Under a Rebel Flag: Social Resistance under Insurgent Rule in Aceh

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Abstract

Resistance is difficult in the best of times and is especially challenging in authoritarian settings. How does social resistance play out in violent armed conflicts, an extreme non-democratic context? Focusing on two key structural factors, this article suggests that while threat is amplified, political opportunity may be considerable, making wartime social resistance high-stakes but not uncommon. This article explores social resistance against popular rebel forces during the recent secessionist conflict in Aceh, Indonesia. It examines four forms of resistance, varying in their visibility and degree of opposition: Engagement, internal, everyday, and defiance. While we must not exaggerate the potential for voice, Aceh's civilians were able to resist rebel rulers in several ways. This shows that social resistance can blossom even in the most difficult circumstances.

While one should never exaggerate the ease of resistance in democratic settings, democracy by definition allows some space for voice. The room for maneuver in non-democratic settings is more limited. Authoritarian regimes may lack the rule of law, capacity or will to rein in security forces, and acceptance of human rights norms, providing perilous sites for resistance. One would expect the situation to be even more difficult in armed conflicts, non-democratic settings that are marked by the widespread use of coercion. Armed conflicts, though, feature political contestation, with armed groups competing for territory as well as hearts and minds. While violence heightens threat, contestation presents unique political opportunities. The result, this article suggests, is that social resistance represents an epic gamble for those living in the midst of war, but one that many people are willing to make.

This article explores some of the unique constraints faced by social resistance in conflict environments, namely the recent secessionist conflict in Aceh, Indonesia. I focus on nonviolent social resistance against rebel groups within their zones of control. What opportunities exist for localized civilian social resistance against dominant local armed groups? What forms of resistance should we expect from those living under a rebel flag? I outline four types of social resistance: Engagement, internal, everyday, and defiance. Engagement and internal resistance are not necessarily oppositional, asserting independent preferences in ways that challenge and transform combatants without confronting them. Meanwhile, everyday resistance is more oppositional and hidden, sapping the power of armed groups. Defiance, the most dangerous form of resistance, involves open opposition to political order. While severely constrained, Acehnese civilians were able to resist the rebels in a variety of ways, actually shaping the content of rebellion as well as the direction (and resolution) of the conflict (Aspinall 2009: 123). Hardly hapless bystanders, civilians are often willing to take great risks in an effort to survive and shape politics.

The first parts of this article explore the meaning of social resistance and theories of social resistance in war. I focus on some key elements shaping mass mobilization identified in the social movement literature, namely political opportunity and threat, and then see how these ideas travel to studies of civil war. Part three introduces the Aceh conflict, providing a brief overview of anti-state resistance. The fourth part explores social resistance within Aceh's rebel zones, illustrating four types of social resistance and discussing how this affected the conflict.

The Art of Dissent: Social Resistance & Armed Conflict

It is useful to begin by discussing the concept of social resistance and how it relates to more commonly used terms. Social movements represent a more familiar concept. They are about collective action—organizing to achieve change. Charles Tilly (2015) characterizes social movements in terms of "1) a sustained, organized public effort making collective claims on target authorities, 2) an array of claim-making performance… and 3) public representations of the cause's worthiness." In other

words, social movements include campaigns, repertoires, and legitimacy. Although scholars do not always agree with this understanding of social movements, with some focusing on informal movements (Diani 1992), social movements seem to be about more or less identifiable groups of persons and individuals, and more clearly, are about identifiable targets and goals. If social movements feature sustained, public, organized campaigns, then what of more sporadic, unorganized resistance that lacks cohesive goals?

The concept of social resistance represents a broader category of contention that includes social movements and much more. This allows us to recognize the political nature of a greater range of behaviour, especially of more marginal societal forces or those facing extreme threats. Highly informal forms or resistance, such as those described in James Scott's classic formulations of weapons of the weak (1985), have never fit comfortably into the world of social resistance, especially since weaker actors are often unable to be visibly organized, making resistance more solitary and less focused. Everyday resistance is often understood to consist of solitary acts, although they are informed and understood through social meaning. Lost between social movements and everyday resistance might be, for instance, an occasional protest by villagers against an armed group or particular government official. Social resistance thus represents a broader concept that includes social movements and everyday resistance, as well as points in between.

The concept of social resistance has been applied to a range of cases in which there are clearly identifiable patterns, but not formal organization, or resistance against more powerful actors, including minority social behaviour (Factor, Kawachi, and Williams 2011), popular responses to public health campaigns (Hussain et al 2012), and much more. Using a broader concept such as social resistance is especially useful when exploring the types of resistance in difficult circumstances, as a wider lens allows us to observe more varied phenomena. Social resistance is understood as any civilian actions that serve to transform or otherwise challenge the agendas of powerful political actors, including states, warlords, and armed groups.

Another related term is the concept of 'civil resistance', non-violent resistance by social groups against powerful actors (Chenoweth

and Stephan, 2011). Clark (2000, 3) refers to a wide definition of civil resistance, namely "resistance by the civilian population", but notes that most writers emphasize non-violent resistance by civil society organizations. Randle (1994, 10) defined civil resistance in terms of "collective action…that avoids any systemic recourse to violence." Many understandings of civil resistance overlap with social movements, as resistance is carried out by organized groups. Social movements and civil resistance diverge from one another in a few ways, namely that civil resistance specifies non-violent actions and it is solely about resistance, whereas social movements need not be. However smaller, less organized acts of resistance are not always included under the blanket of civil resistance. A broader category such as social resistance is useful to illuminate such acts, especially when they are widespread but not formally organized, informed by social transcripts. I should note, though, that this article focuses on non-violent social resistance, thus speaking to the literature on civil resistance.

Although scholars have not always used this broader term, social resistance has a long pedigree in a variety of academic fields, with distinct flavours provided by sociologists, anthropologists, historians, political scientists, and economists. While political scientists tend to focus on the state (what is being resisted), sociologists tend to focus on social movements (those doing the resisting). Social movements are often approached by sociologists in terms of their organization and repertoires. Sidney Tarrow's classic Power in Movement (2011) looks at the organization and strategies of agents, but also to structural contexts, balancing political and social forces. To explain the emergence of powerful social movements, Tarrow hones in on two principal factors: Political opportunity and threat. Political opportunity involves the perceived efficacy of political action, the political factors that are largely beyond the control of social forces. Charles Tilly (1978: 100) understands opportunity in terms of the space between facilitation and repression—the toleration of social resistance. Political opportunity is about the will and capacity of states to crack down on dissent, but also the capacity of states to carry on the functions of governance and maintain control. While the concept of political opportunity has been criticized as vague, basically communicating that action is context-dependent (Meyer

2004), macro-level political factors clearly shape the likelihood of mass mobilization and successful resistance.

The second key factor shaping social resistance is threat, primarily the threat of coercion but also the fear of arrest, legal action, or other forms of punishment. This is what makes resisting the state somewhat distinct from resisting other actors, such as corporations, as the state possesses a variety of means to threaten its opponents with force. When states threaten protestors, the costs of mobilization are raised so that resistance may wither away, although in some cases coercion represents a new grievance, resulting in a backlash against security forces and a strengthening of opposition. Tarrow (2011: 160) emphasizes that threat is distinct from political opportunity—opportunity is not limited to avoiding coercion. After all, a crumbling regime may present significant political opportunities for its opponents, but also present unpredictable, extreme levels of coercion. If political opportunity is about the possibility of a carrot, threat is about the likelihood of getting hit with the stick. These factors help to explain the structural factors that make social resistance efficacious.

For all of its richness, the literature on social resistance tends to focus on countries that are Western, developed, and democratic (Tarrow 2011: 28). This bias is problematic, as authors have identified established democracies as having institutionalized and routinized protest, which no longer has the same effect or meaning (Meyer and Tarrow 1998). One would think that it would make sense to shift our gaze to where social resistance is most urgent, namely non-Western, non-democratic settings. In recent years, authors have done precisely this. Kevin O'Brien (2006) explores social resistance in China, showing how resistance couches their actions in terms of loyalty to the state. Graeme Robertson (2011) explores social resistance in Russia, arguing that hybrid regimes necessitate hybrid resistance, with civil society working through state organizations and developing new repertoires. In Latin America, scholars have approached social movements in terms of communist rebellions, human rights and democratization, and Liberation Theology (Wickham-Crowley 1993; Wood 2003). Guillermo Trejo (2012) suggests that indigenous uprisings in Latin America can be explained not simply in terms of grievances tied to neoliberalism and political opportunities provided by democracy, but

also by competition over souls, with the arrival of Protestantism leading to mobilization of faith-based groups. Such studies have shed light on the nature of resistance in non-Western and non-democratic regimes.

Regime-type is fundamentally important for the style and substance of social resistance, shaping opportunity and threat. Writers distinguish between open political systems that are more amenable to successful resistance and change, and closed systems that provide few opportunities for inputs of any form (Kriesi 2004). Democracy represents the quintessential open system, providing channels for institutionalizing contention, while authoritarian contexts are more closed as well as violent (Meyer 2004: 128). Tarrow (2011: 179) suggests that in non-democratic settings, "when contention appears, it erupts violently." It seems that the less democratic the regime, the fewer political opportunities and the more threat, stunting the growth of social resistance. In the face of widespread violence, one might think that armed resistance is the only way out for those demanding change.

Armed conflicts represent extreme non-democratic settings in which physical coercion is widespread and groups challenging power are targeted for violence. The obvious threats involved lead writers to expect that we will not see much in the way of war-time social resistance in conflict zones (Tarrow 2911: 178). Without support from external allies (Engelbrecht and Kaushik 2015; Venturi 2014), the threat of violence makes localized resistance difficult for civilians living in the midst of armed conflict. While threat is obviously high in war zones, what of political opportunity? This element has been partially neglected in the literature.[1] Wars involve contestation, with neither side by definition maintaining a monopoly on authority. Although scholars have explored how hegemony stifles social resistance (McKenna 1998; Scott 1990), in armed conflicts we should not expect much in the way of hegemonic control, as neither state nor rebel forces command uniform loyalty or oversee the systems of education necessary to manufacture consent. Armed conflicts feature rival claims to governance, territorial control,

[1] An exception is Tilly's (1990, 20) observation that war presents unique opportunities for change, with groups bargaining to extend civil rights or democracy in the shadow of violence.

and legitimacy. The emphasis on extreme threats to social movements in war zones must be balanced by a focus on political opportunities. It is not that social resistance should be more common in war, but instead that the stakes are higher and the results less certain. Such cases provide opportunities to illuminate the forces affecting social resistance in non-democratic settings more generally. If we see little social resistance in armed conflicts, then it helps to identify threat as the key variable. However, if we see widespread social resistance, then political opportunity should be our major concern.

What, then, should we focus on within conflict environments? Several studies equate social resistance with armed rebellion. This conflation can be problematic, encouraging security forces to target protestors and blinding observers to rebel violence. While there are some exceptions (Wood 2003), many studies treat armed rebellion as resistance. Susan Eckstein's edited volume on popular protest in Latin America (2001) generally understands guerilla violence as a form of social resistance.[2] Tilly's many informative texts focus largely on violent revolution, and even Tarrow (20011: 105) focuses more on violent collective action than collective action in contexts of violence. The civil resistance literature, meanwhile, typically focuses on abusive states, not rebel groups, and rarely focuses on active armed conflicts between state and rebel forces.

There are several problems with conflating armed rebellion and social resistance. Writers speak in terms of resisting injustice (Eckstein 2001: 15), even though rebel groups may utilize violence and generate fresh injustices. Social movements are often defined as voluntary, so when an armed group demands compliance backed up by the threat of direct or indirect coercion, it is problematic to see civilian support as social resistance. When civilians resist rebel forces, the result tends to be similar to resisting violent states, as rebels hardly respond to resistance kindly. In Guatemala, David Stoll (1993: 120) notes that "Neutrality was no more acceptable to the guerrillas than to the army…[each claimed]

[2] The exception is Marysa Navarro's chapter on the Mothers of the Plazo de Mayo, who resisted the Argentine state in ways that were not directly supportive of rebels.

to represent 'the people' and constitute legitimate authority. When dissenters threaten that claim, guerrillas tend to respond the same way as the governments they challenge." Civilian support for armed groups is almost never free from societal pressures or coercive threats, as the idea of voluntary support is problematic (Petersen 2001).

Another problem of equating resistance with armed rebellion is that rebels often represent local political orders. Coercive capabilities allow rebels to challenge the state's monopoly on violence, but rebels do far more than resist; many seek to rule. Recent studies have emphasized that rebel groups are often proto-states, seeking a monopoly on force and providing governance (Mampilly, Kasfir, and Arjona 2015). Communist and secessionist rebels each endeavour to seem like a state in their relations with local and global forces, aspiring to some form of statehood. Even rebel groups that are far from statehood may possess strongholds where they are local authorities. Stathis Kalyvas (2006) encourages scholars to see intrastate conflicts in terms of territorial control. While military planners have long spoken in terms of red or liberated zones, Kalyvas outlines the importance of local power dynamics for understanding wartime behavior and conditioning the actions of civilians. Civilian support typically follows zones of control; "irrespective of their sympathies…most people prefer to collaborate with the political actor that best guarantees their survival" (Kalyvas 2006: 12). The idea of territorial control is fundamentally important for understanding social resistance in war because if rebels are the dominant local power, then supporting them is not really an act of resistance. In order to speak of resistance, societal forces should act against the demands of the regionally dominant actor. Otherwise, a civilian supporting rebels in the rebel heartland is no more 'resisting' than is a state loyalist in an area controlled by government forces.

As a consequence, social resistance in war is clearer when it unfolds against a regionally dominant armed group, making it easier to distinguish resistance against one group from support for another group. There may be important differences between resisting state forces and state-like rebel forces, although the extent to which this is true depends on the particular case and should not be assumed. Generally though, states possess clearer forms of organization and civilian / military divisions. Rebel forces tend

to have a greater proportion of military forces compared to their civilian officers, necessary when resisting the incumbent states, and this often makes resisting rebels more dangerous than resisting state forces. Rebels often use force against their critics, perhaps justifying their actions by framing their targets as pro-state. This said, in prolonged conflicts, state forces tend to be dominated by armed forces, which are often unaccountable and operate independently of civilian oversight, making the distinctions between resisting state and rebel forces minor in many cases, and dangerous in most.

What forms of social resistance should we expect to find in armed conflicts? In the vast literature on social resistance and social movements, it is sometimes assumed that resistance must confront. Writers speak in terms of defiance and protest, targeting those in power. Some of the most fascinating forms of popular voice and politics, however, unfold in ways that are designed by powerless actors to express themselves and shape behaviour while avoiding confrontation. One form is engagement, non-oppositional interactions and negotiations between armed groups and social forces. This is what Till Förster (2015) refers to as "dialogue directe", the micro-level interactions between civilian and combatant at road-sides and cafes that evolved into formal exchanges between rebels and civilians. When armed groups arrive in search of information, local diplomacy can allow for non-confrontational resistance. Sometimes resistance may be framed as feedback, provided in a spirit of improvement, even if this challenges a sense of armed group control and transforms the behaviour of armed groups.

Another form of resistance may unfold from within armed groups and affiliated organizations. While it may be easier to view political actors as monolithic, in reality they are fragmented and internally diverse, a recognition that allows for resistance. Armed groups and the states they resist represent assemblages of societal forces and are sites of internal political rivalries, allowing for societal forces to bring about internal transformation. In China, resistance often unfolds within official discourses and institutions, as peasants resist local authorities by citing national laws and policies, sometimes going above their heads to more powerful officials in ways that do not confront the regime as a whole (O'Brien 2006). State and rebel forces may themselves be sites of social

resistance, especially as they ally with and absorb diverse civilian social groups.

In a sense, non-oppositional resistance may appear as a contradiction. Efforts to engage with or transform armed groups from within may actually strengthen the group in question, depending how adept they are in managing social challengers. Engagement may be perceived as a direct challenge and be met with force by one armed group, while for another it may not. If civilian engagement and internal challenges are accepted by an armed group, this is typically because the civilians providing them are not perceived as opposing the armed group. However, they are still resisting if their actions seek to alter the identity, goals, and behaviour of the group. Channeling armed groups in new directions is clearly resistance to the group, even if this does not clearly represent overt opposition.

More conventional forms of resistance are oppositional, challenging the programs or goals of political actors. What sort of oppositional resistance should we expect in war? Due to the threat of violence against open resistance, we should expect that some resistance will be hidden, everyday resistance. James C. Scott (1985) explores everyday forms of resistance in which individuals who are not in a position to mount overt, concerted resistance utilize tactics such as foot dragging, desertion, hoarding, and indifference to resist power. These are not necessarily solitary acts, as gossip and slander inform social understandings that can undermine the credibility of armed groups. Most such resistance is hidden, however some forms such as graffiti provide public displays. While such weapons of the weak are hardly high politics, their effects can be substantial in aggregation. In war, everyday resistance should be even more important, as civilians possess few means to organize and face great costs in doing so, but also possess grievances that generate a desire to protest. Stephan (2015) suggests that, even against brutal groups such as ISIS, nonviolent everyday resistance such as humor has great potential to challenge the Islamic State because it is not confrontational. Scott (2012, 9) speaks of desertion as one of the greatest threats to any armed group, citing specifically the Confederate collapse during the American Civil War. Everyday resistance also provides ideal ways to sour the fruits of forced collaboration, with civilians hoarding food and playing dumb

in response to demands for intelligence. Even after conflict, everyday resistance can shift state and rebel agendas. Susan Thomson (2011) shows that Rwandan peasants have subtly undermined reconciliation efforts through non-confrontational tactics, as they perceive the process to be unjust. She sees peasants as "whispering truth to power", as they are unable to speak out through more formal channels against sometimes violent actors.

Sometimes, such hidden transcripts can explode into outright defiance. This is rare in violent conflicts, as social forces must navigate dangerous landscapes. When Burmese monks refused to allow soldiers to provide alms, this was a direct though symbolic act of defiance, and led to bloody reprisals. The communist and Muslim insurgencies in the Philippines are notable for zones of peace, in which civilians declare villages to be off-limits to war, harnessing religious and media forces to ensure that combatants comply (Mitchell 2007). In the Spanish Civil War, Michael Seidman (2002: 145) notes that mass strikes, boycotts, and protests took place against armed groups even within their strongholds. In Uganda, secessionists established local governments, but then faced social resistance when their civilian officials went on strike to demand regular wages (Kasfir 2006). In a sense, defiance seems to be the stuff of social movements. But defiance need not be collective in nature. Certain protected persons, such as religious figures, may be able to defy armed groups, and their solitary nature may even make them less threatening to armed groups than a broader movement. While difficult, open defiance against dominant armed groups is hardly impossible for civilians in war.

Despite considerable risks, there are several ways that civilians resist armed groups in armed conflicts. These four forms of wartime social resistance, which vary in levels of opposition and visibility, are laid out in Table 1. Of course, many forms of social resistance fall in between these ideal types. For example, acts of sabotage are often seen as forms of everyday resistance, although larger acts may move beyond this and represent bold, overt acts of defiance. In terms of non-oppositional resistance, one could engage with armed groups by joining affiliate organizations, affecting change through a partially incorporated group. Civilians could utilize outright resistance from within a rebel group, perhaps taking over one of its wings and challenging others for

power. Table 1 is intended only as a useful schema with which to better understand forms of civilian resistance in the midst of violent conflicts.

Table 1- Four Forms of Wartime Social Resistance

	Covert	Overt
Non-Oppositional	Engagement	Internal
Oppositional	Everyday	Defiance

Wartime social resistance represents a high-stakes decision. While civilian resistance in armed conflicts is especially dangerous, the contested nature of power provides opportunities. This section has also emphasized the importance of decoupling civilian resistance from armed rebellion, especially in light of rebel coercion and territorial orders. I have suggested numerous forms of wartime resistance, ranging from non-confrontational engagement and internal transformation, to everyday resistance and defiance. At this point, I turn to the recent secessionist conflict in Aceh to illustrate and asses these claims. After providing a brief overview of the conflict and anti-state resistance, I focus on social resistance in rebel zones.

Social Resistance in the Aceh Conflict

The below discussion is based on ethnographic fieldwork carried out over the past decade. Early fieldwork in 2003-04 was part of a project focusing on persons displaced by the Aceh conflict with a Thai human rights organization. I conducted over six months of interviews between 2007 and 2009, with additional fieldwork in summer 2014 and winter 2015. The result is over 300 interviews with about 500 respondents representing a range of societal forces, allowing me to assess patterns of civilian activity across and within zones of control. This work is also primarily rural, a useful corrective against the urban bias in much social movement and armed conflict literatures. This article is the product of a 2014 Symposium on Social Resistance organized by Lund University, where participants were encouraged to consider resistance more broadly, beyond sustained social movements.

Located at the northern tip of Sumatra, Aceh has a long history as an independent Sultanate leading to its involuntary incorporation into the Dutch East Indies in the nineteenth century (Reid 1979: 7). After making significant contributions to Indonesia's war for independence, Aceh took part in the Darul Islam Rebellion in the late 1950s, joining religious regions across the country in demanding Islamic law and autonomy (Sjamsuddin 1985). The secessionist conflict formally began in 1976, when an Acehnese businessman lost a support contract for the Lhokseumawe gas fields, prompting him to declare Acehnese independence. Early on, the Free Aceh Movement (GAM: *Gerakan Aceh Merdeka*) was primarily aspirational, its fighters limited to Darul Islam veterans and youths with personal connections to rebel leaders. The rebellion was suppressed, but GAM returned in the late 1980s. The 1990s saw gross human rights abuses committed by Indonesian security forces, leading to anger which burst forth with the Fall of Suharto in 1998. While Indonesia democratized, Aceh remained mired in military rule. As the army cracked down on civil society movements, GAM finally became the champion of the Acehnese. By the peak of rebel power in 2000-01, they were able to openly challenge the army and control their strongholds. A series of failed peace talks and continued assaults by an increasingly cohesive Indonesian military led to a decline in GAM power by 2004, when a massive tsunami killed over 100,000 persons. This disaster accelerated incipient peace talks, leading to the 2005 Helsinki Agreement. Today, the former rebels dominate local politics through popular elections, as well as coercion and corruption (Aspinall 2009), a situation vastly improved from decades of war.

This brief overview betrays how the conflict varied across the province and across distinct zones of combatant control. The mountainous non-Acehnese interior as well as southern coastal regions saw violence only from around 2001. Ethnic minority districts in the interior and south largely supported the Indonesian state, possessing historical grievances against Acehnese rulers and alienated by the rebels' intense ethno-nationalism. The capital city of Banda Aceh and its environs also remained largely pro-state, since many of its residents identified as Indonesians and worked for state agencies. Other areas were contested, especially mixed ethnic Acehnese / minority regions, which saw uncertain conflict dynamics and

some violent ethnic clashes. Only in ethnically Acehnese areas, primarily the northern heartland of Pidie, Bireuen, Lhokseumawe, and Idi, did GAM enjoy immense popularity. This populous coastal stretch serves as Aceh's rice bowl, is the core of Acehnese culture, and has been home to historical struggles against the Portuguese, Dutch, and Indonesian forces under Sukarno and Suharto. In these districts, GAM served as defenders of the Acehnese against abusive Indonesian forces and drew from a strong sense of ethnic Acehnese nationalism. The rebel flag flew relatively openly here and GAM even came to take on some functions of governance. While rebel rule was never consolidated, with state forces able to control highways and major towns, the rebels operated relatively openly and developed zones of partial control. Long after the conflict, these areas remain loyal to the former rebels, with *Partai Aceh* garnering impressive vote shares in provincial and district-level elections (Barter 2011).

The above overview also neglects the extent to which resistance was carried out beyond GAM ranks, by societal forces. Acehnese districts witnessed considerable non-violent resistance against the Indonesian state. In New Order elections, Acehnese voters tended to boycott elections or else support the state-sanctioned Islamic Party, largely rejecting Suharto's Golkar. The Suharto era also saw various protests from student groups and Islamic leaders, including some sporadic millenarian rebellions from traditional Islamic leaders (Drexler 2009: 141). It was with the fall of Suharto in 1998, when the political opportunity presented itself, that social resistance became widespread. With this opportunity came severe threats, as 1999-2003 saw the worst human rights abuses of the entire conflict.[3] Aceh was home to a civil society-led human rights movement whose message resonated across the province. In the wake of military crackdowns and events in East Timor, Acehnese activists organized a referendum movement, its crowning achievement being a massive 1999 protest that effectively shut down the entire province. At this point, this quintessential social movement was arguably stronger than the rebels,

[3] Early in the conflict, there were few internally displaced persons, limited to a few thousands temporary evacuations in GAM strongholds. 2002-03 saw an explosion of displacement, with hundreds of thousands of Javanese and Acehnese displaced by fighting (Ramly 2005: 13).

especially since they were linked to pan-Indonesian protests. This largely urban movement was led by students and intellectuals, and for some time resembled Western protests in their emphasis on democracy and nonviolent means (see Clark 2000). The referendum movement was not initially linked to the rebels. Students did not see eye to eye with GAM leaders, whose shady pasts and vision of a Sultanate confronted their vision of democracy. State forces, though, saw all protest as pro-rebel, attacking all forms of resistance and forcing civil society activists to flee, go underground, or else side with the rebels.

Anti-state resistance developed across the province, however but as the army cracked down on dissent and the rebels emerged as the champion of the Acehnese, distinct regional dynamics set in. While Banda Aceh continued to see sporadic anti-state resistance, the capital remained home to significant pro-state, anti-rebel sentiment, and witnessed little violence. Ethnic minority areas, which saw the worst of GAM forces and whose leaders were incorporated into pan-Indonesian patronage networks, saw anti-rebel rallies, protests, and other forms of anti-rebel resistance. Meanwhile, rebel zones featured growing anti-Indonesian resistance, with NGO activists publishing critical human rights reports and thousands attending prayer rallies, events sponsored by the rebels that criticized Indonesian abuses. Respective strongholds saw considerable symbolic resistance as well, with anti-rebel graffiti dotting minority landscapes and anti-Indonesian statements throughout GAM areas. As the Aceh conflict fragmented into zones of state and rebel control, many people in respective zones supported the dominant local group and resisted the other side. This should not be surprising, as societal forces typically resist the weaker armed group in different conflict regions. In some ways, this social resistance served to support the dominant local power. Indonesian authorities helped to organize and protect anti-rebel resistance, armed and unarmed, in minority areas, just as GAM helped to promote and secure resistance against the Indonesian state in its domain. This is not to totally take away from such resistance. After all, the worst human rights abuses tend to be carried out by the weaker armed group in any given zone, in part because they lack the social networks and capacity necessary to obtain quality intelligence. The result is identical behavior on the part of moral civilians resisting injustice

and self-interested civilians siding with power. Clearer examples of social resistance exist where civilians oppose the dominant local political order, despite the dangers in doing so. This was evident in the human rights movement in the provincial capital, where civilians defied the Indonesian state despite the clear dangers of doing so in its own backyard. What of anti-rebel resistance? What did social resistance against the political order look like in rebel zones?

Social Resistance under a Rebel Flag in Aceh

GAM was tremendously popular in its strongholds. This said, the rebels were not without faults, and when residents felt the need to resist, they managed to do so through a variety of strategies. Below, I illuminate a world of war time social resistance, organized in terms of engagement, internal, everyday, and defiance.

Not all resistance involved direct opposition, as some civilians worked to moderate GAM behavior by engaging with the rebels. There are a variety of examples of civilians approaching GAM members and providing advice in the spirit of cooperation. Village elders, members of traditional village councils (tuhapeut, eight elders) did precisely this. Members of one village council explained how they would discuss GAM behavior on a regular basis with GAM Commanders at a local coffee shop; "we would say they were disrespectful when looking for informants or demanding food. We reminded GAM of the difficulties the people had. Sometimes they forgot this." Sometimes, such feedback was requested by Commanders working to police their own ranks. At other times it was less welcomed, but often accepted. In several instances, individual rebels were called upon by their Islamic teachers and village chiefs, as personal connections provided an opportunity for civilians to express their grievances. Feedback was easier to provide for elder males, especially those on the tuhapeut whose traditional role is dispensing advice. There was also some space for women to speak out to and against armed groups, as women were afforded some protections by gender norms (Siapno 2002: 20-22). I was told several accounts of older women who would shout at rebels, perhaps blaming them for continued assaults from Indonesian forces or for failing to project the village.

Other villagers were able to speak out through different channels, some of which were created by the rebels in an effort to institutionalize engagement. Edward Aspinall (2009: 182) notes that GAM Commanders published their mobile phone numbers in local newspapers in order to solicit feedback, especially regarding 'fake' GAM units exploiting local people. With time, GAM worked to institutionalize feedback by creating sub-district-level civilian representatives (ulee sagoe), a sort of ombudsperson. Most ulee sagoe were college students, young men and women who wished to contribute in ways other than fighting. For one ulee sagoe, "GAM is a popular movement, not just a rebel group. We had an important job, ensuring that we listened to the Acehnese people." Villagers report being able to discuss their concerns because ulee sagoe were students, not soldiers; "we would criticize GAM to GAM civilians, who would take our complaints to Commanders that were more reasonable than soldiers."

The primary source of resistance through non-oppositional engagement was found in the mediation efforts of village chiefs (keucik). Unlike feedback channels dominated by the rebels, Aceh's chiefs are independent figures and their mediation roles are long-standing cultural norms. While not always virtuous, the keucik maintains a respected role in Acehnese society. During the conflict, Aceh's chiefs served two clear, primary roles: Diplomat and lawyer. These roles were found across state, rebel, and contested zones, and were evident during previous conflicts. When state or rebel forces arrived in villages, they would usually approach the chief, who would serve as a sort of diplomat in talks with combatants. If either side demanded food, information, or other forms of support, chiefs had to negotiate. If chiefs refused, their village faced reprisals, but if they were too generous, then the village would go without and the other side would see them as supporters. For one chief, "we always had to give something, but never too much. I would explain to GAM that if we helped them too much, the army would punish us. I put it in terms they understood, how the army is so hungry for blood and GAM has to help people." Chiefs explained that when the army approached, they would wear khaki government uniforms and speak Indonesian, but when it was GAM, they would wear traditional Acehnese dress and speak Acehnese. Chiefs explained that, just as mangroves are between the ocean

and the forest, chiefs must be between the state and the village, as well as between the state and rebels. They worked to establish relationships with local Commanders, sitting them down, making small talk, sharing some snacks, and praying together. Such trust-building mechanisms helped them to disagree with combatants without being seen as oppositional.

Chiefs also served as lawyers for detained villagers. When villagers were arrested, chiefs were expected to approach feared military outposts and defend or plea bargain for their people. Those who failed to play this role were pressured by villagers to step down, making the position one that was by no means relished. Originally, GAM did not have a system of jails or investigation. When a villager was suspected of working against them, they would question, beat, or kill the suspect. Through engagement, villagers persuaded GAM to change, especially since Indonesian forces sometimes performed better on this count; "we told them that they will not get anywhere killing people. They will just create anger and hurt their cause." Helped by growing capacity, GAM worked to provide a basic legal system presided over by Islamic leaders (ulama). By 2001, GAM typically approached chiefs during their investigations, eventually expecting them to serve a defense role. In one example, a young man was suspected of providing information to the army. GAM summoned his village chief, who explained that the man had provided information only after being tortured, and even then he still withheld the names of GAM soldiers. GAM released the man into the custody of the chief, whom he credits for saving his life. GAM Commanders explained that they knew chiefs might lie, but did so defending their people, which was admirable, provided it did not necessarily undermine GAM interests. Such roles were often dangerous for chiefs. In one subdistrict, GAM killed two chiefs for defending villagers who were actually informants. All told, Aceh's chiefs exemplify engagement in war, representing power independent of the rebels and sometimes resisted their efforts to monopolize power.

A second non-confrontational form of resistance came from within the rebel movement. GAM evolved from being an elite group with some shady local commanders to being a respectable political force by 2000-01. They did not do this alone, developing through alliances with powerful societal forces, not unlike nascent states. Early on in GAM's evolution, in the 1980s, the rebels expanded to include various former

military and criminal forces. The inclusion of such groups provided the rebels with military power, but at the expense of discipline and local legitimacy. GAM was never able to shake its criminal reputation, and later, after the conflict, has returned to these shadier roots. As GAM grew more powerful, it was able to court and develop various societal forces, however sustained alliances with them still resulted in the group's transformation. Just as Suharto's New Order created a variety of women's organizations in Indonesia, the Free Aceh Movement featured a women's organization, the Inong Balee. Taken from famous female Admiral Malahayati's 'widow's brigade' in the 16th century, the Inong Balee organized women wishing to support the rebels, serving as cooks, spies, nurses, and more. However, many women joined the group and subtly challenged the rebels, demanding that women speak at rallies, receive financial assistance, and later helping GAM soldiers demobilize and return home to their families.

The primary forms of internal resistance came from Islamic groups and NGO / student activists. In 1999, GAM, ulama, and activists were distinct groups with separate goals. As the Indonesian army cracked down on all resistance, many ulama and activists turned to the rebels. They did so for protection, to oppose Indonesia, and as a vehicle to achieve their respective goals. These state / society alliances were mutually beneficial and transformative, with ulama and activists developing a sense of Acehnese ethno-nationalism and the rebels incorporating elements of Islam, human rights, and democracy. In this way, civilians were able to transform the content and organization of rebellion, an important opportunity for resistance. Similarly, GAM's efforts to co-opt various social forces enabled ulama and activists to achieve their goals from within the rebel camp. Ulama were able to implement forms of Sharia Law and promote a more Islamic society. Although early in the conflict GAM was avowedly secular and retained socialist ideals, on the ground the rebels created local Sharia courts and incorporated leading ulama as advisors. For one ranking Islamic teacher, "many of GAM soldiers were once our students. Through them, we were able to promote Islam and make the independence movement halal." Meanwhile activists criticized Indonesian human rights abuses and represented the rebels in peace talks, moderating rebel demands and contributing towards overcoming the

conflict. Previously demanding the creation of a Sultanate and refusing the idea of a referendum on the grounds that it affirmed Indonesian sovereignty, student and NGO activists redirected GAM's core goals to be more democratic, with GAM leader Hasan di Tiro serving as a Head of State instead of a Head of Government. For one activist, "when we joined GAM, it was a military hierarchy, nobody said anything about democracy. I think they learned from East Timor to listen to us and become open to democracy." Groups working within the rebels resisted GAM's secular and ethnonationalist claims, transforming the very meaning of rebellion in Aceh.

Thus far, I have spoken of resistance that was not directly oppositional, that rebels could perceive as consistent with their cause in some way, even if it altered their cause in some way. A more oppositional form of resistance is found in weapons of the weak, everyday forms of resistance hidden from public view. While they tend to unfold "within the official discourse of deference," and are thus indirect, weapons of the weak allow individuals to quietly oppose power (Scott 1990: 95). To put it another way, the above forms of opposition can actually strengthen dominant actors provided they are willing to listen and adapt, while everyday resistance necessarily weakens authorities. Due to GAM popularity and antipathy towards Indonesia, it is easier to document everyday resistance against the Indonesian state. Documenting hidden, micro-level anti-rebel resistance within rebel strongholds represents a tougher task.

One of the clearest forms of everyday resistance was flight. Young men faced considerable pressure to join the rebels, but many refused, as thousands voted with their feet and sought employment in Malaysia, an important alternative to taking up arms. What of those who did not leave? When GAM soldiers demanded food or money, many civilians would hoard their wealth and lie to maintain their scarce resources. Locals often differentiated between GAM units from their village and those from other villages, withholding support from outsiders and questioning their authenticity. Civilians often slandered GAM forces, especially early on in the conflict, seeing them as a creation of the Indonesian military, challenging their Islamic credentials, mocking eccentric GAM leader Hasan di Tiro, and claiming GAM linkages to the United States. One coffee shop owner shared that his customers joked about "Sultan di Tiro"

and suggested that GAM was trained by the CIA. Slander and gossip against the rebels continued even at the height of the conflict. When GAM Commanders were seen as corrupt, such as one in Aceh Besar who literally sat atop a local gold mine, they faced widespread criticism and lost local support. In various rallies, instead of waving rebel flags, some civilians report waving United Nations flags, "telling the world we are squeezed between two rocks", and even white flags, "hoping that the conflict would just end." As fighting waned, everyday acts of resistance intensified. Just as Thomas McKenna (1998: 194) documents how gossip and semi-mythical stories of divine support for rebellion dried up and turned against Mindanao's rebels as the conflict endured, by 2003, many Acehnese civilians had lost faith in GAM. One woman explained that GAM used to hide in her house and demand food, and while she initially supported them, this became a burden. Her solution was to prepare the blandest food possible and tell them she heard rumours of military sweeps. She developed several ways to undermine support; "GAM used to hide weapons under my hearth outside, so I boiled water every night so it was too hot to use." Perhaps the most damaging form of everyday resistance at this time related to desertion. As one woman reported, "I told my sons to return. The conflict was not ending and we needed to get on with our lives. Many women told their sons and husbands this. It was time to come home." In aggregation, such acts undermined the Free Aceh Movement considerably.

Although hidden resistance signified anti-rebel sentiment and chipped away at their power, it stopped short of direct defiance. Open defiance against GAM was uncommon, both because it was dangerous and because there were few reasons in GAM strongholds to defy the rebels, at least compared to brutal state forces. Nevertheless, there are examples of wartime defiance in GAM's backyard. Some examples are found when Acehnese villagers refused GAM demands to boycott Indonesian elections or state agencies. Villagers in Aceh Besar explained that GAM told them not to send their children to Indonesian schools. "We refused, they need education." Villagers continued to send their children to school and criticized GAM for threatening their children's future. This led GAM to burn several schools, and then work with activists to open new ones offering an 'Acehnese' curriculum. Another

instance of defiance occurred when chiefly mediation failed, especially when chiefs were subjected to violence. In West Aceh, one village chief approached a shady GAM Commander who had arrested and beaten several villagers. The chief asked why he had not been informed. The rebel leader responded by attacking the chief. Far from remaining silent, the chief began criticizing this Commander. Word of the altercation soon spread, with villagers noting that this Commander did not respect local traditions. Other GAM Commanders came to protect the chief, but asked that he remain quiet. Such criticisms were an important reason why mediation worked, as combatants who failed to respect chiefly duties faced social reprisals.

The primary instance of anti-rebel defiance was the response to GAM efforts to cleanse the province of ethnic Javanese. GAM had long promised to rid the province of Javanese "colonialists", whose "massive relocation" threatened Aceh with "Javanization" (di Tiro 1981: 70). In reality, Aceh received a relatively small number of Javanese, whose numbers peaked at about 12% of the provincial population, compared to one third in nearby provinces (Barter and Côté 2015). Many Javanese were born in Aceh, having arrived under the Dutch, and almost all settled in the non-Acehnese interior. Most Acehnese had no problem with the Javanese. While GAM leaders saw things in terms of their ethno-nationalist vision, most Acehnese are proud of their multiethnic history, and while they see Java as insufficiently Islamic, local Javanese were often pious. Many local Javanese had intermarried with Acehnese. As a result, GAM pogroms ignited local resistance, militias in state strongholds and defiance within rebel strongholds. In one example, GAM forces demanded that an Aceh-born Javanese Islamic teacher leave the province. This led his students to protest, surrounding the rebels in prayer when they arrived at the teacher's school. As the teacher was removed and his house destroyed, locals organized sermons on the Prophet's campaigns to transcend tribalism. The villagers wrote a letter to several prominent pro-GAM ulama, one of whom later visited the village and apologized for GAM's actions. The Javanese Islamic teacher returned one year later. In Saree, a Javanese coroner was told to leave. While other Javanese fled, he remained, and when confronted by GAM, the village chief defended him, citing his important village duties. The next day, his house was

burned down. Another local Javanese family was killed by GAM the next day, leading residents to hold a village meeting criticizing GAM's actions. In Bireuen, one Javanese family that had assimilated into local society was targeted by GAM. Villagers surrounded their home and blocked the rebels, and after a brief skirmish, a GAM Commander was called in to negotiate with the protestors. "The people explained that these are not even Javanese any more, that Aceh has always assimilated other people. I agreed to let them stay, but the villagers wanted more. They wanted me to sign a letter guaranteeing it. So I did it—I wanted to show we are reasonable."

These examples demonstrate that defiance is possible even in strongholds and despite considerable threats. Some Acehnese spoke out in direct opposition to rebel behavior and raised their voices. The effects should not be underestimated, as GAM lost some popularity just as Indonesia regrouped and launched fresh assaults on the rebels. Some Acehnese even report a newfound appreciation of Indonesian multiculturalism, though they remained critical of the country's corruption and human rights abuses. Internally, many ulama who had joined the rebels criticized ethnic violence against fellow Muslims on religious grounds, and many rebel activists criticized it in terms of human rights. By 2003, GAM made a surprising shift with the Stavanger Declaration, written with the help of activist allies. The Declaration marked a reversal of GAM policy, now stating that Aceh is a multicultural state where citizenship should be based on birth. According to one rebel spokesman, "this was a response to our mistakes. The people of Aceh did not like violence against Javanese and we were criticized internationally as well." To GAM's credit, they were willing to adapt in response to social resistance, leading to major changes in the rebel vision.

Implications

Despite immense threats, social resistance is possible in armed conflicts largely because political opportunities are considerable. Social resistance is possible and even probable against abusive states where rebels maintain power and against rebels in state strongholds. While such acts are important and cannot be assumed to be manufactured, the meaning of social resistance is less clear when it supports the local political order. A

stiffer test is found where civilians challenge the dominant local authority, state or rebel, resisting independent of rewards or protection and despite risk. I have showed ways that civilians are able to resist the dominant armed group in times of war, in this case against a powerful rebel movement, in effect mounting civil resistance against armed resistance (but not for the state). These findings show room for social resistance against an armed resistance movement. Crucially, social resistance was found even in extremely constrained circumstances, a context in which social movements were unable to form. Despite intense violence, resistance continued for Aceh's civilians. This speaks to the centrality of political contestation in armed conflicts, a factor often overlooked compared to the focus on violence in war.

In Aceh, I have documented four forms of social resistance against separatist rebels in rebel zones, varying in terms of opposition and visibility. Although a social movement lens might have focused on the short-lived civil society referendum movement or on the Free Aceh Movement, a social resistance lens uncovered less visible forms of civilian agency. Social resistance also uncovered a wider range of resistance than would a lens of everyday resistance, most notably including less oppositional forms of resistance such as engagement and internal transformation, which served to transform the behaviour and goals of the rebel movement. Even though GAM was popular in its strongholds and Indonesia was hated, Acehnese civilians continually questioned power. This should caution against portrayals of civilians as powerless, forced to act in terms of survival. Anti-rebel resistance was hardly counter-revolutionary though, and was not necessarily pro-state. Instead, civilians resisted the rebels on their own terms, sometimes in an effort to improve rebel behaviour. While not always heroic, Acehnese civilians resisted GAM where they felt it was necessary.

Why did GAM not crack down on social resistance, especially where it directly challenged their interests? Sometimes they did. I noted examples of abused chiefs and villagers, where those challenging GAM were punished. This serves as a reminder that resisting the rebels was by no means safe. For the most part though, GAM responded by adapting to social resistance. This was true in part because GAM enjoyed local popularity and wanted to maintain it. Many rebels saw themselves as

fighting for the people against an abusive state. GAM worked to avoid comparison to Indonesian security forces, reflecting the centrality of contestation in armed conflict, as political opportunity provides some window through which civilians can resist.

In post-conflict Aceh, the former rebels have continued to dominate their strongholds, but now through the ballot box. In the 2009 Elections, Partai Aceh won over 2/3 of the vote in northern districts. While not totally democratic, as the former rebels dominate the local economy and have utilized violence against challengers, the results testify to their popularity. However social resistance continues. In 2014, the former rebels entered into a shocking alliance with former military leader Prabowo Subianto, the son-in-law of former President Suharto who is widely considered to be responsible for horrific human rights abuses against activists and rebels. This alliance was perceived as opportunistic, with the former rebels betraying their principles. How did Acehnese voters respond? In the national legislative contests, Prabowo's party gained just two of thirteen seats despite support from Partai Aceh leaders. In the Presidential Elections, voters in the rebel heartland chose Prabowo's rival Jokowi, ignoring the demands of their party and sending a strong message to the former rebels. Social resistance continues well into Aceh's contemporary electoral era. What remains to be seen is if the former rebels will retain the skill to manage and adapt to it.

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