

# **Communalism shattered: Thirty years of conflict experiences in the province of Aceh, Indonesia**

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## **Abstract**

Since their war against the Dutch in 1873, the Acehnese have been known as a people of character in Indonesia: a distinctive and robust sense of communalism has shaped their society and culture. Strong family bonds, community ties, and social frameworks have reinforced this communalism. However, this character has eroded under a thirty-year conflict in Aceh, which began in the 1970s under the New Order government. The conflict only ended in Aceh after a tsunami in 2004 struck it. This article analyses how the structural context of Aceh, with its various agents, has influenced Acehnese culture. Changes in the context have promoted a redefinition of community cultural identity and transformed social life. This research has found that structural changes have forced adaptations that have severed ties between generations and disturbed the passing of values. The severing of social bonds in society has been unavoidable, and restoring them has been difficult. This article recommends a need to redefine culture, taking an approach that is more open to the dynamics of power. The construction of values in society has involved diverse agents and, as such, Acehnese culture has not been free of the influences of various power interests.

**KEYWORDS:** communalism, conflict, social cohesion, ethnic identity, cultural change

## **Introduction**

When a community is presented in an ethnographic text, depictions of clearly delineated social units on a limited scale are presented as the main signifiers (Abdullah 2006). In these social units, human beings are integrated into a cosmological system: an institutional system jointly followed to ensure the creation of an understanding of harmony that is dynamically constructed, developed, and even adapted. Most community members obey the system, or are compelled to do so, to fulfil a social pact; others challenge these shared traditions and attempt to force the creation of new social agreements.

Community dynamics develop continuously and influence understandings of symbolic meaning to address continuously transforming interests (Bourdieu 1979; Geertz 1973). The integration of individuals within communities creates a shared sense of identity, one that is not only constructed and maintained but also transformed and renewed to

maintain legitimacy despite new challenges. Challenges to the shared understanding of harmony, thus, may occur for a variety of reasons or as a result of diverse processes or internal/external conditions. Various communities have experienced internal threats to their very existence, threatening them with extinction; meanwhile, external factors have posed a dire threat to communities incapable of adapting to outside pressures (Colwill 2009).

Various forms of crises, including conflicts and natural disasters, can significantly affect the continued existence of communalism in society. The 2004 tsunami that struck Aceh in Indonesia was great disruption to the people of Aceh. Before the tsunami, however, a number of conflicts had coloured the lives of the Acehnese, not only creating a crisis but also shaping the characters and identities of the Acehnese people as a community (Reid 2004; Schulze 2007).

The social transformations in Aceh that occurred as a result of lengthy historical and political changes, beginning with war between the Acehnese people and the Dutch colonial forces in 1873, gave rise to a community lacking total harmony, particularly given the sharp contestation of meaning between those attempting to (re)define Acehnese identity and its symbolic boundaries.

This paper aims to analyse how infrastructural changes and structural pressures in Aceh have evolved following the region's 70-year war against the Dutch (1873–1942), the pressure of the central authorities through militarisation (1970s–2000s), and the 2004 tsunami. As discussed in the following sections, a society that was once solid and held collective values and spirits has turned into a cracked and vulnerable one. I argue that historical experience has structured new patterns of relations that are based on economic and political interests, rather than the cultural interests that were once dominant. Conflict and crisis are assumed to have encouraged cultural redefinition due to the erosion of the cultural boundaries that maintain social harmony in Acehnese society. The question that will be answered through this paper is how the Acehnese experienced war in their lives and its consequences, as well as the involvement of different agents in structuring social life in Aceh. This cultural reflection is based on a series of visits to Aceh since the 2004 tsunami. Observations in Acehnese society as well as a series of conversations with traditional leaders and government officials have enabled me to recognise a shift in patterns of behaviour and social interaction in response to changing fundamental values. My experience living with the community leads to the conclusion that Aceh is not as it once was. Adaptation to external pressures has removed the original character of Aceh, as illustrated in the following section.

## **Aceh in history and culture**

Aceh, located along the crowded Strait of Malacca, has become a point for intense cultural intersection as well as trade, particularly with various regions in the Malay Peninsula and India (Van Leur 1983). Its position and activities indicate that Aceh has been open to the outside world. Recognising the geographical position and the expansion of Aceh into western Sumatra under Sultan Iskandar Muda, it is clear that Aceh has provided significant capital in the national economic and political constellation (Polim & Isa 1996). Aceh's contribution of an aircraft to President Sukarno, which later became the foundation for

Garuda Indonesia Airways, indicates the region's nationalism and contribution to the development of the Unitary Republic of Indonesia.

Understanding Aceh's history has to do with how Aceh is represented. First, Aceh is known as a place where religion and *adat* (tradition) serve as important pillars in the social structure: '*Adat bak Po Teumeureuhom, hukom bak Syiah Kuala*' ('*Custom comes from ruling king, the law comes from scholars*') (Sufi & Wibowo 2004). The social and cultural lives of the Acehnese people are constructed on the basis of religion and *adat*, both of which are important sources of social order. The *ulama* (Islamic scholars) are essential manifestations of both the religious and *adat* pillar and, as such, they received special attention under Dutch colonial policies. Even today, religion is considered the essential part of the lives of the Acehnese, despite a gap existing between the younger and older generations. The older generations tend to romanticise religion, seeking the enactment and enforcement of an Islamic sharia code, while the youths of Aceh have become increasingly secular.

The discourse for creating Islamic sharia in Aceh has been intended to return Aceh to an earlier structure, one romanticised through the identification of Aceh as *Serambi Mekah* (Veranda of Mecca). The connections between religion and *adat*, once deep-rooted, have become unclear in local institutions and social practices, except for the implementation and enforcement of Islamic sharia in every Acehnese regency. The institutional capacity for sharia law remains quite limited, as seen by the lack of authority and institutional activities.

Second, the Acehnese people have long been known for their courage, as shown in the Aceh War, which was declared on 26 March 1873. This war, which lasted for almost 70 years, showed the strength and resolve of the Acehnese people in defending their territory and the truth, particularly as related to religious truth, such as the crusade ideology socialised among the Acehnese people in their struggle against the Dutch (Alfian 1987). Acehnese patriotism gained broad recognition, as conveyed by Zengraaff:

The truth of the matter is that the Acehnese people, both men and women, generally fought fiercely for something they viewed as in their national or religious interest. Among those fighters, there were many men and women who became the pride of their people; they were no less powerful than any of our most famous figures (Wibowo 2004: 75).

Their courage in battle indicated their devotion to the ideal of just leadership, a characteristic prioritised by the people of Aceh. Among the Acehnese people, justice and social order are worth fighting for, things that must be attained by any means necessary. Conversely, injustice is a sensitive issue, one regularly faced by rejection and even social protest.

Third, the people of Aceh have a strong sense of faith and confidence, which is rooted in the history that has been continuously communicated through the *hikayat* (*annals*) from generation to generation. These *hikayat* tell of the glory of Aceh and its success battling Dutch colonial forces. The symbol of the mosque, as well as historical and cultural heritage sites, have likewise contributed to the Acehnese people's pride and confidence. The history of war and wealth of culture in Aceh has given its people mental strength, establishing a shared identity and sense of pride (Reid 2004: 307). Although Aceh is far

from homogenous, as evidenced in the diverse languages and dialects used in different parts of Aceh (i.e., Acehnese, spoken in Aceh Besar; Gayo, spoken in Central Aceh; and Jame, spoken in South Aceh), a shared Acehnese identity has been firmly maintained in the region's dealing with foreign peoples and cultures.

Fourth, the people of Aceh have historically valued collectiveness. This is apparent in the Acehnese tendency to gather and congregate at coffee shops, rituals, ceremonies, or everyday visits (Wibowo 2004). It is through these gatherings that the values of Acehnese identity are jointly constructed and even integrated into the arts. Various Acehnese dances, such as *Seudati*, *Saman*, *Debus*, and *Rapa'i*, are just some of the plethora of arts and cultures that involve numerous people in their activities. The basis for this communalism in various activities, *adat* rituals, village meetings, and *adat* discussions shows its importance in Aceh, where these values are collectively constructed, developed, and adapted over time. The *meunasah* (mosque) importantly functions in Aceh as a common space for various activities. It is here that village meetings are held. However, currently, this public space has lost this function and, as such, mass mobilisation is more difficult.

Several characteristics of the Acehnese people and culture have experienced a substantial decrease, transforming various aspects of the Acehnese social landscape and ethnoscape. These changes are apparent in the understandings of contemporary Acehnese, who have put greater emphasis on individualism while abandoning the principles of communalism that have long characterised Acehnese socio-cultural life. Likewise, there has been considerable concern shown for the decreased religiosity of Acehnese society.

## **The changing character of the Acehnese**

The various social processes experienced by Aceh have caused transformations in the personality of the Acehnese people. There are three prominent and fundamental problems that have caused an erosion of Acehnese social ethics, stemming from its social and political history: distrust, disengagement, and social jealousy. The lengthy conflict experienced by Aceh has given rise to a broad distrust of others, not only migrants but also different individuals and social groups. Mutual suspicion has emerged over time, depending on the social proximity through which an individual or group's membership in an in-group/out-group is determined (Vermeulen & Govers 2000). This lack of trust is also directed towards institutions, particularly government ones, which are seen as extensions of the central government and its (perceived-to-be) detrimental policies. War and armed conflict have caused widespread social fragmentation and weakened traditional institutions, which has led to a lack of clarity in social reference systems. Meanwhile, doubt and alienation have become increasingly common. Individual members of society have relied increasingly on small, narrow institutions, such as the core family. This has systematically weakened the traditional communal bonds.

This broad sense of distrust has become the basis for social disengagement. Members of the community have tended to withdraw from or avoided becoming involved in activities that include other people or organisations. Something that does not directly benefit members of society or does not offer the possibility of profit (particularly from a security perspective), would not receive broad support. This social disengagement has

eroded the social ethics that serve as the basis of the Acehnese people's collective values. This is reminiscent of the concept of "safety first" mentioned by James Scott (1981), in which marginalised groups tend to be oriented towards security and protection from the structural pressures they face.

This social disengagement has also occurred in regards to government policies and programmes. Public support cannot easily be gathered, as historical experiences have underscored (at least in the public perception) that such programmes are incapable of addressing Acehnese society's needs. Rather, they have learned that the policies taken have been detrimental to them and only damaged the socio-cultural framework (Miller 2009).

Another problem, important and with broad implications, is the social jealousy that has emerged in regards to the privileges enjoyed by migrants. These migrants, for example, have been perceived as receiving special rights, while those considered local or indigenous have experienced extensive obstacles to gaining decent work. The phrase *buya krueng teudendeng*, *buya tameung meureseki* (the local crocodile lays idle, the crocodile that comes gets blessed) has been frequently used in public discussions of the structural positioning of the Acehnese in the lowest level of the social hierarchy. This situation can be traced back to at least the 1970s, when natural gas production facilities began construction in North Aceh, involving thousands of labourers. At this time, critical positions tended to be occupied by workers from outside Aceh. The Acehnese people have frequently had limited access, and as such poverty has remained rampant in villages near industrial areas, such as those of PT. Arun LNG and Mobil Oil/Exxon Mobil.

## **From holy war to daily war: The political construction of Aceh**

When examining the current phenomena experienced in Acehnese society, including cultural disintegration and various forms of disharmony, an essential question must be asked: to where has Acehnese culture gone, and how has it changed? Following the concept of money, commodity, and person proposed by Olwig (1997), Aceh must be seen as an area of capital (money), rather than an area of conflict, to understand its situation today. Recognising the extensive natural wealth in the region, Aceh can be categorised as an area of capital with the ability to bring wellbeing to its residents. However, this wealth has only positioned Aceh as a commodity, including a political commodity, which has, in turn, influenced the fates and lives of the community (person).

The problems faced by contemporary Aceh can be traced to the discovery and exploitation of natural gas in Arun, North Aceh. As a result, Aceh became open to the outside world. In the late 1970s, Aceh began to host not only Indonesian migrants from outside Aceh, of different ethnic backgrounds, but also international migrants from the United States and Japan. Its standards and values became more open, with those previously practised in Aceh slowly being eroded.

Commodification in Aceh has been widespread, with land, homes, and public services becoming increasingly expensive with the influx of migrants. This process has disturbed the egalitarianism of Acehnese society, as new situations have been created.

Despite more opportunities being created, the Acehnese people themselves have had limited ability to take advantage of them. Because of the lack of Acehnese human resources, various employment opportunities offered by companies in North Aceh, for example, have not been filled by the people of Aceh. As a result of this segmented labour market, the Acehnese people have only been able to enter the labour market as labourers or in the lowest wage brackets.

Such a situation in Aceh is not conducive to the creation of a harmonious and united society with strong leadership. Rather, there has been a deterritorialisation of culture, as suggested by Appadurai (1994), which has eroded the cultural identity of the Acehnese, in other words, of determining who the Acehnese truly are. This could indicate the extinction of a society, unable to maintain its identity under continuous pressure.

Aceh has experienced extensive socio-political pressure, which has influenced the social, economic, and cultural construction of society, as evidenced by poverty, social trauma, and cultural disorientation. This construction has occurred as a result of the penetration of various forms of power, both that of the Dutch colonial forces and that of the State since Indonesia's independence, over the course of more than a century. Seven decades was spent on a lengthy war between the Acehnese people and Dutch colonial power, beginning in 1873 and ending only in 1942 with the Japanese occupation. Meanwhile, for more than three decades, relations between Aceh and the Indonesian central government were stressed by a rebellion that later became known as the Free Aceh Movement (*Gerakan Aceh Merdeka*, or GAM), creating terror in the everyday lives of the Acehnese and desensitising them to violence and death (Dexler 2008).

In this political framework, the structural preconditions in society cannot be avoided. As such, there are four social, political, and economic processes that have significantly shaped the social and structural transformations that have occurred in Aceh since 1873. First, war and insecurity have long been part of the Acehnese people's lives. Historical records indicate that Aceh has experienced almost unending conflict since 1873 while fighting against Dutch colonial forces, although the Acehnese forces weakened significantly after the Dutch discovered their weapon production facility in 1912. After Indonesia's independence, the Acehnese people again took up arms, as President Sukarno was perceived as not keeping his promises to the people of Aceh. As a result, Tengku Daud Beureueh led the Darul Islam/Tentara Islam Indonesia (House of Islam/Islamic Army of Indonesia) in opposition to the government in the 1950s and 1960s.

During the New Order, the unresolved issues being faced by Aceh led to the emergence of GAM in the 1970s. The creation of a military operations zone between 1988 and 1998 led to intense trauma for residents. This policy was followed by a civil emergency policy, which was in turn followed by a military emergency policy, in the 2000s. This laid the foundation for the fragmentation of society (Dexler 2008).

Second was the penetration of capitalism into Aceh in the 1970s and 1980s, marked by the installation of natural gas, oil, and fertiliser factories, leading to the circulation of money on a broad scale. Unfortunately, the opportunities presented by the industrialisation of Aceh could not be accessed by local residents owing to the limited quality of human resources. These opportunities were then utilised by migrants, who began living in their own

enclaves and enjoying facilities that differed significantly from those of most residents.

This industrialisation led to new problems and conflict between the elites and general society (owing to widening gaps between them), as well as between local residents and migrants (who were perceived as unfairly profiting). The large enterprises that began operating in Aceh likewise had little effect on the indigenous people of Aceh, thereby not only creating social jealousy and inequality, but also failing to have any substantial effect on community development. This left only inequality, poverty, and the seeds of conflict that continued to be tended by social situation.

Third, the central government and bureaucracies applied pressure on the Acehnese people both through policy and using the military. The government's policy of standardised village (*desa*) structures threatened the existence of the traditional *gampong* and enacted new forms of recruitment and leadership. This began to cause changes in the society and culture of Aceh, including both values and social practices. The top-down and authoritative policies enacted by the government are also evidenced in the conflict resolution mechanisms used in Aceh; the central government used military actions and operations in its attempt to stop the fighting. The systematic killing of members of GAM, which was considered an illegal group, threatened the political stability of Aceh and traumatised the Acehnese people.

Pressure was also exerted by the State through various policies oriented towards creating uniformity while ignoring the cultural variations in Aceh. The varied leadership systems in the different regions of Aceh were made uniform, following the values and practices of the central government. Resistance to government was caused primarily by the severing of existing social relations.

Fourth, the activities of GAM caused the Acehnese people, as Indonesian citizens, to exist in a difficult position. With the presence of GAM in Aceh, all social, economic, and security activities in Aceh were threatened. The lengthy conflict in Aceh led to the redefinition of citizenship, as evidenced by the implementation of 'Red and White' identity cards for Acehnese people, distinguishing between Acehnese and non-Acehnese people. Acehnese identity, thus, seemingly became incompatible with other Indonesian identities and Indonesian citizenship. Meanwhile, in the economy, the collapse of indigenous trade in Aceh showed how politics seemingly became the only force for defining Acehnese identity and life.

These four factors threatened the collectivism of the Acehnese people, as evidenced by widespread distrust, disengagement, and social jealousy, as previously discussed. This was detrimental for the communalism in Aceh, and restoring it will require significant energy and time. To better understand this problem, the following section will examine the processes that have weakened communalism and its practice in Aceh.

## **War consequences: Deterritorialisation of Acehnese culture**

Five processes may be considered to have contributed to the weakening of communalism in Aceh. First is the status of *Acehnese-ness*, which underwent sustained subjugation. Since the

colonial era, Aceh has faced a situation of unrest (*karu*), manifested in war, vertical conflict, and horizontal conflict. Under the New Order government, Aceh remained an area of *karu*, with its residents distanced from security, prosperity, and harmony in their everyday lives. The enactment of a military operations zone in Aceh only showed that it was a significant area of capital and that this influenced the positions of the Acehnese people.

The people of Aceh were identified as GAM supporters and troublemakers, and as such many were worried about admitting themselves to be Acehnese. In many cases, the voting rights of the Acehnese people were not realised. In this situation of conflict—between the central government and local community, between the Indonesian military and GAM, the Indonesian military and the Acehnese people, and between GAM and the Acehnese people—the people of Aceh were unable to guarantee their own security. Parents lost their ability to protect their children, and their parental roles were slowly eroded. Many children were asked, or forced, to leave their homes, because their parents had failed to protect them.

Second, the public ownership rights of the Acehnese were disturbed. Houses of worship, sacred to the people of Aceh, were penetrated by people with no interest in or respect for freedom of worship. The Acehnese people could no longer worship in peace but rather were stifled by insecurity and even destruction. Religious institutions, which had once offered the Acehnese people a place to escape the pressures of the turbulent world, lost their traditional functions. Meanwhile, 527 schools, 89 official houses for teachers, and 33 official houses for principals were burnt down throughout Aceh (Schulze 2007).

Likewise, ownership of land, homes, and other objects was vulnerable to theft, robbery, and looting. There was no sense of security in ownership, as land could change hands without any legal forces protecting the people of Aceh. Rituals could not be performed properly, as they were restricted by the limits enacted by the government. *Tahlilan* (recitation of prayers) in funerals could likewise not be held as normal, mostly because residents were required to return home immediately after the sounding of the call to *maghrib* (evening) prayers.

Third, the Acehnese people lost their access to various resources, including mobility, employment, agriculture, fisheries, and politics, owing to their insecurity. The ability to travel was limited, owing to strict supervision and monitoring (including military checkpoints) as well as the inability to ensure safe travels. Access to various government services was also limited, as was access to the distribution of goods and public facilities. The Acehnese people lost the ability to control their everyday situations and lives. They became greatly dependent on the situations in which they found themselves, while their individual authority was throttled. Running contrary to the basic character of the Acehnese people, this limited access and control led to social frustration and a sense of surrender.

Fourth, decision making processes have tended not to involve the people of Aceh. In the enactment of the military operations zone and the extension of the military emergency in Aceh, the people of Aceh were not accommodated. In this current era of decentralisation, decision making should be held by the regional government. The limited involvement of the Acehnese in decision making is also apparent in the formulation of the 'blue print' for Aceh's reconstruction following the tsunami, which was ultimately

unable to properly direct Aceh's reconstruction and recovery. The central government used a centralistic approach to define Aceh's needs, without implementing participatory decision-making mechanisms or political systems.

Fifth, social and religious costs have had to be borne owing to unilateral policies and activities. The honouring of religion and *adat* was disturbed, particularly owing to the lengthy conflict. These costs, aside from being significant in amount, will require much time to be repaid. Relations between generations were damaged, as were relations between leaders and their followers. The shattered ties between residents indicate the significant effects of war and armed conflict. The attempts to integrate Aceh into the Indonesian communal value network has posed a significant challenge that requires precision, patience, and dedication to resolve.

This discussion has presented Aceh as a disintegrating construction without solid ties between (for example) two different regions owing to the concentration of security and insecurity; between social groups; and between different generations. Inter-regional disparities were manifested in the mapping of Aceh, with some areas being marked 'white' (free to pass through or visit) and 'grey' or 'black' (danger zones). Communications in such areas were difficult. Social institutions began to collapse owing to the uncondusive situation, thus severing the ties between different groups. Furthermore, the spatial problems were detrimental to family and social unity in Aceh. Children were separated from their parents and siblings; wives were separated from their husbands.

## **Politics of security and communalism**

The structural and infrastructural conditions shaped by war and conflict created vulnerability in social relations, threatening the collectivism and communalism in Aceh. The destruction caused by the war and military conflict during the New Order was exacerbated by the tsunami, and this extended the amount of time necessary for Aceh to recover from its wounds and suffering. This difficulty was caused by the lack of necessary structure and infrastructure in Aceh following lengthy historical processes that destroyed the socio-cultural bases of society. The presence of an *ulama* (religious scholar) in Aceh is a classic example of civil power in Acehnese society during the colonial era. Other forms of civil society power, such as the *dayah* (Islamic School), eroded.

Likewise, the institutions controlling the oceans, forests, fields, and *adat* were slowly weakened. As such, when the tsunami struck Aceh in 2004, no civil society power existed to respond to the disaster. The destruction could not be immediately addressed, as there were no institutions available to respond. This situation had a number of enduring effects, including the stereotype of the Acehnese people as being unable to take care of themselves, as being dependent on outsiders, and even as shirking responsibility.

Recognising this stereotyping, there are three key points to be understood about Aceh, particularly over the past thirty years. First, there has been a dynamic cycle of 'settling' and 'migrating' that has been reproduced systematically. The Acehnese people go from 'settling' to 'migrating' and vice versa, given their fluid social situations, thereby requiring them to adapt. Various social groups took to moving from their homes/villages when the situation was unsafe, and then returning when the situation was secure.

They began to prepare for the threat of danger, attempting to recognise the signs of its presence. As a result of this dynamic cycle, the people of Aceh not only lost their culture of collectivism, but also became open to values that could not have emerged from within the culture itself.

Second, a positioning of the Acehnese people between ‘being’ and ‘unbeing’ emerged as a result of the repressive situation faced in social life. In this situation, the people of Aceh were aware of the need to present themselves (being) or avoid presenting themselves (unbeing) as dictated by the social situation around them. On the one hand, they were members of various groups, communities, and families, while on the other hand they attempted to mitigate their membership by minimising their group, community, and even family bonds. They would change their names as needed to ensure their security, thus creating confusion both within themselves and within those around them. During this time, some Acehnese would even deny existing familial bonds with persons involved in the separatist movement to ensure their security. Over time, such denial or rejection of shared bonds and identity had a detrimental effect on the long-term relations established in Aceh.

Third is the expanding confusion in the expression of Acehnese and Indonesian identity. Where Indonesian-ness was expressed to show obeisance and support for political integration, under GAM pressure, the Acehnese would express their own Acehnese-ness. Those who were not Acehnese faced pressure to leave Aceh, and they were even terrorised to do so. As a result, there was a widespread exodus of non-Acehnese people from the region. Conversely, the social situation and political rhetoric forced the Acehnese people to assert their Indonesian-ness with ‘red and white’ identity cards, which detailed their personal identities. GAM, meanwhile, could seize such identity cards, and as a result getting new cards could be difficult. As a result, the social reality in Aceh, including public knowledge, values, activities, and identities, was constructed through a discourse of power (Dexler 2008; Reid 2004).

These three processes resulted in the expansion of the State into various aspects of social life. The State, for example, transformed *adat* institutions through Law No. 5 of 1979, causing fundamental structural transformations. Until 1997, tensions remained high owing to the implementation of government structures that differed from those in *adat* society (Sufi & Wibowo 2004: 30-2). Such tensions are an integral part of the history of central–regional relations.

## Conclusion

Understanding Acehnese culture must begin with the redefinition of culture itself, not as a generic culture (following inherited guidelines) but as a differential system (negotiated and contested through social interactions) born and shaped in a time of conflict. Acehnese culture is not one practised collectively and passed from generation to generation, but rather a situational culture informed by the character of power and the dynamics of fluid relationships. War and military conflict have had a significant historical and structural influence on the social and cultural dimensions of Aceh.

The case of Aceh offers an important lesson about the definition of community and culture. Aceh has experienced deterritorialisation as its culture has been redefined and reconstructed over time. Such a community differs from most societies, which have unity

and integrity, and function organically. People may also live with fragmented values, lacking unity and integrity, even as social processes move towards resolution, reinterpretation, and reorganisation. Such a changing society requires a new method of research, one that differs from the method and approach used by cultural studies to examine small-scale society. The deterritorialisation of culture, as in Aceh, requires research methods to be evaluated in their ability to, for example, understand the shared values of society.

The problem faced by Aceh in the deterritorialisation of its culture is the creation of meaning, not by a single agent, but by diverse agents with different interests. In Aceh, symbols no longer refer to a shared meaning, but different meanings shaped and informed by various forces. As such, culture – which is frequently understood as a set of shared values – can no longer serve as a means for examining symbols and social practices, as in it individual logics are not only severed from their general context but also influenced in their open communication.

In such a case, individual behaviour can be difficult to explain. Values have been constructed in Aceh competitively, primarily by the State (through the military) and the market. Meanwhile, traditional agents such as families, *adat* institutions, and traditional figures, have had a limited role and lacked the necessary legitimacy to create values within Acehnese society. Parents have even lost the authority to raise and educate their children as a result of pressures to improve security and promote peace.

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## **Povzetek**

Od vojne proti Nizozemcem leta 1873 so bili Aceh v Indoneziji pojmovani kot karakterni ljudje – posebni in robustni občutek komunalizma je oblikoval svojo družbo in kulturo. Močne družinske vezi, povezanost skupnosti in socialni okviri so ta komunalizem še okrepili, vendar pa je ta karakter v tridesetletnem spopadu v Acehu, ki se je začel v sedemdesetih letih v vladi novega reda, erodiral. Konflikt se je končal v Acehu, potem ko ga je leta 2004 prizadel cunami. V tem članku je analizirano, kako strukturni kontekst Aceha in njegovih različnih dejavnikov vpliva na akhensko kulturo. Spremembe v kontekstu so spodbudile ponovno opredelitev kulturne identitete skupnosti in preoblikovale družbeno življenje. Raziskava je pokazala, da so bile strukturne spremembe prisilne prilagoditve, ki so prekinile vezi med generacijami in zmotile prehajanje vrednosti. Prekinitev družbenih vezi je bila neizogibna, njihova ponovna vzpostavitev pa je bila zahtevna. V članku je izražena potreba po redefiniranju kulture s pomočjo pristopa, ki je bolj odprt za dinamiko oblasti. Izradnja vrednot v družbi je vključevala različne agente in kot taka se akhenska kultura ni oblikovala brez vpliva različnih interesov moči.

**KLUŽNE BESEDE:** skupnost, konflikt, socialna kohezija, etnična identiteta, kulturne spremembe

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