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Cover image: Scotch Cattle by Peter Stevenson © the artist
Back cover: Punks at the Tsunami Museum © Marjaana Jauhola

Detail above: Dyfrin Arduwy [p.](c) Aled Gruffydd Jones
THE STREET PUNKS OF THE TSUNAMI MUSEUM

Marjaana Jauhola and Yudi Bolong describe how an alternative sense of belonging is created across the city of Banda Aceh and the wider world by the Acehnese punk movement, in the face of persecution by the authorities.

Marjaana Jauhola

I met with Yudi and the other Tsunami Museum street punks for the first time in June 2013 when I was doing urban ethnography fieldwork in Banda Aceh. When approached by Planet in May of this year to write a piece on the street punks in Aceh, I asked Yudi if he was interested in sharing his thoughts directly with the magazine's readers. Yudi's text is a result of sitting together and sharing my laptop with him at the museum.

The city of Banda Aceh, the provincial capital of the westernmost province of Indonesia on the island of Sumatra, is mostly known as the epicentre of the Indian Ocean earthquake and the tsunami on 26 December 2004, but also as a place that is rebuilding itself after a thirty-year-long armed conflict between the Acehnese independence movement and the Indonesian central government. The Tsunami Museum is one of the new landmarks of the reconstructed city.

Marjaana Jauhola is a researcher at the University of Helsinki. She holds a PhD from the University of Wales, Aberystwyth. All images © Marjaana Jauhola.
The Banda Acehnese punk community became part of a global media circuit of recycled quotes and images when sixty-five punks (sixty-two male and three female) were arrested at an event on the evening of 10 December 2011. The event was attended by many punks and metal fans from different parts of Aceh, but also those from Northern Sumatra and Jakarta. Some fifteen bands were scheduled to perform, and formal permission for the event was applied for and granted by the municipality administration and the religious Ulama Consultative Assembly by using a commonly known strategy to get official permission for such public events: it was advertised by the local organisers and punk and metal bands as a charity event to support orphanages in Aceh.

The arrests led to three days of detention at the police station and then a further ten days of ‘re-education camp’, or ‘moral rehabilitation’ at the police academy compound. It was not the first arrest of punks in the city. Rather, it took place after the local police had officially outlawed twelve local punk communities by publishing a list of banned groups in the local media. The arrest and detention overlapped with the campaigning period for the 2012 mayoral elections. The members of one banned group, the Museum Street Punks, saw the timing of the December 2011 arrests as no mere coincidence, however, but rather as a carefully planned intervention during this campaign to discipline ‘out of control bodies’ and ways of living that were claimed to be incompatible with Acehnese and Islamic culture.

Both the global English-speaking media and the local government portray the events of December 2011 as part of a narrative about the implementation of Shari’ah law in Aceh. The international media framed the story around the ‘threat’ of Shari’ah law – a crackdown on punks in the name of Islam. The local media and authorities repeated the story of punk being a Western phenomenon, inherently alien to Islam and to the Acehnese way of life.

After my arrival in Banda Aceh, I became more interested in how alternative narratives about the city are created by the punks, through giving their accounts of the December 2011 arrests to outsiders, journalists and researchers for example, and through repeatedly watching YouTube videos of the
demonstrations and other expressions of solidarity. What does the singing of well-known Indonesian anarchist and punk songs in the streets over and over every night after evening prayer, and other daily routines, tell us about the complexities of urban space in a post-conflict, post-disaster zone? In this former Dutch colony, now situated in a (post)-colonial, globalised world, how does a punk ‘map’ of Banda Aceh connect to a wider context?

To gain a sense of this meant reorienting myself into punk space and time, which consisted mostly of spending hours and hours at the museum. I turned my focus on the ways the punks occupy the space and resist attempts to discipline urban adolescence. I discovered how they form new kinds of intimate and caring relationships. The streets became their home and punk friends in Aceh and elsewhere their immediate family – although most Banda Acehnese punks would return to their parents and formal guardians regularly to eat, wash up, and change clothes. They establish multiple and networked forms of ‘home’, with their belongings, such as toothbrushes, soap, sewing kits kept in hidden storage across the city. This provided a sense of belonging and community, but it also allowed for care of the self through bathing, mending clothes and so on. The punks establish friendships across the Indonesian archipelago and the rest of the globe using social media, and visitors from outside, such as researchers, documentary-makers, journalists, punk and anarchist tourists reproduce these punk perspectives outside Aceh.

Each day between five to ten punks, mostly male, in their twenties, would gather at the Tsunami Museum after just a few hours of sleep in the streets, parks, and abandoned houses. The raised ground floor of the museum provided shelter from the hot sun and the rain and thus was ideal for hanging around. Leaning against the pillars they smoke, watch cars go by, check out motor bikers and museum visitors, flirt with shy teenage girls, and monitor and mock the passing Shari’a police patrols. Other ‘hanging around’ activities include the making of DIY T-shirts, sloganed patches, and jewellery; regulating a kind of street punk political economy by punishing those stealing money, and sharing and debating punk and anarchist ideology; tattooing, shining boots, playing guitar, drawing, writing lyrics, squating, sleeping and daydreaming. These activities were sometimes described by the punks as bosan (boring). Yet the fact that most of the ‘being bored’ time was spent at the Tsunami Museum can be read to signify something meaningful. As one of the punks explained to me, hanging around at the museum was their way of becoming visible.
The inspiration for this song by my band Totaliter came from a Javanese band called Bandit Chaos. The song describes the situation in Aceh where thoughts are imprisoned by those who rule us through indoctrination. These rulers wish to lock up people's thoughts so that they become hostile towards difference. This illiberal, dogmatic thinking gives a rise to a prolonged ideological conflict.

My Land

My land is no longer beautiful
Because it is exposed to oppression

[...]
Rulers are fuckers
Always spreading promises
But there was never any evidence
Ordinary people deluded.

This is a song by Totaliter about the revelations we have about the process of 'being made stupid' that happens in our country, a country which is proud of its orthodox thinking. The impact of the authorities' action is that those who are strong control, those who are weak are corrupted, those who are rich become richer, those who are poor become poorer, those who are clever deceive, those who are ignorant are indoctrinated and 'become cultured'. This is indeed the reality in this ragged and scruffy country.

Law is only a show for the upper class, while for ordinary people, it is terrifying.
Why do I think like that? Because everything happens because of money. [...]
Money, in fact, is capable of challenging even Godly powers.
This is a place where justice can be bought and engineered.
by those who regulate the system. Because of this I resist the authoritarian system that exists in this country. Because the policies of the powerful are good for only a small group of people, essentially we can draw the conclusion that ordinary people are victims of their policies.

What is crystal clear here is that justice can be bought with money.

This is a text I wrote while I was imprisoned in Kajhu prison in Banda Aceh for five months.

A.C.A.B. (All Cops Are Bastards)

Fuck government
They are dictators
Fuck the police
We are a moving resistance
A.C.A.B.

I also wrote these lyrics when I was imprisoned. This song is an expression of my feelings towards the government and police in this country which always wants to conquer, and never accepts any blame.

Education in Indonesia can be enjoyed only by the few who are rich. Meanwhile, for ordinary people, lack of education becomes a burden on their lives. The only thing that matters in this system is money.

Local academic research which is being carried out at the moment in Aceh about the lives of punks is written from a perspective that does not appreciate our lives as punks. Information about punks is not gathered directly from punks. These academics have published false information about the punks for the academic community and the general public more widely. This becomes a serious problem for the punk community.

The local media also publishes false information about the punks. Stories and facts are inverted and twisted so that the line is that the punk community are always to blame for any problems. To conclude, what is clear is that the life of a punk in Aceh is full of challenges and burdens.