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# FACETS OF HOSPITALITY: ROHINGYA REFUGEES' TEMPORARY STAY IN ACEH

Antje Missbach

“We have to help strangers because we have a heart. This is Acehnese culture.”<sup>1</sup>

“Aceh had similar experiences [*merasakan hal yang sama*] during [its] conflict, this is why we will help anybody who needs help [*pertolongan kemanusiaan*].”<sup>2</sup>

“Aceh has kindly welcomed the Rohingya refugees. Volunteers ... as well as Aceh residents have left their own families day and night to help them. But then [the refugees] lied and claimed they were raped, humiliating us, the volunteers, Aceh, and Indonesia.”<sup>3</sup>

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Antje Missbach, a senior lecturer and research fellow at the School of Social Sciences, Monash University, Melbourne, offers these acknowledgments: “I thank the following people for their continuing support. First of all, Anne McNevin and Danau Tanu, each of whom joined me on one field visit to Aceh. I am grateful for the critical input from Birgit Bräuchler, Nikolas Feith Tan, Susan Kneebone, Sverre Molland, Dan Birchok, and Rachel Salmond. The research was financially supported by the Australian Research Council. Last but not least, I am also indebted to Don Emmerson, who hosted me during my Lee Kong Chian Fellowship and the Shorenstein APARC at Stanford University, where I presented my findings in Fall 2017.”

<sup>1</sup> Interview with the head of the social department, Banda Aceh, April 9, 2016. All translations are my own unless indicated otherwise.

<sup>2</sup> Muzakir Manaf, vice governor of Aceh, during a visit to a Rohingya camp in North Aceh in June 2015; see “Muzakir Manaf Dampingi Wamenlu AS Tinjau Pengungsi Rohingya di Aceh Utara,” June 3, 2015, [http://acehonline.info/mobile/detail.php?no\\_berita=11945](http://acehonline.info/mobile/detail.php?no_berita=11945), accessed October 17, 2017.

## Indonesia: No Place for Permanent Refuge

This article examines four facets of hospitality and how they materialized during the treatment of more than a thousand Rohingya refugees who came to Aceh in the aftermath of the so-called Andaman Sea crisis in May 2015. The media gave extensive positive coverage of the hospitality provided to Rohingya refugees by Acehnese fishermen and villagers, largely in response to the initial hostile reaction of the Indonesian central government to these “boat people.” The Indonesian navy was deployed to push some of the Rohingya boats back to sea.<sup>4</sup> Given this circumstance, the extraordinary hospitality offered by many Acehnese civilians and district officials, as well as a number of Indonesian nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), has been widely praised in light of Indonesia’s overall lack of a legal framework for refugee protection.<sup>5</sup> Some practitioners and observers suggested that these morally and ethically driven forms of hospitality, led by nongovernmental groups rather than by official legal-rights provisions, had potential as a way forward in overcoming the current lack of protections and durable solutions for asylum seekers and refugees in Southeast Asia.<sup>6</sup> In March 2011, at the Fourth Bali Process conference, a Regional Cooperation Framework (RCF) was set up by the member states. The RCF, however, remains a “non-binding regional cooperation framework [that could] provide a more effective way for interested parties to cooperate to reduce irregular movement through the region.”<sup>7</sup> Collaboration for enhancing regional refugee protection has so far lagged behind despite frequent political outcry, which rings louder whenever the Rohingya are forced to flee their homes again.

Indonesia, in company with all ASEAN member states other than the Philippines and Cambodia, is not a signatory to the 1951 UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (“1951 Refugee Convention”) or its 1967 Protocol, and thus is not legally obliged to offer protection to refugees as prescribed by the United Nations under the global refugee regime.<sup>8</sup> The only durable solution for refugees in Indonesia are

<sup>3</sup> Mustafa MY Tiba, head of Komite Nasional untuk Solidaritas Rohingya (National Committee for Solidarity with Rohingya, KNSR) in Aceh, quoted in “Committee to Report Rohingya Refugees for False Rape Claims,” *Jakarta Post*, October 2, 2015.

<sup>4</sup> Sabrina Asril, “Panglima TNI Tolak Kapal Pengungsi Rohingya Masuk RI, tapi Bersedia Beri Bantuan,” *Kompas*, May 15, 2015.

<sup>5</sup> Mohammad Hasan Ansori, Johari Efendi, and Wiryadi Adiweni, *Managing Refugee Crisis in Southeast Asia: Policies, Practices, and Challenges* (Jakarta: The Habibie Centre, 2017).

<sup>6</sup> See: Martin Jones, “Moving beyond Protection Space: Developing a Law of Asylum in South-East Asia,” in *Refugee Protection and the Role of Law*, ed. Susan Kneebone, Dallal Stevens, and Loretta Baldassar (London: Taylor and Francis, 2014), 251–73; and Yayasan Geutanyoe, *Hidup Dalam Penantian: Setahun Pengungsi Rohingya di Aceh* 2016, 16. Yayasan Geutanyoe’s report stated, for example, “It can be claimed that the humanitarian services [*pelayanan kemanusiaan*] provided to the Rohingya in Aceh were the best all over the ASEAN region, and for the special case of the Rohingya it might have constituted the best globally.” Several speakers made similar enthusiastic statements during a special South East Asian Conference on Rohingya hosted by the South-East Asia Humanitarian Committee and Dompot Dhuafa in May 2016 in Bogor.

<sup>7</sup> “Co-chairs’ Statement of the Fourth Bali Regional Ministerial Conference on People Smuggling, Trafficking in Persons, and Related Transnational Crime; Bali, Indonesia, 29–30 March 2011,” [http://asean.org/?static\\_post=co-chairs-statement-of-the-fourth-bali-regional-ministerial-conference-on-people-smuggling-trafficking-in-persons-and-related-transnational-crime-bali-indonesia-29-30-march-2011](http://asean.org/?static_post=co-chairs-statement-of-the-fourth-bali-regional-ministerial-conference-on-people-smuggling-trafficking-in-persons-and-related-transnational-crime-bali-indonesia-29-30-march-2011), accessed September 19, 2017.

<sup>8</sup> The global refugee regime has been conceptualized as the constitutive framework Refugee Convention and its specialized institution, UNHCR. The first and foremost element of the regime is the right to

voluntary repatriation to their countries of origin or, if that is not possible, resettlement to a third country.<sup>9</sup> Local integration, either temporary or permanent, is not an option for refugees in Indonesia. Nonetheless, many asylum seekers and refugees have stayed in Indonesia for protracted periods of time and begun, *de facto*, their social and cultural integration into Indonesian society, in spite of the objection of the state.<sup>10</sup>

Today Indonesia does not have a comprehensive legal framework through which asylum seekers can access and claim protection, even though tens of thousands have arrived in Indonesia over the last two decades. The Indonesian constitution does guarantee the right to asylum: this right is stated in Law 39/1999 on Human Rights and Law 37/1999 on Foreign Relations.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, Indonesia lacks coherent policies on how to deal with incoming mobile (displaced) populations in a regulated and standardized fashion. Official mechanisms for dealing with asylum seekers and refugees in Indonesia remain rudimentary and the processes for handling them are inconsistent.<sup>12</sup> To fill the legal vacuum, President Joko Widodo signed a presidential decree on handling refugees from abroad in December 2016.<sup>13</sup> Although this decree spells out the nation's duty to rescue people in maritime disasters and bring them safely to land (independent of their migration status), it reiterates that these people's presence in Indonesian territory must be temporary in any event.<sup>14</sup>

Asylum seekers in Indonesia apply for protection to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), which handles their assisted return or resettlement in a third country. The International Organization for Migration (IOM), adopted by the United Nations as a Related Organization in 2016, covers most costs related to the asylum seekers' and refugees' temporary stay in Indonesia, such as accommodation, food, health services, and rudimentary education.<sup>15</sup> This sharing of responsibility for the care of asylum seekers was set up in 2000 under the Australian-funded Regional Cooperation Arrangement (RCA) and modified in accordance to needs.<sup>16</sup> Given Indonesia's rather rudimentary structure for handling asylum seekers,

asylum, expressed as an obligation on the part of states to respect the prohibition against refoulement on their territory or within their jurisdiction. Secondly, the global refugee regime is based on burden-sharing via international cooperation, generally expressed via UNHCR's three durable solutions: repatriation, local integration, and resettlement. However, the obligation to provide durable solutions is inchoate as the Refugee Convention does not include a prescriptive burden-sharing mechanism.

<sup>9</sup> Nikolas Feith Tan, "The Status of Asylum Seekers and Refugees in Indonesia," *International Journal of Refugee Law* 28, 3 (2016): 365–83.

<sup>10</sup> Antje Missbach, *Troubled Transit: Asylum Seekers Stuck in Indonesia* (Singapore: ISEAS, 2015), 90–113.

<sup>11</sup> These laws can be found at the Indonesian government's official website, <http://indonesia.go.id/#>

<sup>12</sup> Circular Letter by Director-General for Immigration No. IMI-1489.UM.08.05 of year 2010 and also Peraturan Direktur Jenderal Imigrasi Nomor Imi.1917-Ot.02.01 Tahun 2013 Tentang Standar Operasional Prosedur Rumah Detensi Imigrasi (regulation of the director general of immigration on standard operational procedures for immigration detention centers).

<sup>13</sup> Presidential Decree 125/2016 on handling refugees from abroad.

<sup>14</sup> Antje Missbach and Nikolas Feith Tan, "No Durable Solutions: A New Presidential Decree Delivers Little for Asylum Seekers and Refugees in Indonesia," *Inside Indonesia*, March 13, 2017, <http://www.insideindonesia.org/no-durable-solutions>, accessed October 17, 2017.

<sup>15</sup> Savitri Taylor and Brynna Rafferty-Brown, "Difficult Journeys: Accessing Refugee Protection in Indonesia" *Monash University Law Review* 36, 3 (2010): 138–61.

<sup>16</sup> Missbach, *Troubled Transit*, 138.

many consider its migration management to be problematic, not least because a rights-based approach for assessing and handling displaced and persecuted stateless minorities, such as the Rohingya, is inadequate.<sup>17</sup>

All migrants who are intercepted while attempting irregularly to enter or leave Indonesia face mandatory detention under Law No. 6/2011 on immigration, which makes no mention at all of asylum seekers, refugees, or forcibly displaced persons.<sup>18</sup> Like most other irregular migrants, asylum seekers are usually housed indefinitely in immigration detention centers, of which there are currently thirteen located all over Indonesia. Once individual asylum claims have been recognized by the UNHCR, those refugees are placed in IOM-funded community shelters located in several Indonesian provinces. Vulnerable asylum seekers, such as unaccompanied minors, families, the elderly, and the infirm, may also be accommodated in these shelters. However, there is not enough capacity in the immigration detention centers and community shelters for all of the more than fourteen thousand asylum seekers and refugees, including about 960 Rohingya asylum seekers and refugees currently registered with the UNHCR in Jakarta.<sup>19</sup>

The treatment of the more than one thousand Rohingya who arrived in Aceh in May 2015 after being rescued from their month-long ordeal by local fishermen differed substantially from the procedures commonly applied to other asylum seekers in Indonesia.<sup>20</sup> The treatment also differed from that of smaller contingents of Rohingya who arrived in Aceh in 2009, 2011, 2012, and 2013 and who were relocated swiftly to Indonesia's immigration detention centers.<sup>21</sup>

Aceh is an area that, over the last century, has suffered a number of violent conflicts. Today the impact of those conflicts on the material settings and immaterial conditions of political life in Aceh are profound.<sup>22</sup> Because Aceh has no immigration detention centers or community shelters to house refugees, it is seen as a site of interception rather than a place of residence. Moreover, given the ongoing political instability in post-conflict Aceh,<sup>23</sup> it is unlikely to become an official site of temporary residence for refugees any time soon. Nevertheless, because the number of Rohingya

<sup>17</sup> See: Bhatara Ibnu Reza, "Challenges and Opportunities in Respecting International Refugee Law in Indonesia," in *Protection of Refugees and Displaced Persons in the Asia Pacific Region*, ed. Angus Francis and Rowena Maguire (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 117–34; and Susan Kneebone, "Comparative Regional Protection Frameworks for Refugees: Norms and Norm Entrepreneurs," *International Journal of Human Rights* 20, 2 (2016): 153–72.

<sup>18</sup> Government Regulation No. 31 Year 2013 on the Implementation of Law No. 6 of 2011 on Immigration.

<sup>19</sup> UNHCR Indonesia, *Monthly Statistical Update*, November 2016. For more details on immigration detention in Indonesia, see Antje Missbach, "Detaining Asylum Seekers and Refugees in Indonesia," in *Detaining the Immigrant Other: Global and Transnational Issues*, ed. Rich Furman, Douglas Epps, and Greg Lamphear (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 91–104.

<sup>20</sup> Graham Thom, "The May 2015 Boat Crisis: The Rohingya in Aceh," *Cosmopolitan Civil Societies Journal* 8, 2 (2016): 43–62.

<sup>21</sup> Hotli Simanjuntak, "Hundreds of Myanmar Rohingya Sheltered in Aceh Sports Hall," *Jakarta Post*, May 12, 2015.

<sup>22</sup> Michelle Ann Miller, *Rebellion and Reform in Indonesia: Jakarta's Security and Autonomy Policies in Aceh* (Oxon: Routledge, 2009).

<sup>23</sup> Patrick Daly, R. Michael Feener, and Anthony Reid, eds., *From the Ground Up: Perspectives on Post-Tsunami and Post-Conflict Aceh* (Singapore: ISEAS, 2012).

rescued in 2015 exceeded the capacity of detention centers in other provinces, they remained in Aceh much longer than first anticipated. Local district governments in Aceh's affected cities and regencies were more supportive of the decision to keep the Rohingya there than were the governments at the provincial and central level, as the Acehese officials speculated there would be financial incentives as a result of promised international aid contributions.<sup>24</sup>

The foremost Indonesian government institution in charge of law-enforcement measures that address irregular migration is the Coordinating Desk for Handling People-Smuggling, Refugees, and Asylum Seekers (*Desk Penanganan Penyelundupan Manusia, Pengungsi dan Pencari Suaka*, P2MP2S or "the Desk"), formally established in January 2013.<sup>25</sup> The Desk involves eleven ministries and national institutions, including the Ministry for Law and Human Rights (within which the Directorate-General for Immigration sits), the Ministries for Foreign Affairs and Internal Affairs, and the national police. The Desk maintains no offices outside Jakarta but encourages the formation of task forces to coordinate and involve relevant government agencies at the district level. Local task forces of district government officials, civil society activists, relief organizations, and NGOs were set up for Aceh under an agreement with central and local authorities on May 24, 2015.<sup>26</sup> Whenever the state rejects primary responsibility for humanitarian assistance beyond emergency aid, NGOs are in high demand to provide vital services. It was the involvement of non-state actors, other than the UNHCR and the IOM, that made the handling of the Rohingya refugees in Aceh special, as activists and charity groups have not shown much interest in refugee issues in Indonesia's other provinces.<sup>27</sup> In part that is because providing and coordinating refugee aid at the local level is daunting.

While challenges abound in handling asylum seekers and refugees at the central level, problems at the local level are even greater. Local hospitality plays a significant role in accommodating refugees, particularly when the state tries to avoid taking responsibility for them.<sup>28</sup> Yet, as I will show in this article, the involvement of NGOs, charity groups, and local bureaucrats presented new challenges in handling the Rohingya in Aceh. On the one hand, those groups and their services were needed; on the other hand, their lack of knowledge and experience in refugee protection not only caused administrative disarray but also jeopardized the Rohingya's safety. The lack of experience and, more importantly, the lack of any comprehensive understanding of what constitutes a refugee and what rights refugees are entitled to meant that some of

<sup>24</sup> Thom, "The May 2015 Boat Crisis," 49. This divide between international, national, and subnational responses toward asylum seekers raises interesting parallels with sanctuary cities and the localization of hospitality elsewhere. Jennifer Ridgley, "Cities of Refuge: Immigration Enforcement, Police, and the Insurgent Genealogies of Citizenship in U.S. Sanctuary Cities," *Urban Geography* 29, 1 (2008): 53–77.

<sup>25</sup> Missbach, *Troubled Transit*, 162.

<sup>26</sup> Thom, "The May 2015 Boat Crisis," 53.

<sup>27</sup> Bilal Dewansyah, "Asylum Seekers in a Non-Immigrant State and the Absence of Regional Asylum Seekers Mechanism: A Case Study of Rohingya Asylum Seekers in Aceh—Indonesia and ASEAN Response," conference paper, 5th AsianSIL Biennial Conference, Bangkok, November 24–25, 2015.

<sup>28</sup> Eve Lester, "A Place at the Table: The Role of NGOS in Refugee Protection: International Advocacy and Policy-Making," *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 24, 2 (2005): 125–42.

the ad-hoc approaches taken in Aceh violated the protection-based approach for refugees and asylum seekers used elsewhere in Indonesia and Southeast Asia.<sup>29</sup>

Framing my observations in the context of hospitality, a concept that is prone to ambivalence, equivocation, and misinterpretation, raises questions about the sustainability and adequacy of receiving guests and also about the various motivations behind the hospitality offered to the Rohingya during their stay in Aceh. So-called South-to-South hospitality has only recently reentered academic studies, in part because unofficial acts of coping with crises and helping others cope with forced displacement have gained wider recognition in view of the record numbers of people affected by such involuntary global migration. Such assistance has also created new opportunities for temporary or permanent accommodations in countries not usually among those countries, typically Western, where refugees are resettled.<sup>30</sup>

The Acehnesse response to the plight of the Rohingya has been identified by some observers as a pragmatic and viable model with the potential for application elsewhere in Southeast Asia. In this essay, however, I ask whether the “unmatched” and “extraordinary” welcome<sup>31</sup> and hospitality afforded by non-state actors and local bureaucrats in Aceh, and tolerated by the central government in Jakarta, really offers a sustainable mid- to long-term model for protecting refugees passing through Southeast Asia. In other words, is it an adequate substitute for the protections and measures that should be otherwise rendered by the state?

My main focus here is on the ideological foundations of the collective imaginations of the specifics of Acehnesse hospitality, or *Peumulia Jamee* (Acehnese: honoring the guest), which is used to refer to a ritual ceremony and also to more generic practices of welcoming strangers. The arguments I put forward in this article are informed by my long-term interest in the political situation in Aceh and also through field visits. Twice I visited the four Acehnesse camps where the Rohingya were hosted, once in November 2015 and again in April 2016. Most of my interviews were conducted with local authorities in charge of managing the Rohingya and with members of NGOs operating in the camps. They were complemented by informal conversations with Acehnesse fishermen involved in the rescue of the Rohingya and with more formal interviews with representatives of the Indonesian Ministry for Foreign Affairs in Jakarta.<sup>32</sup>

This article has five parts, the first providing an overview of the plight of the Rohingya as a persecuted stateless minority, and particularly of their flight from Myanmar (which culminated in the Andaman Sea crisis). The second part briefly

<sup>29</sup> Thom, “The May 2015 Boat Crisis,” 44.

<sup>30</sup> See: Julia Pacitto and Elena Fiddian-Qasmieh, “Writing the ‘Other’ into Humanitarian Discourse: Framing Theory and Practice in South–South Humanitarian Responses to Forced Displacement” (Working Paper Series no. 93, Refugee Studies Centre, University of Oxford, 2013); and Matei Candea and Giovanni da Col, “The Return of Hospitality,” *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 18, special issue (2012): 1–19.

<sup>31</sup> IRIN, “In Indonesia’s Aceh, a Warm Welcome for Refugees in a Sea of Misery,” June 15, 2015, <http://www.irinnews.org/feature/2015/06/15/indonesia%E2%80%99s-aceh-warm-welcome-refugees-sea-misery>, accessed October 17, 2017.

<sup>32</sup> Local newspaper reports and gray literature were also used in my analysis. However, due to language barriers and lack of interpreters, it was not possible for me to conduct extensive interviews with Rohingya refugees themselves.

summarizes the main facts of their being hosted in Aceh. The third sketches out some theoretical underpinnings and implications of hospitality that provide a guiding structure for the fourth and main part, which offers location-specific interpretations of how different motivations for rendering hospitality toward Rohingya played out in Aceh between May 2015 and November 2016. A brief conclusion summarizes my skepticism that the Acehnese model, involving the active engagement of non-state actors and NGOs, has potential as an alternative to the central government's responsibility for hosting refugees in Indonesia.

### The Plight of the Rohingya

The Rohingya are an ethnic and religious minority based in Rakhine State, Myanmar, whose claims to citizenship have been ignored by the Myanmar government. The Rohingya, who face not only legal, political, social, and economic discrimination, but also forced displacement and violent persecution,<sup>33</sup> have been seeking asylum outside Myanmar for many years.<sup>34</sup> Yanghee Lee, the UN's special rapporteur on human rights in Myanmar, stated that the Rohingya have been subject to "decades of systematic and institutionalized discrimination."<sup>35</sup> By 2012, a widely reported upsurge in violence against the Rohingya caused the displacement of some one hundred thousand Rohingya inside Myanmar, and tens of thousands fled to neighboring countries, including Malaysia and Indonesia, but particularly Bangladesh.<sup>36</sup> From 2014 onwards, thousands more Rohingya were forced to flee Myanmar. According to estimates by international organizations, between five and eight thousand Rohingya became stranded on boats in the Andaman Sea in May 2015. The crisis at sea was preceded by the discovery of mass graves on both sides of the Thailand–Malaysia border, in camps known to be reception points for Rohingya smuggled from Myanmar.<sup>37</sup> Reports were soon confirmed that many Rohingya had been held, beaten, and murdered in these camps when payments extorted from or demanded of their families back in Myanmar were not received.<sup>38</sup> As police and international media focused on the discovery of the graves, smugglers abandoned their Rohingya "cargo" at sea. When some of the abandoned passengers managed to steer their vessels toward

<sup>33</sup> Renaud Egretteau and François Robinne, eds., *Metamorphosis: Studies in Social and Political Change in Myanmar* (Singapore: ISEA, 2016), especially Jacques P. Leider's chapter, "Competing Identities and the Hybridized History of the Rohingyas," 151–78.

<sup>34</sup> See report by Human Rights Watch, "Perilous Plight: Burma's Rohingya Take to the Seas," May 2009.

<sup>35</sup> UN Human Rights, Office of the High Commissioner, "End of Mission Statement by Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Myanmar," <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=21232&LangID=E#sthash.0vhCV8eI.dpuf>, accessed October 17, 2017.

<sup>36</sup> See: Syeda Naushin Parnini, "The Crisis of the Rohingya as a Muslim Minority in Myanmar and Bilateral Relations with Bangladesh," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 33, 2 (2013): 281–97; Avyanti Azis, "Urban Refugees in a Graduated Sovereignty: The Experiences of the Stateless Rohingya in the Klang Valley," *Citizenship Studies* 18, 8 (2014): 839–54; and Lindsey N. Kingston, "Protecting the World's Most Persecuted: The Responsibility to Protect and Burma's Rohingya Minority," *International Journal of Human Rights* 19, 8 (2015): 1163–75.

<sup>37</sup> Thomas Fuller and Joe Cochrane, "Rohingya Migrants from Myanmar, Shunned by Malaysia, Are Spotted Adrift in Andaman Sea," *New York Times*, May 14, 2015.

<sup>38</sup> See report by Human Rights Watch, "Southeast Asia: Accounts from Rohingya Boat People Denial of Rights in Burma, Bangladesh Lead to Trafficking and Dangerous Sea Voyages," May 27, 2015.

the coasts of Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand, authorities refused them permission to land. Instead the officials met the boats at sea, where they provided the refugees with fuel, water, and food, and ordered them to continue their journeys.<sup>39</sup>

Three of the boats, however, got close enough to Aceh to be rescued by local fishermen. On May 10, 2015, fishermen from the village of Seunuddon, near the port of Lhokseumawe, helped to bring 578 passengers to shore.<sup>40</sup> Indonesian military authorities promptly warned fishermen along the coast of Aceh not to engage in rescue operations, which would place them at risk of breaching state law.<sup>41</sup> Nevertheless, on May 15 and 20, fishermen from two other villages close to the port city of Langsa rescued people from two more boats and brought them ashore, where they were provided with emergency aid. Altogether, 1,807 passengers were rescued.

Under mounting pressure from international media reports, on May 20, 2015, the foreign ministers of Malaysia, Indonesia, and Thailand met in Putrajaya, Malaysia. The Malaysian and Indonesian ministers agreed to offer “temporary shelter provided that the resettlement and repatriation process will be done in one year by the international community” and capped the number of beneficiaries at seven thousand.<sup>42</sup> From the very beginning of this intervention, it was clear that the deadline for speedy resettlement was unrealistic, given that the processing time for asylum seekers in both countries was well over one year and waiting times for resettlement (if available at all) frequently extended to several years.<sup>43</sup>

Although the Acehnese villagers offered the Rohingya all the help they could provide—they gave them shelter, food, and clothing, and washed and comforted them—it was clear that they did not have the resources to do so for an extended period of time. Local authorities and national agencies were brought in to provide emergency services. Khofifah Indar Parawansa, minister of social affairs, promised Rp 2,3 billion (US\$177,000) from the national disaster fund to provide initial help.<sup>44</sup> Meanwhile, a number of countries, including Turkey and Qatar, promised substantial amounts of direct aid or special contributions to agencies dealing with the Rohingya, such as the IOM, to tackle the crisis.<sup>45</sup> These donations were needed because local

<sup>39</sup> See: UNHCR, “South-East Asia: Mixed Maritime Movements, April–June 2015,” <http://www.refworld.org/docid/55e6c1994.html>, accessed October 17, 2017; Amnesty International, “Deadly Journeys: The Refugee and Trafficking Crisis in Southeast Asia,” October 21, 2015, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/ASA21/2574/2015/en/>, accessed February 22, 2017.

<sup>40</sup> UNHCR, “Southeast Asia: Mixed Maritime Movements.”

<sup>41</sup> Sabrina Asril, “Panglima TNI Tolak Kapal Pengungsi Rohingya Masuk RI, tapi Bersedia Beri Bantuan,” *Kompas*, May 15, 2015.

<sup>42</sup> “Ministerial Meeting on Irregular Movement of People in Southeast Asia,” Joint Statement, May 20, 2015, Putrajaya, <https://reliefweb.int/report/myanmar/joint-statement-ministerial-meeting-irregular-movement-people-southeast-asia>, accessed December 8, 2017.

<sup>43</sup> Sara Schonhardt, “‘Boat People’ May Need Longer Stay in Indonesia, U.S. Official Says,” *Wall Street Journal*, June 3, 2015. For an indication of average waiting times, see Missbach *Troubled Transit*, 126.

<sup>44</sup> Faiz Nashrillah: “Indonesia Earmarks Rp 2.3 Billion for Rohingya Refugees,” *Tempo Online*, May 25, 2015, <https://nasional.tempo.co/read/669312/indonesia-earmarks-rp-2-3-billion-for-rohingya-refugees>, accessed January 29, 2018.

<sup>45</sup> See: “Turkey Pledges \$1 Million to Help Asia Migrant Crisis, Trying to Reach Stranded Migrants,” Associated Press, May 20, 2015; and “Qatar Pledges \$50 Million to Indonesia for Hosting Rohingya Refugees,” <http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/qatar-pledges-50-million-indonesia-hosting-rohingya-refugees-1053290332>, accessed February 22, 2017.



governments were prevented from using local budgets for any costs beyond emergency aid.<sup>46</sup>

Immediately after the Rohingya's arrival, volunteers all over Aceh from the newly founded Aliansi Aceh Peduli Rohingya started collecting donations on the streets and in the mosques.<sup>47</sup> As well as the many private donations and contributions of such things as food, clothing, and toys, there were symbolic gestures of hospitality, such as the charity concert to welcome the Rohingya given by Rafly Kande, Aceh's most popular musician,<sup>48</sup> which event also included a *Pemulia Jamee*.<sup>49</sup>

Elsewhere in Indonesia individuals and charity groups donated very generously for the Rohingya. Nuke Pudjiastuti, a long-term observer of refugee issues in Indonesia, observed that "never has a group of forced migrants in Indonesia seen so many donations and so much public support."<sup>50</sup> To manage the incoming aid for the Rohingya a consortium (Komite Nasional untuk Solidaritas Rohingya, KNSR) was established, which coordinated NGOs and charity groups involved in providing help and services. KNSR also lobbied strongly for the political rights of the Rohingya, urging the Indonesian government to apply diplomatic pressure on the Myanmar government to end the violence toward the Rohingya.<sup>51</sup>

### Hospitality and Hostility in Aceh

Initially the Rohingya were housed in emergency shelters, such as abandoned warehouses. Men were separated from women and children and the Rohingya were separated from those considered to be Bangladeshi migrants, who were not deemed in need of international protection and were to be repatriated.<sup>52</sup> As this emergency accommodation was not viable, four camps were established, under the jurisdiction of the city of Langsa and the districts of East Aceh and North Aceh.

The standard of services and procedures differed substantially across the four camps. While in Lhok Bani, near Lhokseumawe, Rohingya were accommodated in wooden barracks. In Bayeun, male Rohingya had to sleep in semi-open tents with no

<sup>46</sup> Ninditya, "Pemerintah Gelontorkan."

<sup>47</sup> Adi Warsidi, "Aktivis Aceh Bentuk Aliansi Peduli Rohingya," *Tempo*, May 19, 2015.

<sup>48</sup> "Rafly KanDe Gelar Konser Amal 'Peumulia Jamee' Peduli Rohingya," *Lintas Nasional*, June 5, 2015, <http://www.lintasnasional.com/2015/06/05/rafly-kande-gelar-konser-amal-peumulia-jamee-peduli-rohingya/>, accessed October 17, 2017.

<sup>49</sup> IRIN, *In Indonesia's Aceh*. "Pemulia Jamee" has several layers of meaning. It is used to express general ideas of hospitable treatment, and also more specifically for ceremonial elements within welcome rituals. Here it relates to a traditional dance called *ranup lampuan*, performed by women for guests, during which the guest is offered betel nut and the guests put some money into the bowl from which the nuts are offered. This dance is performed in Aceh at important gatherings, such as weddings. I am grateful to Ainul Fajri for her explanations.

<sup>50</sup> Tri Nuke Pudjiastuti, "Shelter versus Shielded Borders," *Inside Indonesia* 124 (2016).

<sup>51</sup> Observation from national workshop, "Tuntas menolong Rohingya," Jakarta, November 26, 2015.

<sup>52</sup> "Govt Starts to Repatriate Bangladeshi Refugees," *Jakarta Post*, July 24, 2015. The first so-called assisted voluntary repatriations started in June 2015, organized by the IOM, with special funding from Australia and the United States. By September 2015, more than six hundred people had been returned to Bangladesh; see IOM, "Bay of Bengal and Andaman Sea Crisis IOM Response, Situation Report, September 2015," <http://reliefweb.int/report/bangladesh/bay-bengal-and-andaman-sea-crisis-iom-response-situation-report-september-2015>, accessed February 22, 2017.

protection from the heat and the rain, while women and children were housed in brick houses. In Langsa, male Rohingya were housed in wooden barracks away from the city, while women and children were housed in the city, in a walled compound belonging to the Langsa local government. International visitors deemed the camps inadequate because of their “poor sanitation, insufficient protection from the elements, as well as unsanitary cooking facilities.”<sup>53</sup> Food, basic healthcare, and sanitation in the camps were mostly covered by IOM and the UNHCR.<sup>54</sup> Local, national, and international NGOs offered educational programs for children and adults, religious activities, and also some practical training (for example, gardening). Children were by far the main recipients of contributions and attention.<sup>55</sup>

The Rohingya were visited in the camps by their rescuers and other local Acehnese. Sometimes friendships formed and were manifested through the exchange of gifts. The camps were also a magnet for researchers and journalists from near and far. Several documentaries were made, capturing the friendly atmosphere between the Acehnese hosts and the Rohingya. For example, some Singaporean filmmakers made a movie called *Peumulia Jamee*, in which they hoped to “shed light on the love the Acehnese have showered on these strangers who are aliens in their homeland.”<sup>56</sup> No doubt, as in many other regions hosting displaced populations, hospitality in Aceh became, to a certain extent, a narrative that the media had woven together and which was rarely challenged by scholars.<sup>57</sup>

Meanwhile, reports also emerged about hostility toward the Rohingya in Aceh. In late September 2015, only four months into their stay, more than two hundred Rohingya stormed out of their camp near Lhokseumawe as tensions erupted following allegations of rape and beatings by locals.<sup>58</sup> Although the rape allegations could not be

<sup>53</sup> Amnesty International, “Deadly Journeys,” 33. Sources from NGOS and the local government in Aceh gave a very different picture. For example, KNSR’s Syuhelmaidi Syukur said: “These are the best shelters we have ever built.” Based on the existence of a site for religious worship, a health station, a playground, and the green environment, the shelter was deemed to be “worthy” (*layak*). See “Wagub Resmikan Shelter Rohingya Blang Adoe,” August 14, 2015, <http://www.acehprov.go.id/news/read/2015/08/14/2501/wagub-resmikan-shelter-rohingya-blang-adoe.html>, accessed March 2, 2017.

<sup>54</sup> See: IOM, “Bay of Bengal ... Situation Report, September 2015”; UNHCR Indonesia, “Response to the Rohingya Situation in Aceh and North Sumatera, February 2016,” <http://www.refworld.org/docid/58208e224.html>, accessed February 22, 2017.

<sup>55</sup> Thom, “The May 2015 Boat Crisis,” 53.

<sup>56</sup> “Documentary Reveals Acehnese Kindness toward Rohingya Refugees,” *Jakarta Post*, December 14, 2015.

<sup>57</sup> Estella Carpi, “Against Ontologies of Hospitality: About Syrian Refugeehood in Northern Lebanon,” October 27, 2016, <http://www.mei.edu/content/map/against-ontologies-hospitality-about-syrian-refugeehood-northern-lebanon>, accessed February 22, 2017. For the positive affect that media publicity about hospitality had on the self-image of a local population who saw themselves not as victims of the arriving refugees, but as helpers and heroes, see Kaarina Nikunen, “Hopes of Hospitality: Media, Refugee Crisis, and the Politics of a Place,” *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 19, 2 (2016): 161–76.

<sup>58</sup> Associated Press, “Alleged Rapes Prompt Rohingya Mass Walkout of Indonesia Camp,” September 29, 2015, <http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2015/9/29/alleged-rapes-prompt-rohingya-walkout-of-indonesia-camp.html>, accessed May 25, 2016. When the allegations were not substantiated, some members of the local NGOs got very agitated, saying that they intended to sue four women for defamation (interview with anonymous source, Blang Adoe, April 14, 2016). See also Tiba, “Committee to Report Rohingya Refugees.” In regard to the frequent occurrence of rape in refugee camps, also see Michel Agier, “Between War and City: Towards an Urban Anthropology of Refugee Camps,” *Ethnography* 3, 3 (2002): 317–41.

substantiated, they raised a number of tough questions about the personal safety and protection of the most vulnerable among the Rohingya and stirred up controversy about the role of local government agencies and NGOs operating in Lhokseumawe, especially about their authority and competence.<sup>59</sup> In other camps, such as in Kuala Langsa, Rohingya reported that villagers came into the camps demanding their share of aid deliveries, with threats of violence.<sup>60</sup> The media reported on additional incidents of hospitality turning into hostility. The special application of *sharia* law in Aceh also caused concern. For example, a local NGO organized marriage ceremonies for Rohingya in the camps as they found the cohabitation of unmarried males and female sinful. Among the brides were a number of girls who were allegedly underage.<sup>61</sup>

On my first visits to the camps in November 2015, I heard many complaints about the Rohingya from local volunteers and NGO staff, particularly about their “ungratefulness.” The Rohingya were seen as not appreciative enough of the shelter they were given and were blamed for willfully damaging things.<sup>62</sup> Some Rohingya had started to sell their care packages to villagers to raise some cash to buy phone credit, cigarettes, and betel nuts. While some Acehnese considered such behavior entrepreneurial,<sup>63</sup> most tended to condemn it as not complying with the unwritten rules of hospitality, suggesting that the Rohingya salesmen were unworthy guests.<sup>64</sup>

To prevent further tensions arising from the Acehnese villagers’ jealousy of the Rohingya, one NGO organized joint gatherings, such as a mass circumcision for Rohingya and poor local village boys.<sup>65</sup> Other initiatives to maintain or establish goodwill included joint small-scale farming projects, in which tasks and outcomes were supposed to be shared. When projects or initiatives did not work out the way their initiators had anticipated, the Rohingya beneficiaries were blamed for refusing to be “instructed” (*susah dilatih*) or “guided” (*susah diajar*).<sup>66</sup>

As time passed, most Rohingya in Aceh decided to leave the camps, so that in November 2015 only 372 remained.<sup>67</sup> Most of those who left were presumed to have

<sup>59</sup> Interview with Teuku Mansur, the head of social affairs, Lhokseumawe, November 20, 2015; and with several NGO members who preferred to remain anonymous, Blang Adoe, November 19, 2015.

<sup>60</sup> Thom, “The May 2015 Boat Crisis.”

<sup>61</sup> See: Amiruddin Abdullah Reubee, “18 Pasangan Pengungsi Rohingya Minta Menikah” [18 Rohingya Couples Request Marriage in Shelter], *Metrotvnews.com*, Lhokseumawe, August 4, 2015, <http://news.metrotvnews.com/read/2015/08/04/418232/18-pasangan-pengungsi-rohingya-minta-menikah>, accessed May 25, 2016; and “Warga Rohingya Ikut Nikah Massal di Aceh” [Rohingya Participate in Mass Wedding in Aceh], *Megapolitan.kompas.com*, August 30, 2015, <http://megapolitan.kompas.com/read/2015/08/30/16305311/Warga.Rohingya.Ikut.Nikah.Massal.di.Aceh>, accessed May 25, 2016.

<sup>62</sup> Rizka Argadianti Rachmah and Zico Efraindio Pestalozzi, *Barely Living: Research on Living Conditions of Rohingya Refugees in Indonesia* (Jakarta: SUAKA, 2016), 41. From my own observations I found that some barracks had no windows, thus Rohingya inhabitants made holes to let air and light in. A day before my visit, IOM and UNHCR’s offices and storage areas had been broken into at night, which was blamed on the camp inhabitants.

<sup>63</sup> “Topang Keluarga, Pengungsi Rohingya Berdagang Keliling,” *BBC Indonesia*, May 20, 2016, [http://www.bbc.com/indonesia/berita\\_indonesia/2016/05/160517\\_indonesia\\_rohingya\\_jualan](http://www.bbc.com/indonesia/berita_indonesia/2016/05/160517_indonesia_rohingya_jualan), accessed February 22, 2017.

<sup>64</sup> The notion of being a “worthy guest” is discussed in more detail by Katarina Rozakou, “The Biopolitics of Hospitality in Greece,” *American Ethnologist* 39, 3 (2012): 563.

<sup>65</sup> “31 Anak Rohingya Dikhitan Massal,” *Serambi Indonesia*, June 2, 2015.

<sup>66</sup> Interviews, Blang Adoe, April 10, 2016.

<sup>67</sup> UNHCR: Monthly Statistical Report Indonesia, November 30, 2015.

been smuggled to Malaysia by boat to reunite with family there or to seek work, which was unavailable in Indonesia.<sup>68</sup> Several of the Rohingya men had previously been to Malaysia and spoke some rudimentary Malay.<sup>69</sup> By April 2016, my second visit to Aceh, only 248 Rohingya remained in the camps.<sup>70</sup> Despite the dwindling numbers, a new refugee camp had been built in Timbang Langsa with financial help from some twenty organizations.<sup>71</sup> It offered a more permanent infrastructure and capacity for up to fifteen-hundred people, but the camp was used only for a short time. For both the local and national NGOs the Rohingya leaving was seen as half blessing (the task of providing services came to an end) and half vexation (much of their income derived from caring for the Rohingya).<sup>72</sup> In November 2016 the remaining 119 Rohingya were relocated to Medan in preparation for their resettlement in the United States.<sup>73</sup>

### **Equivocations of Hospitality: Ideals and Practices**

Hospitality—the relationship between host and guests—is usually premised upon the host receiving the guest with goodwill and providing for the guest’s wellbeing. At the first encounter and when coming in peace, there is an expectation that a guest will be honored and given certain privileges. Cultures around the world have developed complex rules and norms on how to receive visitors or strangers, even if they arrive uninvited. The fundamental underlying notion is reciprocity, or, as Homer wrote in the *Odyssey*: “A guest never forgets the host who had treated him kindly.”<sup>74</sup> An initial act of hospitality thus creates social bonds between the hosts and the hosted, based on highly complex social and political rules and obligations of giving and taking.

Indonesian sayings, such as “*tamu adalah raja*” (the guest is king), raise expectations for exceptionally good treatment. But not every guest is the same. There are invited guests, such as guests of honor at a wedding, and there are also uninvited guests, who show up without prior notice and often at a most inconvenient time. Another Indonesian proverb summarizes this notion: “*datang tidak dijemput pulang tidak diantar*” (somebody arrives without being picked up and leaves without being accompanied). Presumably this dismissal is reserved for guests of low social status

<sup>68</sup> Jonathan Vit, “Rohingya Refugees Vanish from Indonesia,” IRIN, December 14, 2015, <http://www.irinnews.org/report/102293/rohingya-refugees-vanish-indonesia>, accessed February 22, 2017.

<sup>69</sup> Rachmah and Pestalozzi, *Barely Living*.

<sup>70</sup> UNHCR: Monthly Statistical Report Indonesia, April 30, 2016.

<sup>71</sup> Bakri, “Pengungsi Rohingya Direlokasi,” *Serambi Indonesia*, March 20, 2016.

<sup>72</sup> Interview with Chairul Anwar, Assistant Deputy for Coordination for the Handling of Transnational Crime at the Coordinating Ministry for Political, Legal, and Security Affairs, Jakarta, April 25, 2016.

<sup>73</sup> See: Apriadi Gunawan, “US, UN Begin Rohingya Resettlement Process,” *Jakarta Post*, December 7, 2016; and Masriadi, “Desember 2016, Seluruh Warga Rohingya Selesai Dipindah ke Medan,” *Kompas*, November 20, 2016.

<sup>74</sup> Odysseus, however, killed the men who took his wife Penelope and enjoyed his wealth at his home in Ithaka during his ten-year absence. See also Gideon Baker, ed., *Hospitality and World Politics* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 2. Derrida, who described the ambivalences, contradictions, and outright paradoxes of hospitality like no other, coined the term “hostipitality,” merging the etymological roots of the guest (*hospis*) and enemy (*hostis*); see Jacques Derrida, “Hostipitality,” *Angelaki* 5, 3 (2000): 3–18. Candea and da Col were probably also influenced by the friend–enemy dualism, when they wrote that to refuse hospitality is like declaring war; see Candea and da Col, “The Return of Hospitality,” 2.

who do not really matter to the host, as they will contribute little to enhancing the host's social reputation through offering acts of hospitality.<sup>75</sup>

Relationships between hosts and guests are complex and often complicated, particularly if the visit lasts for too long and guests sap the host's resources, time, and patience. Even though they are not expected to contribute anything to the host immediately, their extended stay creates an imbalance. The crux of the matter lies in the temporal dimensions of hospitality, of course—how long should guests be treated “like a king”? Clearly, hospitality cannot be abstract or undifferentiated, or, in Matei Candea's words, “scale-free,” but needs to be approached pragmatically.<sup>76</sup> Hospitality, in order to function, requires that guests depart, as the relationship cannot afford guests overstaying a friendly welcome and reception. Such an understanding is widely reflected in the normative foundations of international relations, and reaches back to philosophers such as Immanuel Kant and his conceptions of perpetual peace and the law of nations that defines universal hospitality as a right of visit and of passage, but not a right to residence.<sup>77</sup> As Dikeç explains, offering rights to residence would imply the establishment of a home, which would then also require new laws to regulate the continuing presence of the guest-turned-resident and the sharing of goods and resources.<sup>78</sup> Understanding hospitality as a finite welcome makes it a two-fold obligation—of the host (temporary reception) and of the guest (timely departure). Jacques Derrida has explained that unconditional hospitality cannot be offered indefinitely, as that would drain the resources of the host, who would then lose the ability to offer hospitality to the guest any longer.<sup>79</sup>

The essential finiteness of hospitality was implicit in the thinking of Acehese rescuers. For example, one fisherman used the analogy of an injured bird to explain the nature of rendering help. “When you find its broken wing, you mend it. But when it heals, the bird would, of course, fly away. It will move on and your job was to simply provide for it when it most needed it.”<sup>80</sup> Hospitality was not seen as leading to permanent stay or integration, as this would require very different measures.<sup>81</sup>

<sup>75</sup> Candea and da Col, “The Return of Hospitality,” 10.

<sup>76</sup> Matei Candea, “Derrida en Corse? Hospitality as Scale-free Abstraction,” *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 18, special issue (2012): 34–48.

<sup>77</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Zum ewigen Frieden: ein philosophischer Entwurf* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1958).

<sup>78</sup> Mustafa Dikeç, “Pera Peras Poros: Longing for Spaces of Hospitality,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 19, 1–2 (2002): 233.

<sup>79</sup> See: Jacques Derrida, *Of Hospitality: Anne Dufourmantelle Invites Jacques Derrida to Respond*, trans. R. Bowlby (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 147; and Erin K. Wilson, “Protecting the Unprotected: Reconceptualising Refugee Protection through the Notion of Hospitality,” *Local-Global: Identity, Security, Community* 8, (2010): 100–22.

<sup>80</sup> “‘Honouring Guests’: How Aceh Welcomed Rohingya Refugees with Open Arms,” Channel NewsAsia, January 17, 2016, <http://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/singapore/honouring-guests-how-aceh/2371394.html>, accessed February 22, 2017.

<sup>81</sup> For details on traditional rules and customary practice (*adat*) for integrating immigrants and strangers, including adoption into local kinship groups, in other parts of Indonesia, such as the Moluccas, see Franz von Benda-Beckmann and Tanja Taale, “The Changing Laws of Hospitality: Guest Labourers in the Political Economy of Rural Legal Pluralism,” in *Law as Resource in Agrarian Struggles*, ed. F. von Benda-Beckmann, M. van der Velde, V.W.M.M. Ampt-Riksen (Wageningen: Agricultural University, 1992), 61–87.

To be viable, hospitality requires clear temporal boundaries, rules, and conditions, which more often than not favor the host, not the guest. Hospitality is essentially a reciprocal but asymmetrical relationship: the host honors the guest, but at the same time tries to keep the guest at bay.<sup>82</sup> Scrutinizing acts of hospitality not only reveals the rules applied to guests, but also how the hosts conduct themselves as a group.

### Facets of Hospitality in Aceh

Acehnese people take pride in their culture of *Peumulia Jamee*, which is grounded in giving wholeheartedly to the guest without expecting anything in return. Needless to say, such collective self-depictions of hospitality are not free from idealization. Nevertheless, as already emphasized, the treatment of the Rohingya in Aceh after the Andaman Crisis was, indeed, special compared to the treatment of other refugees in Indonesia. This raises questions about what compelled the Acehnese to respond so generously to human displacement and about the different motivations that drove their hospitality toward the Rohingya. Although there may be other motivations behind the extraordinary treatment of the Rohingya by the Acehnese, four facets of hospitality emerge as the most striking:

- hospitality as returning favors within the gift economy,
- hospitality as cosmopolitan aspiration,
- hospitality as a “weapon of the weak,” and
- hospitality as a means of NGOs’ income generation.

Needless to say, these four facets coexist and overlap, but will be dealt with individually in the following sections.

### Hospitality and the Gift Economy: Returning the Favor

Hospitality is usually subsumed under the broader logic of the gift economy.<sup>83</sup> Although the duty to help people in distress is a moral obligation connected to altruism, as nobody expects a rescued person to reimburse their rescuer, there are, of course, underlying expectations of reciprocity that keep the systemic exchange of help intact, and thus allow people living and working in disaster-prone environments and dangerous conditions to prevail in their risky livelihoods. When it comes to responsiveness, assistance, generosity, and unconditional help in situations of emergency, there has to be some give and take, but not immediately. In the Maussian vein, nobody can afford to be indebted to others permanently; hospitality must be more than one-directional philanthropy, as it sustains an entitlement to reciprocity over time. Yet, for the beneficiary (guest), the opportunity for directly reciprocating may not arise. Thus, the give and take does not need to be between rescuers and rescued or guest and host, as in the case of the Rohingya in Aceh. Rather, third parties can mediate some sort of overall balance or equity. Involving distant agents to take

<sup>82</sup> Rozakou, “The Biopolitics of Hospitality in Greece,” describes the power relations between hosts and guests in regard to space and ownership.

<sup>83</sup> Benjamin Boudou, “A Political Anthropology of Hospitality,” *Revue du MAUSS* 40, 2 (2012): 267–84.

care of social and material transactions and allowing generous timeframes for recompense is not unusual. In conversations with Acehese rescuers, their hope for compensation was often directed to fortune (*rejeki*) and the divine: "I can get that money [that the rescue cost me] back again from god when I go back to the sea. I believe God will help me get fish."

Acehese hospitality to the Rohingya extended beyond the moral, ethical, and religious duty to rescue the Rohingya stranded at sea and the subsequent emergency of the first days (frequently referred to as *masa panik*, or "time of panic"). However, providing for the Rohingya as more permanent guests was no longer the task of the rescuers, most of whom themselves live in precarious conditions. Responsibility for providing the Rohingya with a refuge was deemed to rest with the state.

Among ordinary Acehese, there was also a sense that helping the Rohingya was a chance to repay prior debts, that is, to achieve collective reciprocity, as many Acehese had been helped by others in times of need (*musibah*). Two points of reference for returning favors and repaying kindness came up frequently during conversations. The first was the enormous amount of international aid Aceh received following the 2004 tsunami for rebuilding things that had been destroyed.<sup>84</sup> The second was the Aceh conflict (1976–2005), during which tens of thousands escaped separatist violence in Aceh by crossing to Malaysia to find safety and work. Politically active Acehese also sought space there to launch political activities that might benefit the Acehese struggle for independence.<sup>85</sup> It was mostly proponents of independence who described their reliance on acts of hospitality in Malaysia and some other host countries, and also the difficulties associated with being in exile.

The crucial point here is that the gift economy depends on the shifting of roles over time. A person who is a refugee today might be a host tomorrow. The reciprocal gift can be delayed and need not be strictly equal, but refusing to offer any hospitality when possible is deemed a severe breach of conduct.<sup>86</sup> Thus, the failure of leading Acehese politicians, such as acting governor Zaini Abdullah, who had been a refugee in Sweden for many years, to show much interest in the Rohingya was perceived rather negatively. His politically estranged deputy, Muzakir Manaf (Muallem), who had spent many years in Malaysia, on the other hand, visited the camp sites frequently and took part in several official functions. At the opening of the campsite near Lhokseumawe, Muzakir Manaf was quoted as saying:

This is just a small example of how we can stand shoulder-to-shoulder and, by helping each other (*tolong menolong*), also help our Rohingya brothers and sisters to find somewhere to live that is worthy [*layak*]. In a nutshell, we are ready to offer maximum help to anybody who needs humanitarian aid.<sup>87</sup>

<sup>84</sup> For more details on reconstruction in Aceh, see: Jennifer Hyndman, *Dual Disasters: Humanitarian Aid after the 2004 Tsunami* (Sterling: Kumarian Press, 2011); and Matthew Clarke, Ismet Fanany, and Sue Kenny, eds., *Post-disaster Reconstruction: Lessons from Aceh* (Washington, DC: Earthscan, 2010).

<sup>85</sup> See: Ed Aspinall, *Islam and Nation: Separatist Rebellion in Aceh, Indonesia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009); and Antje Missbach, *Politics and Conflict in Indonesia: The Role of the Acehese Diaspora* (New York: Routledge, 2011).

<sup>86</sup> Candea and da Col, "The Return of Hospitality," 2.

<sup>87</sup> "Resmikan Shelter untuk Rohingya, Ini Kata Muzakir Manaf," *Aceh Terkini*, August 13, 2015, <http://www.acehterkini.com/2015/08/resmikan-shelter-untuk-rohingya-ini.html>, accessed February 23, 2017.



These public appearances served him well in gaining recognition as a politician. Yet, rumors were rife that some of the aid meant for the Rohingya was redistributed to the communities near the campsites in order to win their support for him in the upcoming local elections.

From these considerations, the crucial point to be drawn is that when hospitality is embedded in the gift economy, it shifts the obligation to help away from merely handing down charity toward enabling rights. Enabling rights, such as access to fair refugee-status-determination processes, access to health care and education, and the right to work, is not something that local communities can enable, but requires comprehensive state legislation. Hospitality as mere acts of care in the provision of accommodation, food, and recreational activities will be insufficient for asylum seekers and refugees, given their specific needs in the long run.

### Hospitality as Cosmopolitan Aspiration

Offering hospitality within the gift economy is never just a simple equation based on equally valued gifts. The gift of hospitality confers social status and honor on the giver in the eyes of the recipient and of non-involved observers. The notion of being “observed” and “paid attention to” from afar is not particularly unusual in Aceh, so public statements such as the following by Muzakir Manaf during the official inauguration of a shelter near Lhokseumawe are not uncommon: “By opening this shelter, the people of Aceh get to *show to the world* [my emphasis] that we are capable of helping our brothers who were afflicted [*tertindas*] and stranded in Aceh.”<sup>88</sup>

Two months later, Muzakir Manaf was quoted as saying “our sincerity in serving [*melayani*] and looking out for [*menjaga*] the refugees so far [has been] very good and appreciated *by the world* (*mendapat perhatian dan apresiasi dunia*) [my emphasis].”<sup>89</sup> The idea of being watched by the world, however, also played a role during the allegations of rape in one of the camps. One member of the local government said that the rape issue made them feel “bitten” (*sangat digigit*) and shameful (*malu*) because it was reported by national and international media.<sup>90</sup> But where does this alignment with the big wide world derive from and what part do the Rohingya play in it?

Acehnese cosmopolitanism is rooted in its long history of trade, religious exchange, and also warfare.<sup>91</sup> Unlike more secluded parts of Indonesia, Aceh is considered a place of interchange, as the so-called Veranda of Mecca; it is deemed an outpost of the Middle East and a gateway into the archipelago.<sup>92</sup> Acehnese

<sup>88</sup> “Resmikan Shelter untuk Rohingya.”

<sup>89</sup> Bakri Zainal, “Wakil Gubernur Aceh: Bila Rohingya Disatukan Lebih Mudah Melayani dan Menjaganya,” October 23, 2015, detikForum, <http://forum.detik.com/wakil-gubernur-aceh-bila-rohingya-disatukan-lebih-mudah-melayani-dan-t1282289.html>, accessed February 23, 2017.

<sup>90</sup> Interview with representatives of the district government, Lhokseumawe, November 18, 2015.

<sup>91</sup> See: Anthony Reid, *The Contest for North Sumatra; Atjeh, the Netherlands, and Britain, 1858–1898* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969) and *An Indonesian Frontier: Acehnese and Other Histories of Sumatra* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 2005); and Michael Feener, Patrick Daly, and Anthony Reid, eds., *Mapping the Acehnese Past* (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2011).

<sup>92</sup> Illustrations of Aceh’s former global connections and worldliness are easily encountered in present times. For example, the Acehnese flag resembles the former Ottoman flag; see Ismail Hakkı Göksoy,



cosmopolitanism is not only characterized as outward-looking, but also by its imagined strategic alignment with the great powers (India, China, and Europe, and the Arabic world), which, more often than not, is accompanied by high expectations for the international community to support Aceh.<sup>93</sup> At the end of the nineteenth century, the Acehnese fighting the colonial Dutch army pinned their hopes on the Turkish and the Americans. In the 1980s and 1990s, the exiled Gerakan Aceh Merdeka (GAM) leaders pinned their hopes on Western governments, expecting them to support GAM's plea for independence from Indonesia, but to no avail. Despite frequent disappointments in the past, the outward-looking orientation persists. Even young Acehnese often perceive Aceh as more deserving of attention than other places because, in their eyes, Aceh occupies a special position in the global order of deserving places. This expectation of support was reinforced by the huge presence in Aceh of donors and aid organizations after the tsunami.<sup>94</sup> With these historical underpinnings in mind, one can see that some acts of hospitality toward Rohingya were carried out to advance Aceh's reputation as *darussalam* (abode of peace)<sup>95</sup> and, therefore, that they constitute a kind of showing-to-the-world the worthiness of Aceh's cosmopolitan aspiration.

The consideration of Acehnese cosmopolitanism triggers a rethinking of the place and the positioning of strangers in the Acehnese cosmos. Recalling Kant's assumption that the right of hospitality is a cosmopolitan right, strangers are marked by their irreducible differences from their hosts and thus remain a "guest in a home not his own."<sup>96</sup> Yet again, Acehnese sentiments seem to run counter to this assumption because the very backbone of Acehnese ethnicity is ethnic pluralism and racially complex descent. As John Bowen has noted,

Acehnese have never thought of themselves as "indigenous"; the folk etymology of Aceh is "Arab, Cina, Eropa, Hindi," to indicate that the area has been a land of immigration of people from many corners of the world, whose common element is Islam.<sup>97</sup>

This folk etymology is encountered frequently in ordinary conversations in Aceh. The Acehnese claim cosmopolitan descent from all corners of the world, so to speak, but what is even more interesting is the potential inherent in this claim for integrating foreigners into the Acehnese society for good.

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"Ottoman-Aceh Relations as Documented in Turkish Sources," in Feener, Daly, and Reid, *Mapping the Acehnese Past*, 65–96.

<sup>93</sup> The other side of the coin of Acehnese cosmopolitanism, however, is strong anti-Indonesian/anti-Javanese sentiment. In fact, Aceh's long-standing animosity toward the central government in Jakarta and its collective longing for independence carry some rather chauvinistic and even racist undercurrents directed at other Indonesian people. The sentiments are based on an Acehnese assumption of moral and intellectual superiority over other Indonesians and were stimulated by GAM founder Hasan di Tiro (Aspinall, *Islam and Nation*, 71).

<sup>94</sup> Some US\$8 billion were pledged by the government to rebuild Aceh, of which about US\$4 billion were spent by April 2007; see Jonathan Benthall, "Have Islamic Aid Agencies a Privileged Relationship in Majority Muslim Areas? The Case of Post-tsunami Reconstruction in Aceh," *Journal of Humanitarian Assistance*, June 26, 2008.

<sup>95</sup> *Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam* was the official name of the province from 2001 to 2009.

<sup>96</sup> Baker, "Cosmopolitanism as Hospitality," 109.

<sup>97</sup> John Bowen, "Should We Have a Universal Concept of 'Indigenous Peoples' Rights?': Ethnicity and Essentialism in the Twenty-first Century," *Anthropology Today* 16, 4 (2000): 12–16.

In one of my discussions with fishermen in Aceh, I heard from a former GAM combatant about two Burmese fishermen who had been rescued from drowning during the Aceh conflict and who both stayed on in Aceh. For them, hospitality did not end but led to assimilation. The basis of their de facto integration was their military conscription by GAM. As the interlocutor explained, “we gave them weapons and showed them how to use them, they joined us [GAM] in the forest.”<sup>98</sup> Both also married Acehnese women. Although there is nothing specifically Acehnese about military service or marriage as possible pathways to membership in national communities, it is worth noting that the Acehnese were not averse to the possibility of long-term integration, at least for small numbers of people. In fact, members of KNSR stated in public that they would deem it desirable “if the Rohingya became part of the Acehnese society, and thus would cease to depend on aid from the people and the Acehnese government.”<sup>99</sup>

It should be noted that the Rohingya, unlike many other Muslim refugees from the Middle East coming to Indonesia, are not only Sunni but also have many other socio-cultural similarities with their Acehnese hosts, which could ease their integration.<sup>100</sup> Potential integration would bring hospitality to an end by means other than departure. Integration would definitely bring an end to the privileges enjoyed by guests, but they would exchange those privileges for the rights associated with belonging.

### Hospitality as Resistance: A “Weapon of the Weak”?

Aceh is known for its intense, century-long struggle for national independence against many opponents, including Dutch colonizers, Japanese occupiers, and Indonesian bureaucrats and military.<sup>101</sup> Assuming that hospitality is political practice *par excellence*,<sup>102</sup> the gestures of hospitality toward the Rohingya could be seen as acts of resisting the Indonesia state in the context of an overall culture of resistance in Aceh. As mentioned earlier, a number of interlocutors spoke quite freely of their own experience of displacement and how they had to seek asylum abroad (mostly in Malaysia) during the Aceh conflict. Besides reciprocating the generosity Acehnese experienced during their own exile, welcoming the Rohingya was an expression of political solidarity with an oppressed people (rather than simply humanitarian empathy). Political solidarity was expressed, for example, by petitions, such as that of Aliansi Masyarakat Aceh Peduli Rohingya, which urged the international community to pay more attention to the plight of the Rohingya.<sup>103</sup> Also, Indonesian (not just Acehnese) Muslim organizations urged the government in Jakarta to increase

<sup>98</sup> Interview with Amir Yusup, former guerrilla fighter, Seunuddon, April 12, 2016.

<sup>99</sup> “Wagub Resmikan Shelter Rohingya Blang Adee.”

<sup>100</sup> Missbach, *Troubled Transit*, 103.

<sup>101</sup> See: Aspinall, *Islam and Nation*; Anthony Reid, *The Blood of the People: Revolution and the End of Traditional Rule in Northern Sumatra* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1979); Tim Kell, *The Roots of Acehnese Rebellion, 1989–1992* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1995); and Michelle Ann Miller, *Rebellion and Reform in Indonesia: Jakarta’s Security and Autonomy Policies in Aceh, 1974–2009* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010).

<sup>102</sup> Boudou, “A Political Anthropology of Hospitality,” 267.

<sup>103</sup> Hasyim, “Aceh Keluarkan Petisi Selamatkan Rohingya,” *Serambi Indonesia*, May 23, 2015.

diplomatic pressure on the Myanmar government, particularly when violence flared up in Rakhine at the end of 2016.<sup>104</sup>

Putting aside the international political context, extending hospitality to the Rohingya in Aceh carried another, much more local and Aceh-specific political message, which could be described as “libidinality of lawlessness.”<sup>105</sup> Aceh’s political sphere is still permeated by individually and collectively expressed sentiments in favor of secession from Indonesia. Willful acts of hospitality that ignore the rules and orders and are not sanctioned by the central government provide a certain kind of “pleasure.” Many Acehnese are proud of their reputation as rebels and believe that challenging the central government is worthwhile. Despite their many defeats, they celebrate martial symbols and artifacts of their resistance.<sup>106</sup> Resisting the Indonesian state and its representatives may be through covert, subtle, and not-so-obvious acts of disobedience and, therefore, might be perceived as a “weapon of the weak.”<sup>107</sup> The obvious example of such resistance was disobeying the Indonesian navy commanders who had ordered the fishermen to not bring the Rohingya to shore. Dozens of Acehnese fishermen defied this order and went to sea to bring in two more boats with Rohingya on board. Suryadi of the fishermen’s association in Langsa explained:

We helped out of solidarity. If we find someone in the ocean, we have to help them no matter who they are. The police did not like us helping but we could not avoid it. Our sense of humanity was higher.<sup>108</sup>

A local NGO, Yayasan Geutanyoe (“Our Foundation”), nominated the Acehnese fishermen for the Nansen award for their civil disobedience and moral courage.<sup>109</sup> They did not receive the award in the end, but the nomination sent out a strong signal, because the fishermen who ignored military orders for the sake of a more universal sense of justice and righteousness were ennobled as *bandits d’honneur* even beyond Aceh.<sup>110</sup>

Other examples of small-scale resistance toward the central government included the issue of marriage. Although marriages between asylum seekers and Indonesian nationals are not allowed under the Indonesian Law on Citizenship, Acehnese officials

<sup>104</sup> “Konflik Rohingya, Pemerintah RI Harus Ambil Tindakan Nyata,” *Okezone News*, November 25, 2016, <http://news.okezone.com/read/2016/11/25/18/1551525/konflik-rohingya-pemerintah-ri-harus-ambil-tindakan-nyata>, accessed February 23, 2017.

<sup>105</sup> This term was used by Ghassan Hage during a talk he gave at the Australian National University, ca. 2009, on the pleasure of disobeying traffic regulations.

<sup>106</sup> Interview with Hermanto Hasan, Yayasan Geutanyoe, Langsa, April 14, 2016.

<sup>107</sup> James Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985).

<sup>108</sup> Kate Lamb, “‘We Helped Out of Solidarity’: Indonesian Fishermen Come to Aid of Boat Migrants,” *The Guardian*, May 18, 2015.

<sup>109</sup> “Aceh Fishermen Nominated for UN Award for Rescuing Migrants,” *Jakarta Post*, February 2016, 10.

<sup>110</sup> Also, in May 2015, Aliansi Masyarakat Aceh Peduli Rohingya (AMAPR), a local NGO, gave the Acehnese fishermen a token of appreciation for saving the “suffering boat people”; see Mukhlis, “AMAPR Beri Penghargaan Kepada Nelayan Aceh,” *Antara*, May 24, 2015. Their appeals to the provincial and national governments, however, to give the fishermen an award (*penghargaan setinggi-tingginya*) remained unfulfilled. However, US Ambassador Anne Richard, during one of her visits to the camps in Aceh, asked to meet the fishermen so that she could show her appreciation; see “Muzakir Manaf Dampingi Wamenlu AS Tinjau Pengungsi Rohingya di Aceh Utara,” June 3, 2015, [http://acehonline.info/mobile/detail.php?no\\_berita=11945](http://acehonline.info/mobile/detail.php?no_berita=11945), accessed February 23, 2017.

nevertheless made public statements that encouraged marriages between Rohingya and Acehnese.<sup>111</sup> Another, and perhaps more significant, example of small-scale resistance was the construction in October 2015 of the aforementioned semi-permanent housing complex for the Rohingya near Langsa (with the financial support of the UNHCR and many NGOs) when the numbers of Rohingya and Bangladeshi had already fallen to 475.<sup>112</sup> On the one hand, it could be claimed that the proponents of the new shelter in Aceh were forward-looking in anticipating the imminent arrival of more asylum seekers. On the other hand, the opening of new shelters for asylum seekers and refugees near Acehnese villages offered the possibility of extended stays and even rudimentary forms of social and economic integration, options to which the Indonesian government strongly objected. Ignoring the one-year deadline imposed in May 2015 by the central government that demanded Aceh remain a site of interception (or transit) and not become a site of residence, Muhammad Thaib (alias Cek Mad), a former GAM combatant and now local district head (*bupati*) in Langsa, offered to continue to host the Rohingya for up to eight years.<sup>113</sup> Such offers were in open contravention of government pleas, as representatives in Jakarta had repeatedly urged the UNHCR to process the Rohingya in Aceh faster than asylum seekers elsewhere in Indonesia.<sup>114</sup>

Testing whether the local government could proceed with the construction of the relatively permanent shelters might have helped its proponents determine the political space that was available for maneuvering under Aceh's special autonomy regulations. Any prohibition or restriction of such plans could easily have been interpreted as proof of Aceh's ongoing lack of freedom to self-rule within Indonesia's current political configuration. After all, to provide hospitality, the host requires enough authority to act as host (*tuan rumah*; literally, landlord) and to possess the basic sovereignty of a home,<sup>115</sup> which many Acehnese consider they lack even under special regional autonomy. Nevertheless, the construction of the shelter in Timbang Langsa went ahead and, in March 2016, a few dozen remaining Rohingya moved in. The Langsa local government even allowed some Rohingya children to attend class in a state-funded primary school, whereas access to education in state school is usually not granted.<sup>116</sup>

<sup>111</sup> "Tidak Ada Salahnya Warga Aceh Menikah dengan Muslim Rohingya," *Fajar*, August 13, 2015.

<sup>112</sup> See: "Shelter Rohingya Mulai Dibangun," *Serambi Indonesia*, October 30, 2015; UNHCR Indonesia, *Response To the Rohingya Situation in Aceh and North Sumatera*, February 2016; and UNHCR Indonesia, *Monthly Statistical Report*, October 2015.

<sup>113</sup> Irmansyah D Guci, "Ini Kata Bupati Cek Mad Tentang Pengungsi Rohingya," *Portalsatu*, February 6, 2016. Early, Cek Mad had stated that he wished the Rohingya to live independently (*mandiri*). ("Cek Mad: 'Impian Saya Pengungsi Rohingya Bisa Mandiri'," August 12, 2015, accessed February 23, 2017, <https://act.id/id/whats-happening/view/1910/cek-mad:-%22impian-saya-pengungsi-rohingya-bisa-mandiri%22>).

<sup>114</sup> Rachmah and Pestalozzi, *Barely Living*, 29.

<sup>115</sup> Candeia, *Derrida en Corse?* 40.

<sup>116</sup> Dedek, "Wasatgas Pengungsi Kota Langsa: Pendidikan Tidak Mengenal Batas Negara," May 3, 2016, <http://m.goaceh.co/berita/baca/2016/05/03/wasatgas-pengungsi-kota-langsa-pendidikan-tidak-mengenal-batas-negara>, accessed February 23, 2017. To put this achievement into perspective, only six Rohingya children (clad in the red-and-white Indonesian school uniform) went to school, not for six days a week but only for three; see Suriatno, "Enam Bocah Rohingya Masuk SDN 3 di Langsa," *Serambi Indonesia*, March 30, 2016.

### Hospitality as Income Generation for NGOs

While the motivations for offering hospitality discussed above more or less relate to hospitality that comes to an end at a particular point in time because it is no longer needed, the last facet of hospitality considered here does the opposite by seeking to prolong the stay of those receiving the hospitality. As mentioned earlier, it is only in Aceh that dozens of NGOs are involved in handling asylum seekers and refugees to any great extent. While other asylum seekers and refugees coming to Indonesia are also Muslim, the Rohingya, as a persecuted religious minority, receive much greater sympathy for their plight.<sup>117</sup>

The involvement of NGOs in the global aid industry is a complex matter and often follows pathways that are swayed by external agendas and pressure for funding and financial viability. Indonesian charity organizations have established sophisticated online and offline donation systems and the willingness of Indonesians to donate is high, partly because of the religious practice of giving alms.<sup>118</sup> To keep donations flowing, narratives of “Muslim solidarity” had to be nurtured, and the helplessness of the Rohingya was often emphasized publicly through harrowing images of the ongoing conflict in Rakhine. The neediness of the Rohingya in Aceh enabled some NGOs to thrive, but this facet of hospitality cemented the Rohingya’s status as victims and “eternal guests.” The refugees’ dependency, then, becomes the *raison d’être* for the NGOs that provide them with aid and services. Some NGOs saw their involvement as reaching beyond care to such things as empowerment and education.<sup>119</sup>

Given the massive financial contributions that flooded Aceh like a tsunami of another kind after the disaster in 2004, NGOs operating in Aceh have gathered much experience in running projects and learned how to attract donations from domestic donors and their foreign counterparts.<sup>120</sup> For the many aid networks that are still in place and currently looking for new fields of engagement, refugee issues hold promising potential. An anecdote from a refugee advocate from Jakarta serves as an illustration of this appropriation. One of his PowerPoint presentations on the need for refugee protection in Indonesia took on a life of its own once it started to circulate in Aceh without his consent. Somehow his slides had been copied, recycled, and modified into a proposal by a local NGO that was seeking funding from a district government in Aceh for a number of activities for refugees.<sup>121</sup> Generally, one could take a pragmatic stance here, namely, that there is nothing wrong with such NGOs and their creative fund-raising as long as the asylum seekers and refugees benefit from such activities. Problems arise, however, when NGOs campaign on behalf of their “brethren in need” and then spend money allocated to their cause for completely

<sup>117</sup> Pudjiastuti, “Shelter versus Shielded Borders.” Whereas Australian solidarity for refugees in Indonesia has mostly centered around the Hazara, in Indonesia the Rohingya have mattered most.

<sup>118</sup> For example, see Uyang, “Bantu Rohingya, Masyarakat Indonesia di Jepang Salurkan Donasi ke Dompot Dhuafa,” June 2015, <http://www.dompetdhuafa.org/post/detail/1063/bantu-rohingya-masyarakat-indonesia-di-jepang-salurkan-donasi-ke-dompot-dhuafa>, accessed February 23, 2017.

<sup>119</sup> Interview with Mustafa, Aksi Cepat Tanggap (ACT), Jakarta, November 21, 2015.

<sup>120</sup> In Banda Aceh alone there were 180 international NGOs in June 2005; see Benthall, “Have Islamic Aid Agencies a Privileged Relationship in Majority Muslim Areas?”

<sup>121</sup> Anonymous informant, personal communication, May 2015.

different purposes.<sup>122</sup> Several NGOs openly stated that they redirected some of the surplus donations to nearby villages to improve relations among the Rohingya, the locals, and the NGOs.<sup>123</sup> The funding made available by NGOs was attractive to local government officials not only for the ongoing support of the Rohingya, but also for spin-offs involving locals from whom officials could skim unofficial income.<sup>124</sup> Rumors were rife of local politicians having tapped into the Rohingya funds to finance their election campaigns.<sup>125</sup> For example, several NGO members reported that not all of the cows and goats intended for the Rohingya and villagers near the camps during *Idul Fitri* (the end of the fasting month) actually arrived.<sup>126</sup> Fierce competition for slowly receding donations caused NGOs' representatives in Aceh to bad-mouth each other in interviews. Furthermore, the lack of coordination and cooperation among NGOs operating in the camps resulted in poor standards in the services and aid that they did provide.<sup>127</sup>

The involvement of NGOs in handling the Rohingya also caused problems with local government officials. In Lhokseumawe, the clash between one NGO and the local government was particularly noticeable: local officials complained about that NGO's misdeeds and interference in daily proceedings (e.g., camp routines and schedules), while suspecting that the NGO enjoyed the protection of former GAM combatants now in power at the provincial level. Nevertheless, government officials had to work with the NGO, because the local government had no budget for accommodating the Rohingya or for conducting any activities for them.<sup>128</sup>

In contrast to the negative experiences in Lhokseumawe, the relationship between the local government and NGOs in Langsa proceeded much more smoothly. Weekly meetings were held throughout the months and even resulted in the publication of a guidebook for standard operating procedures, outlining lessons learned from Aceh to serve as a blueprint for managing asylum seekers and refugees effectively in the future.<sup>129</sup> Many NGOs considered their contributions in Lhokseumawe to be a great success and as a way forward in promoting better treatment of asylum seekers and refugees. Some NGOs were proactive in promoting the Aceh experience as a

<sup>122</sup> Aceh is not unique in this regard, as embezzlement of refugee funds by NGOs and misallocation by local administrations of resources meant to benefit asylum seekers and refugees, as well as the involvement of organized crime in migrant reception sites, have been reported elsewhere. For the "Sicilian way," see Adam Kersch and Joanna Mishtal, "Asylum in Crisis: Migrant Policy, Entrapment, and the Role of Non-governmental Organisations in Siracusa, Italy," *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 35 (2016): 97–121.

<sup>123</sup> Interview with Mustafa.

<sup>124</sup> During my second visit in Aceh, members of a local Rohingya taskforce invited me to a barbecue. They wanted to grill a goat, which seemed a little out of the ordinary. A taskforce member explained, however, that they did this regularly as a team-building exercise, which suggested that they must have been cashed-up (financially secure).

<sup>125</sup> Interviews with various NGO staff, Banda Aceh, April 9, 2016. In particular, the vice governor, Muzakir Manaf, was suspected of relying on some NGOs. People repeated rumors that NGOs that work for him are like "his bait (*umpang*)," as he was trying to buy the support of nearby villages by providing financial contributions (*memperdayakan masyarakat sekitar*).

<sup>126</sup> Several informal interviews, Blang Adoe, November 18, 2015.

<sup>127</sup> Thom, "The May 2015 Boat Crisis," 53.

<sup>128</sup> Confidential interviews with members of an international NGO, Langsa, April 13, 2016.

<sup>129</sup> Rina Wijaya, *Operational Guideline Humanitarian Aid Management for Refugees in Langsa City and East Aceh District* (Yogyakarta: Jogja Bangkit Publisher, 2016).

model for use by governments of ASEAN member states.<sup>130</sup> Central government representatives did not, however, share their enthusiasm and did not consider the Acehese model, especially the widespread involvement of NGOs, sustainable. They tolerated their involvement for the time being, because NGOs could provide funding, but the central government would have preferred higher levels of coordination and control.<sup>131</sup>

### Hospitality: An Answer, but not a Solution

American novelist Edgar Watson Howe once suggested that “to be an ideal guest, stay at home.”<sup>132</sup> This is clearly not an option for people who are persecuted and must flee for their lives. If forcibly displaced people cannot find permanent residence through immediate resettlement in a safe country, they must rely on temporary, in-transit hospitality from host countries, where conditions may be far from ideal. Even the imperfect, and at times hostile, hospitality of the Acehese is better than what the Rohingya face in their country of origin.

The interlude of the Rohingya in Aceh has been extraordinary compared to the treatment of asylum seekers and refugees in other Indonesian provinces. In this article I have tried to explain the peculiarities of Acehese hospitality with the help of four lines of reasoning: hospitality as part of a gift economy, hospitality as cosmopolitan aspiration, hospitality as a “weapon of the weak,” and hospitality as a source of revenue for NGOs. What these four lines of reasoning hold in common are certain self-interests, which perpetuate all kinds of political, material, reputational, and moral interests in Aceh. By demonstrating the underlying motivations behind Acehese hospitality vis-à-vis the Rohingya, a hospitality that others have often described as selfless, I instead try to raise awareness about the pitfalls of such idealistic assumptions, as no form of hospitality can substitute for the much-needed protection afforded by the state through a consistent framework that is rights-based and legally binding.

From the day the first Rohingya arrived in Aceh, a long-term option for them was always questionable and assumed to be unsustainable. Their stay came to an end, not because Aceh’s hospitality toward them expired, but because most of the Rohingya opted to clandestinely depart from Aceh to Malaysia. The collective “escape” from the Acehese camps could also be interpreted as an attempt to avoid “domesticating conditionalities by the host.”<sup>133</sup> After all, life in the camps was characterized by rules, sanctions, control, supervision, and top-down edification of the Rohingya. Confined to

<sup>130</sup> Interview with members of Yayasan Geutanyoe, Langsa, April 13, 2016. See also: Ihan Nurdin, “SOP Pencari Suaka di Langsa Diharapkan Jadi Contoh bagi Negara ASEAN,” *Portalsatu*, December 24, 2015, <http://portalsatu.com/berita/sop-pencari-suaka-di-langsa-diharapkan-jadi-contoh-bagi-negara-asean-3734>, accessed February 23, 2017; and Yayasan Geutanyoe, *Hidup dalam penantian: Setahun pengungsi Rohingya di Aceh* 2016; and Ansori et al., *Managing Refugee Crisis in Southeast Asia*, 101.

<sup>131</sup> Interview with Andi Rachmianto, director, International Security and Disarmament under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Jakarta, April 19, 2016.

<sup>132</sup> Edgar Watson Howe, *Country Town Sayings: A Collection of Paragraphs from the Atchison Globe* (Topeka: Crane and Co, 1911), 15.

<sup>133</sup> Gideon Baker, “Cosmopolitanism as Hospitality: Revisiting Identity and Difference in Cosmopolitanism,” *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* 34, 2 (2009), 109.

campsites and prohibited from earning a living, many Rohingya might have felt that their hosts' initial compassion had gradually turned into repression, and that they, the Rohingya, had been taken hostage by the host, on whose goodwill they had relied on for too long and whose house rules they could no longer tolerate. The Rohingya's decision to move on could be seen as a rejection of the "gift of hospitality" offered by the Acehnese.<sup>134</sup> Nevertheless, given that many of the Rohingya moved on to Malaysia, which has no comprehensive refugee policy either, and where the Rohingya once again relied on basic forms of hospitality, it is perhaps better to frame their departure from Aceh along the lines of personal choice rather than rejection of unsatisfactory hospitality.<sup>135</sup> When living in a prolonged state of uncertainty, insecurity, and socio-legal exclusion, even the smallest self-determined change or promise of betterment, such as onward migration, is a reaffirmation of some notion of autonomy over one's own life and a reclamation of social vitality from being in stasis. Those who did not depart clandestinely were relocated to Medan with the hope of being resettled eventually.

By trying to portray fairly both sides of the hospitality coin (i.e., both the spontaneous friendly welcome and the gradual increase of tensions, if not hostilities), I hope to have demonstrated the need for Indonesia to find a more comprehensive, systemic way of dealing with displaced populations coming to its territory in search of protection. As long as the legal lacuna in provisions for handling asylum seekers and refugees persists (e.g., the lack of consistent laws, comprehensive policies, and funding), refugee protection in Indonesia will remain inadequate. Even the recently issued Presidential Decree (No 125/2016) did not resolve key questions or address critical needs. In particular, the relationship between the central government and regional authorities at the provincial and district levels lacks clarity.<sup>136</sup>

The temporary services and relief programs offered by NGOs and other non-state actors hardly goes beyond short-term humanitarian assistance. Such well-intentioned solidarity cannot compensate in a sustainable and holistic way for the lack of law and policies; or, in Feldman's words, "humanitarianism is an indication of failure—failure of states to protect."<sup>137</sup> Rather than having NGOs step up and fill in the gaps, Indonesia needs to embrace its responsibilities as a state and end the policy stalemate by offering more permanent options for legal residence in Indonesia. After all, the Andaman Crisis of 2015 might not be the last of its kind. It is to be expected that other displaced people will continue to come to Indonesia and the renewed exodus of tens of thousands of Rohingya from Rakhine in late August 2017 only supports this appeal.

<sup>134</sup> Rozakou, "The Biopolitics of Hospitality in Greece," 566.

<sup>135</sup> Rohmatin Bonasir, "Malaysia Sayangkan Pengungsi Rohingya Lari dari Aceh," BBC Indonesia, February 24, 2016, [http://www.bbc.com/indonesia/dunia/2016/02/160223\\_dunia\\_pengungsi\\_rohingya\\_aceh](http://www.bbc.com/indonesia/dunia/2016/02/160223_dunia_pengungsi_rohingya_aceh), accessed February 23, 2017.

<sup>136</sup> Yunizar Adiputera, Antje Missbach, and Atin Prabandari, "Indonesian Cities and Regencies May Be Asked to Shelter Refugees—Will They Comply?" *The Conversation*, September 7, 2017, <https://theconversation.com/indonesian-cities-and-regencies-may-be-asked-to-shelter-refugees-will-they-comply-82734>, accessed September 15, 2017.

<sup>137</sup> Ilana Feldman, "What Is a Camp? Legitimate Refugee Lives In Spaces of Long-term Displacement," *Geoforum* 66 (2015): 244–52.