schools have been described as "24-hour laboratories for socialization" (Amirrudin, 2008, in Feener, 2012, p. 303). They follow a more theologically conservative version of Islam, known as Wahhabism. Many of these schools are supported by either large Islamic NGO organisations or other Islamic nations, specifically Saudi Arabia. Foreign involvement in these schools has raised concerns about these institutions being hotbeds for radicalisation, extremism and breeding grounds for groups such as *Jemaah Islamiyah*[6] (Woodward et al., 2010).

One could begin to question whether the Islamisation of Acehnese education runs counterproductive to goals of education being acceptable and available to all. To that end, LoGA notes that, "*All* the citizens of Aceh have the right to quality and Islamic education in line with the development of science and technology that is implemented based on the principles of democracy and justice and in high respect of *human rights*, Islamic values, culture and *pluralism* (Articles 216.1 and 216.2). The 2008 *Qanun* on Education provides the opportunity for non-Muslim students to be taught the subject of religion in line with their faith. This provision is stipulated in Article 9(a) as follows: "Students at all levels of education in Aceh have the right to be taught the subject of religion in line with their faith and to have the subject taught by a teacher of the same religion" (IDLO, 2009). Such a statement could be seen as evidence for the Acehnese respect for religious pluralism, and that the *Qanun* on Education has provided the guarantee for non-Muslim people to be taught religion in line with their faith.

Additionally, while the pesantren are popularly perceived as hotbeds of extremism, we would like to emphasize an alternative perspective that is worthy consideration:

> The religious education young people receive in pesantren does not drive them towards extremism; just the opposite. It helps to immunize them against it. Furthermore, most pesantren graduates are not ignorant of "secular" subjects. For many young people from pious, but poor families, pesantren are the gateways to higher education in the humanities, natural and social sciences, medicine, law, and technical fields (Woodward et al., 2010, pp. 31-32).

This seems to be in line with our data which shows that - particularly in the urban area of Banda Aceh – pesantren are the preferred choice of parents because they are perceived to be of better quality and better suited to develop students (self) discipline, study skills and desired Islamic values. In contrast to what is often suggested about Islamic (boarding) schools, particularly in the media, the Indonesian Pesantren (in the whole of the country) have been acknowledged for contributing to wider access to education for girls (Srimulyani, 2007). However, there are serious

[6] This group was responsible for several high profile attacks on western nationals in locations such as Jakarta and Bali over recent years.

challenges with regard to educational quality and opportunities, especially for female students linked to a patriarchal system and orientation of schooling. Applying the lens of the social justice, we can observe a lack of both recognition and representation in terms of educational opportunities for girls and other marginalised groups. Qodir (2005, p. 16) sees a need for a multicultural and democratically oriented education system, and argues in this respect how,

> …central to [multi]cultural education is respect for minority's rights in politics, religion, cultural and other social spheres. This sort of respect is also an inseparable part of political participation of the citizens to control the process of public-policy making. […] It seems convincing that by the use of the [multicultural] curriculum democratization within education institution and the making of inclusive characters on the part of the students will take place.

Qodir's perspective does not only reflect on the need for, and lack of, a fair representation of all groups in decision-making, but also on the need for a recognition of equal opportunities (for marginalized groups, including female students) through a multicultural curriculum and pedagogical approach. In our conversations with policy-makers and teachers in Aceh it became clear that in the classroom realities in most Acehnese (public and religious) schools there is often little space and attention for students' engagement and reflections on processes of in- and exclusion of marginalized groups, as generally Acehnese society is described as a rather homogenous one with a great majority of Muslims. However, scratching the deeper surface in more in-depth conversations, lingering pockets of marginalization, exclusion and inequalities of opportunities became clear of those few that: 1) adopt a different faith (there are small groups of Christians); 2) those with a different ethnic and linguistic background (for instance the Gayo population in the central highlands); 3) for gays and lesbians living in Aceh; and 4) for women who face obstacles in furthering a professional career and particularly higher ranked decision-making positions while also being the main care-taker for the family at home. More recently the extension of Sharia law in Aceh to non-Muslims (Simanjuntak and Parlina, 2014) would appear to threaten the space for difference in schooling and social life in general. The current education system, including the potential space available in the LCC, seems to pay little attention to these issues of inequality and possible tensions. Finally, drawing from a recent study in the secondary public schools in the city of Banda Aceh (Wenger, 2014), the omission of historical facts combined with a single perspective approach to history in the public school curriculum and textbooks negatively impacts teachers' ability to teach about Aceh's recent conflict, which in turn limits educations' potential nurturing impact on a lasting peace.

4.4 Short term humanitarian aid/reconstruction vs long term peacebuilding and development

The unfortunate disasters in 2004 brought with them a significant, and often overwhelming amount of foreign donor involvement to the province. This external support has been criticized by some, but was also welcomed by large parts of the affected Acehnese population (Samuels, 2012). Some criticized such efforts for a

lack of coordination and cooperation (Evans/UNDP, 2010), but they did seem to share a "broader discursive framework that emphasized goals of linking relief, rehabilitation and development (LRRD) in response to the disaster" (Feener, 2012, p. 279). In doing so, Aceh was heralded as a case of bridging the divide between humanitarian, development, DRR and security approaches to the situation Aceh found itself in at the end of 2004—a segmentation which Winthrop and Matsui (2013) note has led to a distinctive set of mandates and actors working within them.

Following the rhetorical "building Aceh back better", promoted by international donors in the aftermath of the tsunami, the Indonesian government founded a four-year mandated ministry-level body called the Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Agency for Aceh and Nias (*Badan Rehabilitasi dan Rekonstruksi/BRR*), that aimed to tackle (a better coordinated) reconstruction process, good governance and gender equity in Aceh (Feener, 2012, pp. 279–281). Internationally the work of BRR has been hailed as a success in effectively linking reconstruction activities to broader systemic governance reforms within society, but some have noted how the intent of this work was to foster a political and economic environment that would allow for market forces to be restored (Phelps et al., 2011). In doing, a security-focused—namely an emphasis on instilling good governance agenda and fostering a political settlement to former disputes—leapfrogged the interests and agendas of other actors and interests who were working in Aceh at the time.

As evidence of this, some note how, as physical reconstruction of the disaster-affected regions of the province were phased out, there has been a leap towards longer-term "developmentalism" (Samuels, 2012, p. 236; UNICEF, 2009)—largely failing to take into consideration the peacebuilding needs that address the root causes of the decades-long conflict. In the period between 2004 and 2011, financial commitments by national and provincial governments, as well as international donors, to the reintegration of combatants and peacebuilding has been one-seventh of that allocated for tsunami-related reconstruction. In part it may be the historical product of what international actors could be involved in within the province, without becoming seen to "take sides" or be "politically motivated" in their activities immediately after disaster struck and the humanitarian issues were most acute. At that time, conflict was still active and martial law was imposed across the province. International actors had to seek special permission to work in conflict-affected regions. Those that managed to work in such areas were warned to steer clear of conflict-mitigation or peacebuilding type of activities, and instead to focus on physical reconstruction activities (Barron et al., 2013). Funding was often earmarked for natural disaster-related recovery, rather than conflict-affected recovery (Eurotrends, 2009, p. 19). One individual noted that (personal communication, 25.02.13), *"What for me was really extremely disappointing but quite fascinating was, even the very few programs that were operating down the East Coast*[7] *[after the tsunami], most of them were in complete denial that there had ever been a conflict."* Instead the focus was on reconstruction, which meant that many INGOs

[7] This is despite the fact that this region of the province was most acutely impacted by the 30-year conflict rather than the natural disasters of 2004.

and donors were noted as saying, "*…we don't deal with conflict, we just build toilets, or we just build schools or whatever it was they did*".

Specific to education,the aftermath of the tsunami saw extensive international involvement and support channeled to reconstruct school facilities impacted by natural disaster and conflict, to restore facilities for pre- and in-service teacher training, and to build the capacity of provincial and district-level education officials (AusAID, 2007; UNICEF, 2009). It was acknowledged early in the reconstruction and post-conflict period that it was important to restore and improve educational service delivery as a critical component of legitimating the province's new-found autonomy (Eurotrends, 2009). Lacking was strong political will, from either the Acehnese government or the donors contributing to this effort to effectively deal with impacts of conflict which continued to manifest themselves at the community level. As an example, one donor-funded project initiated in in 2007 as a conflict-remediation effort quickly morphed into a good governance project. The project, which focused on improving participation on school committees, aimed to address conflict as part of this by ensuring that, "*All [activities] are informed by comprehensive conflict assessments undertaken in each of the villages prior to work commencing, and will seek to address issues of conflict through supporting inclusive, transparent and accountable decision-making on issues of education rehabilitation in the community."* Quickly, however, government and donor will for pursuing this explicit conflict-mitigation focus waned, and a conflict-blind approach to improving the functioning of school committees was employed. As a result, the evaluation at the end of the project gave little credence to the project's initial intent, instead noting improved service delivery and a more accountable governance structure as the key outcomes. According to the evaluation, the project,

> "…made significant progress towards achieving 5 of the 8 minimum national service standards including: improved teaching practice; improved facilities; improved SBM roles and improved community participation. As a result, over 10,000 students in 51 school communities targeted by [the program] now have safer access to primary schools with improved education quality*."*

As noted by more than one scholar, the political economy of Aceh is now geared towards a development agenda, and in many minds, the conflict has been and gone, despite the enduring legacies it has left behind in terms of fractures within civil society (Utomo et al., 2009; Dwyer, 2012). Most peacebuilding and conflict-sensitive programs' support had been exhausted by 2011, and there was diminishing political will to directing additional monies to peacebuilding activities. Only 1% of foreign aid was specifically earmarked for such work in 2011–12 (Barron et al., 2013, p. 47).

While the short-term peace dividend that had been bought by providing employment, housing and financial payments to former militants, this will not be sufficient in itself to bring about sustained peace in the province, particularly as employment opportunities related to reconstruction dwindle, and oil and gas revenues decline. Conflict triggers remain undiminished and have been transferred to inter-elite, elite-local and communal tensions over the continued lack of authentic participation and economic opportunity for most citizens (Barron et al., 2013). Thus, "addressing high priority needs, mainstreaming conflict sensitivity into development

programs, and developing strategies to reinvigorate Aceh's economy will be crucial if peace is to be sustained and Aceh is to prosper" (Utomo et al., 2009, p. 71).

5. Concluding – where strategic selective structures and strategic actors meet: Acehnese space for manoeuver?

In this paper we aimed to explain the relevance for studying contemporary educational dynamics through a particular critical realist theoretical perspective that considers the cultural in political economy analysis of education and which involves a strategic relational and social-justice approach. We view this conceptual and methodological approach to be particularly relevant in its application to conflict-affected and fragile situations, an emerging field of study to which this paper aims to contribute. Returning back to the three concepts of recognition, redistribution and representation, it appears that numerous ruptures and contradictions shape the strategically selective context within which a transformative agenda operates at present. As noted in earlier sections, the push for decentralisation and increased funding have provided new opportunities for unacknowledged or ignored voices to be recognised and represented, and possibilities for funding to be targeted at the most vulnerable. Conversely, strengthened systems of patronage politics that emerged as a result of such redistribution, and the transference of conflict dynamics to new fault lines—sectarian, economic and geographic—limits the space for manoeuvre for a transformative agenda to take root. Similarly, new mechanisms of representation fostered through the local content curriculum and regional autonomy have worked to strengthen Islamic identity in the province. At the same time, it also threatened an inclusive system of recognition, which acknowledges minority beliefs, values and experiences.

Using the framework presented earlier we suggest that contemporary Acehnese cultural, political and economic dynamics contribute towards building a liberal peace focused on supporting security and economic development first. There are, however, serious doubts that such a 'trickle-down peace' will be a sufficiently robust development model to address the marginalized majority, and may itself "contain the seeds of continuing insecurity" (Duffield 1998: 10 in Novelli et al, forthcoming: 51-52). The unique context of Aceh, where the conflict was seemingly washed away by mass disaster provided an opportunity for the international community and central government to intervene in reconstructing the province in their making. It afforded tremendous potential to harness significant external and internal resources towards a process of reconstruction that was restorative as well as rehabilitative. Unfortunately, the *tabla rasa* approach employed, all too common in post-conflict and post-disaster contexts, largely ignored the complex historical, cultural and political realities that underpin(ned) Acehnese society. Rather than "building back better" as is often the mantra, deeply seeded structural inequalities has manifested itself in new guises, and education seems to do little to proactively challenge such conditions.

Education, as a driver for peace, has received relatively little focus within Aceh's post-disaster and post-conflict agendas. When considering the dynamics and different logics of intervention of the different sectors (humanitarian, DRR, development, security, peacebuilding) that are operating in contexts, and how

education is perceived within those (Winthrop & Matsui, 2013), it can be argued that a 'minimalist security' and development agenda has dominated what has occurred in Aceh. In doing so, a negative, rather than positive peace, was and is promoted through donor activity in partnership with (local) government political strategies.

At the same time, however, there remains clear opportunity and space for manoeuver to promote a more transformative peacetime recovery for the province. The objective of using CCPPE is to, as we noted at the beginning of the paper, make visible what might otherwise remain invisible, and present multiple rather than single narratives of a trajectory of reform. By doing so, and as outsiders aiming to grasp and voice the perspectives of different stakeholders involved, we hope to crack open a possibility of an alternative present and future perspective for education within the province.

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