peacebuilding and development efforts. The reader can viscerally feel his exasperation at the reluctance of external actors to engage with local knowledge and their preference for simpler, one-dimensional narratives of urban poverty, state failure, "youth bulges" and the like. "The local" thus either gets sidelined in favour of international models from elsewhere, or conversely becomes reified and romanticised as a cure-all, even when it does not fit. James Scambary is equally blistering in his critique of what he terms the neo-patrimonial, clientelist state that he believes the Timor-Leste political elites have built for themselves since independence. There is a distinct under-current of despondency in his narrative as he sketches the channels through which the resources of the country are misappropriated under the eyes of the regulators.

The main contributions of James Scambary's book do not lie in anthropological or political science theory, nor in research methodologies. Rather, this is a book that I would hope (against hope) that external actors involved in peacebuilding and development would read, even if they do not engage with Timor-Leste. It compellingly makes the case for why a contextualised, nuanced, grounded analysis of conflicts is needed. As difficult as it is to explain this to donors, practitioners, journalists, analysts, researchers and others who prefer – or even demand – more straight-forward, simple narratives and dichotomies, trying to understand conflict requires engaging with inevitable and shifting complexities, contradictions and paradoxes. I also hope, with greater hope, that it will encourage more researchers to embrace their work and their subject matter with the same kind of warmth, empathy, dedication but also critical reflection that James Scambary did.

Henri Myrttinen

Gunnar Stange, *Postsezessionismus: Politische Transformation und Identitätspolitik in Aceh, Indonesien, nach dem Friedensabkommen von Helsinki (2005–2012) [Post-Secessionism: Political Transformation and Identity Politics in Aceh, Indonesia, after the Helsinki Peace Agreement (2005–2012)]*. Berlin: regiospectra Verlag, 2020. 352 pages, €33.90. ISBN 978-3-947729-32-6

Gunnar Stange's monograph is a highly detailed account of a complex scene: post-conflict, post-disaster and post-secessionist Aceh. The book is divided into nine chapters that walk the reader through the twists and turns of political transformation of Aceh from 2005 to 2012, with rich ethnographic detail that strongly relies on interviews with high-ranking actors, for instance from the Free Aceh Movement or Gerakan Aceh Merdeka (GAM), which would become the most important local political party.

The tragic Indian Ocean tsunami of 2004 claimed over 230,000 lives across the coasts of East Africa, South and South East Asia. With the triggering earthquake's epicentre off its Sumatran coast, Aceh was one of the worst affected regions, counting 168,000 deaths, close to half a million internally displaced people and material losses estimated at 6.1 billion USD. The world turned its eyes to Aceh in 2004 after this disaster, an event that Gunnar Stange cites as a key impulse for peace talks to begin and pick up speed (p. 3). His study counts as one of the few long-term fieldwork pieces addressing the transformation process from an identity politics perspective. Following reflections on gender, accessibility, the secrecy required when working with separatist movements, and ethics in the face of violence (p. 27), chapter three points to the overflow of (international) humanitarians, development workers and researchers, whose practices of collecting data and then leaving in face of the dire post-disaster and post-conflict realities Antje Missbach has framed as "knowledge extractivism" (Antje Missbach, "Ransacking the Field?", *Critical Asian Studies* 43(3) / 2011, pp. 373–398). While the book is strongly grounded in theories of conflict and collective identity, the author accurately adds that the scope of international financing of post-disaster reconstruction, development and reintegration processes is quintessential to understanding the transformations in Aceh (p. 82). With a historical review that goes beyond republican times and highlights the Kingdom of Aceh Darussalam's relations to cities across the Indian Ocean region, Gunnar Stange lays a solid foundation for an analysis of differential power that strongly opposes methodological nationalism.

The long way from an armed conflict to peace negotiations was paved with over 30,000 lives lost, 7,000 human rights violations recorded and changing political projects. Gunnar Stange carefully connects the latter with wider political constellations, for instance, with post-colonial and anti-imperial struggles in Africa and Asia in the mid 20th century (p. 114), or with a human rights turn well aligned with UN discourse in the 1990s. The author posits that, more than a paradigm change, these projects represent a series of strategic choices taken by political leaders for the internationalisation of the Acehnese cause, amplified by the post-disaster international presence and attention. Peace talks did not emerge out of a vacuum left by the tsunami. Instead, Gunnar Stange succeeds in explaining how social structures, historical depth and dynamic processes played out in peace negotiations, the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding of Helsinki (MoU) in 2005 by the government of Indonesia and the Free Aceh Movement, and the bumpy process of creating legislation for autonomy within a very centralised state apparatus. Violence deescalated and weapons were turned in, but much of the initial "spirit" of the MoU was not translated into the Law of Governing Aceh (p. 149). Here, Gunnar Stange points to how both instruments' intentions are a move away from violent conflict and towards a process of conflict resolution and management, yet neither estab-

lishes clear rules of how that process is to take place, rendering them both a blessing and a curse (p. 156).

The first elections where the GAM participated as an independent party in 2006 were indeed a milestone for a lasting peace. In chapter seven on contestations, the author painstakingly follows the making and unmaking of political movements during the next elections. The GAM's authoritarian leadership style resulted in political divides and new party formations. This process of negotiation and of conflicts being enacted at another level – with a lower degree of violence – is also shaped by corruption and clientelism, as the author illustrates with the example of parliamentarians using funding to reward or punish collective electoral behaviour.

Chapter eight tackles identity politics and takes as a key example the figure of the Wali Nanggroe, Aceh's highest ceremonial position, which had been held by Hasan di Tiro, the most iconic and certainly loudest voice for independence. The Wali Nanggroe is an important symbol of local leadership and autonomy, to the degree that the figure was enshrined in the MoU and Law of Governing Aceh. Yet the highest authority in Aceh, as a province of the republic, is the governor. How to reconcile the two figures? By the end of 2007 a committee of the regional parliament, advised by academics, was tasked with finding the origins of the figure of the Wali Naggroe in order to draft the functions for this position in post-conflict Aceh. The commission meandered from Leiden to Sweden and back to Aceh, empty-handed. Failure. Yet precisely moments like these are what make good ethnographies, and Gunnar Stange does not miss the opportunity to shed light on the social construction and dynamic character of culture. Likewise, the new law foresaw a flag for the province of Aceh, and a 2007 bill strictly forbade separatist symbols. For the elected GAM leadership, who already had a flag that some claimed was thousands of years old, it was natural to officialise this symbol. For the central government, officialising a symbol that separatist armed forces had been waving as a flag was controversial to say the least. Analysing the scope and effect of symbols of a united Aceh, such as the flag, the author also finds dissident voices within Aceh that speak of the ethnic frictions to be negotiated among ex-combatants and civil society actors.

This book is a careful story of transformation of the political landscape in Aceh, which invites the reader to follow multiple actors during a critical period of Aceh identity politics in detail. Especially the genesis and limitations of legal instruments are meticulously described and analysed. However, the juxtaposition of yet another actor and yet another policy document to an already complex mosaic comes at the cost of clarity of the bigger picture, which is the transition from an armed conflict to a process for party politics paired with an ideological transformation that gradually moved away from independence and towards what Gunnar Stange accurately calls "post-secessionism". A list

defining the many acronyms (such a list being several pages long would not be unusual for the Indonesian context), an extra page for a timeline or a chart mapping the actors could have provided a useful overview.

These caveats notwithstanding, overall this book can be recommended to readers interested not only in Aceh, but more generally in detailed accounts of peace processes and the (changing) roles of political actors, particularly the transition of armed groups to political parties. By focusing on how a conflict can operate in different modes, as Gunnar Stange recaps throughout the book, this book contributes to our understanding of conflict and the rearticulation of power. The author reminds us that conflict is not merely the opposite of peace but, if anything, is an inherent aspect of the processes of peace making.

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