Responses to Tsunami and War Trauma Through the Musical Arts in Aceh, 2005–2012[1]

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ABSTRACT

This article traces the musical responses to the Acehnese people's trauma, i.e., the emotional wounds caused by their stressful and life-threatening experiences resulting from (1) the conflict between the Aceh independence movement and the Indonesian army in 1976–2005 and (2) the tsunami that hit its western and northern shores in 2004. Some devastated performing groups were reformed, or new ones created, by key people who initiated them and taught children to perform the traditional dances and music. After the conflict ceased in 2005 joyous villagers started performing again at weddings and other life event celebrations that they had postponed due to the frequent curfews. Convinced of the healing properties of the arts, performing groups performed war and tsunami-related songs and composers wrote songs to poetry that expressed the victim's trauma. In the years following the tsunami the national and local media broadcast emotional songs expressive of the people's losses and grief, and government organised commemorations and festivals to encourage the victims and others from all over the province to perform therapeutic music and dance. This Acehnese study suggests that when a people experience not just one but two disasters that the effects of

the second can partly displace the first and bring about gradual resolution of both trauma, but only if determined, prolonged efforts are made to resolve them over time.

Keywords: *tsunami, war, trauma relief, peace songs, competitions, festivals*

INTRODUCTION

In 2004, the people of Aceh were suffering from severe social deprivation and widespread trauma due to their civil conflict between the Indonesian Army and the Free Aceh movement (Gerakan Aceh Merdeka, GAM), beginning in 1976. Constant fighting and frequent curfews had greatly reduced the amount of time and energy that the affected communities could spend on rehearsals and performances of the traditional music, dance and bardic arts. Many weddings and similar events that usually included artistic performances had been cancelled or postponed in the hope that they would someday enjoy a period of peace. The emotional and psychological wounds that had led to the people's trauma resulted from decades of extremely stressful, life-threatening experiences and the seeming despair that peace would ever be achieved.[2]

To compound the Acehnese people's war-induced misery, the Indian Ocean tsunami struck Aceh's west and north shores on 26 December 2004. Populations of some coastal villages disappeared, while others counted only a few survivors, and the horror of the event left many in a more fragile psychological state than ever. As expressed in the song *Indonesia Menangis* (Indonesia Weeps, Transcription 2), many devout *ulama* (Muslim religious leaders) and other Acehnese saw the disaster as being Allah's punishment for their sins, especially for killing other Muslims in the armed conflict. Some community leaders also blamed the people's reduced respect for Acehnese traditional customs, quoting the Acehnese proverb: "If we lose our children we at least know where they are buried, but if we lose our traditional customs (*adat*), we shall never find them again."[3]

The Meulaboh choreographer and dance pedagogue Ibu Cut Asiah also put the traumatic dual disaster down to the people's neglect of *reusam nibak Meukuta Alam* (the traditional customs) whose roots go back to the Golden Age of Sultan Iskandar Muda in the 17th century (pers. comm., April 2010).[4] As she expressed it, not only the glorious past but also optimism for the future are encapsulated in Aceh's performing art traditions performed at life event ceremonies and national and Muslim holy day celebrations. Whatever disasters may befall the Acehnese, she said, their customs and religion must remain strong.

The great tsunami waves were caused by a large earthquake that measured 9.3 on the Richter scale, the fourth largest in a century. It jolted a 1,200-kilometre expanse of ocean floor and shook the entire planet by up to a centimetre. The blast that was unleashed created a wall of water three storeys high and it travelled a fifth of the way around the earth at speeds of up to 600 km/hour (Hume 2009: 17). An estimated 167,736 Indonesians—mostly Acehnese—died, including almost a third of the population of the capital, Banda Aceh. The tsunami, like the war, resulted in a massive death rate, the widowing of thousands of men and women, and the orphaning of thousands of children. In 2008 there were an estimated 80,000 orphans in Aceh, that is, 3% of the population. Sixty nine thousand children lost their fathers and 7,000 lost their mothers, with the motherless orphans being worse off by far (Vignato 2008: 3). An estimated two-thirds of deaths from the tsunami were female; and 21.1% of tsunami-related deaths were under 10 years of age (Rofi 2006: 340–350). Almost a thousand registered artists died, and most of the personnel and equipment of scores of art troupes and schools on the west and north coasts were wiped out.

The unprecedented international response to the disaster raised more than $7 billion in aid (Thorburn 2008: 1–3). For the first time in decades, Aceh opened its borders to foreign expertise to help in the rebuilding. Sixteen thousand foreign personnel entered the formerly closed province, bringing ships, aircraft and a floating hospital. In many cases, foreign and Indonesian military forces had to make amphibious landings and then to bulldoze roads to reach communities who were suffering from a state of shock, grief and bewilderment.

Barracks and tent cities were established to house the 400,000 homeless, who were so dispirited that many were barely able to function. Apart from the mammoth task of rebuilding immense areas that the tsunami had razed to the ground, the survivors had to grapple with problems caused by the collapse of the economy and social and marital breakdown. Many health professionals and aid workers reported widespread post-tsunami trauma that stemmed from feelings of guilt based on the traditional belief that a body must be buried by a family relative, yet in many cases no body remained for the relative to bury.

Beyond Aceh, the massive loss of life so shocked the world that international pressure was applied to end the fighting and to allow the post-tsunami reconstruction to proceed. After the separatist movement had declared a cease-fire on 28 December 2004, the Indonesian government and army did the same, whereupon the two parties resumed their peace talks. On 15 August 2005, they signed a peace agreement, citing the tsunami as a major factor that allowed the talks to succeed.

To manage the many aid commitments that followed the tsunami, the Indonesian government established the Agency for Implementation of the Rehabilitation and Reconstruction of Aceh and Nias for the period 2005–2009 (Thorburn 2008). Hundreds of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) were allowed to bring in extensive resources to help reconstruct the people's housing and the roads and other communications, and to take measures to restore the people's physical and mental health. The national and international media expressed sympathy for the people's misery and helped to raise funds for the victims by performing, broadcasting and televising traditional Acehnese laments, traditional dance music, and popular songs with appropriate texts.

The aid, however, was distributed unevenly and often failed to reach the very poor and bereft. Very few schools that had lost their teachers, pupils, plant and equipment received any aid. They had to start again from scratch, replenishing their membership with novice artists and less experienced teachers, and replacing their lost equipment with anything they could make, or find.[5] Some NGOs provided opportunities for teenage and child survivors in

the camps and barracks to engage in music, dance, and art therapy by local Acehnese and foreign artists. For example, the International Medical Corps aimed to help some teens and children to heal by preparing them to participate in a festival of arts for 4,500 participants on 6 July, and the UNESCO office in Jakarta engaged in similar activity, including sponsoring a cultural performance on 9 May 2006.

Due to the war, the Acehnese had been prevented from properly practicing their arts and traditional customs. Yet as is argued below, it was largely through the arts and traditional customs that the conflict and tsunami survivors were able to heal.

Some mechanisms that the Acehnese used to cope with their trauma, such as accepting aid and attending therapeutic classes of art, music and dance are applicable in principle to those applied in traumatic situations elsewhere, as in Kosovo in the 1990s (Pettan 2003). However, the explosion of world publicity about the tsunami and the Indonesian government's all-out effort to help Acehnese in their plight were unusual by world disaster relief standards. Unlike in Sri Lanka where the tsunami did not bring the war to a halt (and it still continues at the time of writing), the Acehnese experience of the tsunami and war-weariness led to their acclaimed peace accord and a strong desire to overcome the trauma and maintain a lasting peace. Another distinctive facet of the Acehnese situation after the tsunami struck was the widespread expression of sympathy from other Indonesians, as expressed in the song "Indonesia Weeps" (Transcription 2). Such outpourings of grief and offers of help from across Indonesia certainly helped the Acehnese people to resolve the anti-Indonesian feeling caused by Army abuse among their ranks during the conflict, and to regain a sense of being part of the nation of Indonesia as they accepted the peace accord. Ever since the tsunami, Acehnese leaders stressed that the road to recovery lay in greater adherence to religion and the teachings of the ancestors.

Acehnese artists and some Indonesian and foreign music therapists employed by NGOs also acted on the assumption that music, dance and other arts that express tenets of traditional customs and religion can communicate with and heal trauma sufferers where

words fail, even among those who are thought to be unreachable due to their unspeakable traumatic experiences. As music therapists have shown through many international case studies (e.g., Sutton 2002: 2),[6] trauma victims can achieve closure and overcome their fears through carefully planned exposure to the sensory experience of music and other arts, whether performing themselves or simply responding to artistic expressions through listening or watching. Like the performing arts, particular visual art works can represent the effects of trauma in a tasteful, creative fashion, as shown by the imaginative drawings of child victims of the tsunami in the Tsunami Museum in Banda Aceh.

How is it, then, that works of art afford human beings solace and comfort in times of need? As trauma is an extremely sensory experience, its victims can be particularly sensitive to the emotional effects that are obtainable through artistic creativity, expression and experience. Human beings can in fact view works of art as "objective versions of our own pains and struggles, evoked and defined in sound, language or image. They present our experiences more poignantly and intelligently than we have been able…they explain our condition to us, and thereby help us to be less lonely with, and confused by it" (De Botton 2001: 199).

The few scholarly publications that touch on music and trauma in a Southeast Asian context are limited to peripheral aspects of the study of wars in the region. They include Jamieson's references to a leading Vietcong musician in the Vietnam War (Jamieson 1993: 326), Wang Feng Ng's Singaporean perspective on music therapy for war trauma and peace (Wang 2005), and Kartomi's study of music used by government, the resistance, civilians and NGOs who tried to de-traumatise and reintegrate ex-combatants, widows and orphans during wars in Aceh (Kartomi 2010b: 456–473). Vignato (2008) briefly mentioned the arts in her discussion of efforts made to reintegrate female ex-combatants and orphan children into post-conflict Acehnese society, while a team of scholars have assessed the psycho-sociological needs of select conflict-affected districts in Aceh (Good et al. 2007). Other writers have focussed on music therapy for children as victims of trauma in other areas of the world appeared (e.g., Gilbert 1996; Grinblat 2002; Hussey et al. 2008). Acehnese and foreign

authors have written extensively on aspects of Aceh's religious and secular performing arts (e.g., Isjkarim et al. 1980–81; Amir 2005; Kartomi 2006; 2010a), but apart from Acehnese laments that have been sung in wars throughout the past 130 years and sung non-stop on the media after the tsunami (Kartomi 2010b: 460–466), very little has been written on their role in trauma therapy, despite the fact that religion and the religious-oriented performing arts have played an important role in societal recovery after the tsunami and the conflict.

I shall now discuss some examples of arts therapy that NGOs engaged in as they tried to treat, relieve or heal the trauma of victims living in the displaced persons' camps and among communities more generally. I shall then discuss the private, local troupes of artists' (*sanggar*) efforts to restore their music and dance activity and teaching, noting that the hundreds of NGOs and government agencies operating in post-tsunami Aceh needed to focus primarily on providing housing, road- and bridge-building services (Thorburn 2007) and were only occasionally able to devote resources to assist in the artistic redevelopment. After commenting on some commercial groups' successes in selling performances and recordings of tsunami- and conflict- related songs, I shall discuss some newly created films about the tsunami and the trauma it caused. Finally, I shall comment on the government's arts- and religion-led activities, including the annual tsunami commemorations and the "Program for the Socialisation of Peace and Reintegration in Aceh" in 2008–2009, which aimed to "restore the energy for the growth and development of Acehnese culture which almost died out in the decades of conflict," partly through a "songs for peace" competition.

NGO ACTIVITIES

From 2005 Indonesian and foreign NGOs used music, dance and art therapy in the enormous task of aiding the recovery of survivors from conflict or tsunami trauma, or both, especially in the displaced persons' camps[7] and in peace advocacy work. However, national economic and political conditions directly reduced "…the requisite support for music therapy services" (Wang 2005: 1), and the great majority of direct and indirect victims of Aceh's war and tsunami failed to receive any arts therapy at all.

Some of the NGOs that employed traditional artists to perform for and teach the arts to tsunami victims also commissioned instrument-makers, especially frame-drum (*rapa'i*) makers, to produce replacement instruments. They also employed seamstresses to make and embroider new dance costumes for the depleted troupes in many villages. Aid from the Turkish government reconstructed a destroyed village, providing a *meunasah* (male prayer or meeting house), mosque and new rehearsal and classroom space among the new houses for homeless families. However, in most villages buildings that could be used for rehearsals and classes were not reconstructed, which severely limited the return to normal music making and dance classes for young artists.

As local Acehnese and foreign teachers in the 21 United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) child centres testified, over 1,800 children who had lost one or both parents in the raging tsunami waters wrestled with unimaginable trauma in the ensuing months and years. The centres that were set up in refugee camp tents by local and foreign volunteer staff looked after around 3,000 tsunami and war orphans, who were provided with opportunities to perform the Acehnese *ratôh duek, meuseukat,* and *rodat* sitting song-dances with *rapa'i* (frame drum) accompaniment, to tell stories and draw, often choosing to draw their memories of the tsunami, or of their deceased parents (Leila Bukhari Daud, pers. comm., July 2008). UNICEF child protection officer Frederic Sizaret wrote that the children's resilience seemed high, but "You wonder what they are repressing…Their long-term future is uncertain given the rudimentary child welfare system and the lack of a formal foster care program and trained

social workers" (Jerome and Rubin 2005: 1).[8] As time passed, however, "the children's dark days became fewer," as the following anecdotes show (Jerome and Rubin 2005):

> When disaster struck on 26 December, 10-year-old Sufrisah, and Sufrine her 20-year old sister, were at home with their father, a fisherman, and their mother, who was hobbled by arthritis. Sufrine said: "Mom, let's run," but she replied: "I can't—just go and take care of your sister. My father said he was going to stay and guard Mom. We didn't say goodbye. We just ran." The girls raced up a hill to safety as raging waters swallowed their home and their parents forever. "Everything was gone," she said, clapping her hands together, "like that."

Like many other orphans, Sufrisah could join in the activities of a child centre. "At the beginning, we were just trying to get the kids playing—acting like kids," said Sizaret. "Now the centres, in concert with local organisations, offer sports, games, art, music and massage and dance therapy. On a rotating basis these groups also bus children to Lampnuk, once Aceh's finest beach, now strewn with debris, in order to get terrified children used to the sight of the sea again.

> On one morning about 200 children swarmed Lampnuk in 100 degree heat. Ten adolescent boys in white shirts sat cross-legged in a row. Shouting "Praise Allah" in Acehnese, they knelt and put lyrics all their own to a Muslim prayer chant.[9] "We got swept by the waves, we got thrown here and thrown there," they sang, before launching into a tune about an angel "with red lips and a beautiful smile" who waits in heaven. Then they jumped up and scampered off to join the others. All, that is, but Fajari, 13, who lost

> both his parents. He ran toward the sea. "The water is closer now," he said uneasily. "I don't want it any closer."
>
> Elsewhere, "a cluster of teenage girls in white head-scarves perform a traditional dance—one of the activities designed to draw children out, engage them, and perhaps allow them to express their emotions through the arts." "I've been working on this dance for a month," says Yusnita Dewi, 14. She lost both her parents, and now lives with some old neighbours. "The first time I saw her, she just wanted to be left alone," says Gunawan, her dance therapist. It took six weeks to get the girl to the beach. "The worst times are when I'm alone and at night," Yusnita says. "That's when the memories come." The good days come more often now. Later, Yusnita can be heard gabbing with the girls about scarves and caftans she can't afford to buy, "My favourite things," she says, "are being with my friends and dancing."
>
> Many, like 13-year-old Samsul, still struggle. While 15 children take art therapy in a broad white tent, Samsul sits apart and draws near the water's edge. The others chatter and sketch brightly colored trees and other subjects unrelated to the tsunami. But the silent Samsul, an orphan haunted by images of the disaster, uses only black pencil to draw monstrous waves …

Another testimony tells of a group of boys in Lampnuk who benefited from song-dance therapy led by an NGO. Each group was taught to perform a partly improvised *ratèb duek* song-dance with Muslim texts. Kneeling close together in a row they swayed back and forth while the song leader improvised texts such as *Allahu Akbar* (Allah is great) and *Lailahaillallah* (There is no God but God), to which the group responded by singing the same

texts in chorus to a well-known Acehnese melody, sometimes with Acehnese body percussion including clapping and thigh-slapping (Ibu Laila Bukhari, pers. comm.)

SELF-HELP BY PRIVATE GROUPS OF ARTISTS

The NGOs may have succeeded in using the arts to treat the trauma of many victims, especially women and children, but the restoration of the activities of private groups of artists (*sanggar*) after the war had a much more widespread effect throughout the province. This was despite the fact that the tsunami had caused an incalculable loss of artists' lives, musical instruments, costumes and rehearsal spaces. Formerly active *sanggar* in coastal communities who had lost virtually all their artists were initially hard-pressed to find anyone to perform the usual traditional music and dances at their weddings, circumcisions, and holy day celebrations. Nor could they easily find teachers for their children's music and dance classes. In beachside villages such as Lampnuk the whole community was wiped out, but in Lokna one *ratōh duek* (sitting dance) performer, Hamid, survived. He showed how the arts and *adat* could be saved in extreme circumstances by assuming the artistic responsibilities of the former troupe leader, seeking out and teaching young artists in the village how to perform so that the former troupe would again have sufficient players for such performances.[10]

One day in 2005 I visited a *sanggar* named Narul Alam (founded in 1980) in a village on the outskirts of Banda Aceh. It had lost some of its members and all its *rapa'i geurimpheng* (medium-size frame drums) to the tsunami. However, the *sanggar* survived by virtue of the resilience and musical ingenuity of its leader, who decided that his players would work out how to substitute traditional body percussion techniques for the playing of the frame drums. So they beat out a version of the complex frame-drum rhythms on their bodies, producing interlocking patterns of sound by clapping, snapping their fingers and beating their thighs, breasts, and shoulders. Although the sound quality and rhythmic details naturally differed from those of the original *rapa'i* and vocal performances, the musical result was electrifying.

The body percussion episodes alternated with the solo and group unison singing of secular and sacred lyrics, accelerated and became louder and louder till their very fast final cadence, whereupon they came to a sudden end.[11] Pieces featuring accelerated endings are typical of many Acehnese genres, including those played on the *rapa'i,* but they sound like new creations when it is the human body rather than inanimate drums that produce the sound textures.

The story of another *sanggar's* submergence in the tsunami is remarkable not because of its leader's heartbreak, which was normal, but because of the *sanggar's* survival against all odds due to international assistance. Its leader—Ibu Cut Asiah was a famous choreographer and director of her own *sanggar—Pocut Baren*, operating from a rehearsal pavilion built on her home property near the beach, with her husband handling the government contacts and private invitations to perform. On the day of the tsunami, however, she lost her rehearsal pavilion and all its musical instruments, costumes, and stage properties, and worst of all, the troupe manager—her husband. With him, she said, died her primary source of artistic influence and all hope for the restoration of the *sanggar*. Every subsequent effort that she made to lobby for token help at least from an NGO or government failed, mainly because she was a woman living in a male-dominant society. She desperately wanted to re-start her group, teach, and choreograph new dances. Prospects for recovery were dim. However, a foreign visitor succeeded in securing sufficient funding, with voluntary local labour, to rebuild the facility, and classes and rehearsals re-opened in 2009.[12] After a few despairing years, Ibu Cut Asiah's private *sanggar* survived.

Most *sanggar*, however, survived only if attached to the governor's or regents' offices, and moreover were the preferred performing groups for functions such as official tsunami memorial services.

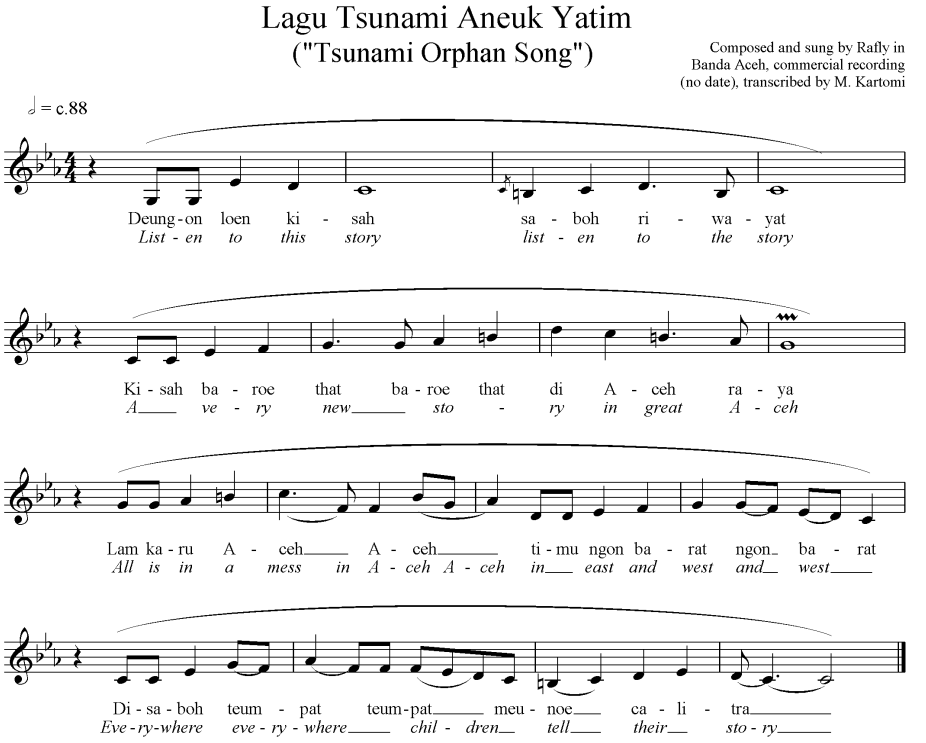
COMMERCIAL MUSIC GROUPS AND THE MEDIA

From the late 1990s to the present a few commercial music groups created new pop songs and revived old classical Acehnese songs reflecting the trauma of human loss in the war,

including *Kande Saweu Syedara,* led by the well-known west-coast Acehnese singer, Rafly. His emotional lyric about Acehnese children orphaned by the war: *Lagu Aneuk Yatim* (Orphan Song) (Transcription 1), became famous. After the tsunami created countless new orphans, the song was recycled under the title: *Lagu Tsunami Aneuk Yatim* (Tsunami Orphan Song). Its Arabic-sounding, minor-key melody and thin harmony is felt to be tragic to Acehnese ears because of its alternation of tone 7 and raised tone 7, leaps of sixths and fifths (perfect and tritonic), and melodic slurs which are perceived as expressing deep emotion. Because its text applied equally to orphans from the war and the tsunami, this ready-made song was played incessantly on various radio stations after the tsunami because it matched the general mood.[13] In the lyric an orphan cries for his/her mother and asks Allah to prevent further bloodshed.

Born on Aceh's southwest coast near Tapaktuan around 1970, Rafly has a powerful, high-pitched singing voice that is typical of the loudly carrying, high pitched *jantan* ("masculine") voices of west-coastal fishermen who sing songs to call the wind at sea. His high-pitched, ornamented melodic style and poignant modifications of intonation, evokes a strongly emotive response among contemporary Acehnese listeners.

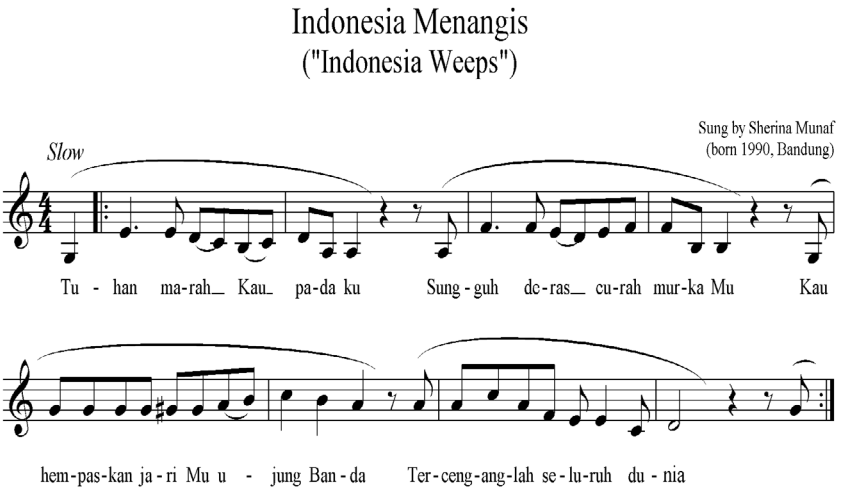
Immediately after the tsunami struck, Rafly's and other singers' performances of heart-rending classical laments (*ratok*; B.I., *ratap*) began to be broadcast virtually non-stop for weeks on end, and on the Acehnese-owned channel Metro TV, for months,[14] as part of a nation-wide effort to secure private donations to help the survivors. The Blangpidie (west-coast)-born Acehnese singer Marzuki Hassan of the Jakarta Arts Institute (*Institut Kesenian Jakarta*) also sang tragic, high-pitched west-coast laments on Metro TV. Troupes of dancer-musicians in Indonesia and overseas performed Acehnese and Gayo sitting dances, *ratōh duek, meuseukat,* and *saman,* to raise money for the victims. Artists took part in the intensive efforts made to alleviate the trauma of the tsunami survivors and the conflict through music. Rafly's "Tsunami Orphan Song" was also widely distributed on cassette, DVD, VCD, ringtone, and other media. Local, national and international audiences heard songs performed by orphan choirs, poetry readings, and sermons by religious leaders at tsunami commemoration ceremonies. In both Aceh and Jakarta, regional folk and pop style songs by members of the *Nyawoung* group that were formerly set to pro-Acehnese Independence texts were given new texts sympathising with the tsunami victims and were popularised on the Internet.



Verse 2 (English only)
There is a child who is crying where is my mother?
I long for her, I can't see her anywhere
If she is alive where is she?
Where is my father?

Verse 3 (English only)
Our fate depends on Allah, God willing we'll be patient,
Yes Allah, patient, so we can be happy again
We ask, oh Allah, that there be no more bloodshed
And that religion in *Serambi Mekkah* be strong.

Transcription 1 *Lagu Tsunami Aneuk Yatim* (Tsunami Orphan Song)



Indonesia Menangis, sung by Sherina Munaf (born 1990, Bandung)

Tuhan marah Kau pada ku	God You are angry with me
Sungguh deras curah murka Mu	Truly Your fury has poured down
Kau hempaskan jari Mu ujung Banda	You lashed Your fingers out on the tip of Banda (Aceh)
Tercenganglah seluruh dunia	Astonishing all the world
Engkau yang berkuasa	You who are all powerful
Janganlah marah lagi	Don't be angry again
Biarkanlah kami	Let us be
Engkau yang pengasih ampunilah dosa	You who love, Pardon our sins
Memang semua ini kesalahan kami	Certainly all of this is our fault
Oh Tuhan ampuni kami	Oh God forgive us
Oh Tuhan tolonglah kami	Oh God help us
Oh Tuhan ampuni kami	Oh God forgive us

Transcription 2 *Indonesia Menangis* (Indonesia Weeps)

In Jakarta the superstar Sherina Munaf (born in 1990 in Bandung) sang *Indonesia Menangis* (Indonesia Weeps, Transcription 2), which expressed the widely felt Acehnese belief that the tsunami was Allah's punishment for engaging in their protracted war, for killing other Muslims, and for not paying sufficient heed to their religious duties.

The Qur'an and several *hadiths* (Commentaries on and Sayings of the Prophet) make mention of the hand or finger of Allah.[15] Thus, the image of the finger of Allah in the lyric carries powerful emotional meaning: it points to Allah's fury and almighty power, like that believed to cause the Great Flood in the Old Testament. However, the song ends with the healing thought that Allah is love and will help and forgive the survivors of the tragedy.

NEW FILMS ABOUT THE TSUNAMI AND TRAUMA

Of the foreign and local films on the tsunami made in 2005, *Nyanyian Tsunami* (Indonesian, Tsunami Song), shows how a few surviving villages restored their artistic heritage in the year after the tsunami had destroyed almost all they possessed. It shows a bard (*tukang hikayat*) in the seaside village of Pudang (in Kecamatan Lhong, Aceh Besar) singing an excerpt from a legendary epic (*hikayat*) and inserting stirring episodes to revive the *semangat* (spirit, will to live) of the villagers after the terror of the tsunami. It also mentions that a legend told on Aceh's offshore island Simeulu about the Krakatau eruption and tsunami in 1883 saved many Simeulu inhabitants from death during the 2004 tsunami because the local people knew to flee from the coast up to higher land. This story underlines the traditional saying about the importance of the people maintaining and nurturing their knowledge of the *adat*, implying that they should run to higher land immediately after a future tsunami is announced.

The film narrator then portrays the self-doubt of the Pudang villagers as they attempt to restore the practice of their local artistic heritage following the death of members of 800 of their 900 households, including the leader and all but one of their *dabōh* performers, a shy, young man. Diffidently he assumed the most difficult role in the *dabōh* genre—a religiously

inspired awl-dancer and troupe leader—and eventually succeeded in acquiring the necessary skills and re-forming the troupe with novice performers. The 30-minute film also tells how the villagers restored the rest of their formerly rich traditional cultural practices, including the *dikè mauluk* (*zikir Maulud,* i.e., singing about the Prophet's birth) and ensemble music played on a *seurune kalèe* (shawm), *geundrang* (cylindrical drums), and *rapa'i* (frame drums). The film makers, Maulana and Afeed Afifuddin at CV Layarkaca Intervision in 2006, employed song composers Jamal Abdullah and Maulana Akbar who wrote the evocative *Lagu Tsunami* (Tsunami Song) accompanied by a simulated Western orchestra and assisted by a group of musicians named *De Atjehers* ("The Acehnese," in Dutch). The film project was supported by the daily newspaper *Serambi Indonesia*, Caritas Czecho in Lamno, and the traditional art troupe *Talo*, and it included interviews by journalists from Regional Asia and USAid.

In 2005, National Geographic made a film titled *Meusare-sare* (Acehnese, "Working Together") that illustrates the arts-led resilience and music therapeutic activities among tsunami victims. In the seaside village of Kampung Cokna in Aceh Jaya, a man named Teungku Sofyan appeared who lost his artist-wife and children to the waves. He overcame his trauma by reviving his wife's troupe and teaching a new generation of young singer-dancers to perform Cokna's main sitting dance, *ratōh taloe* (lit., "net-weaving chattering [song-dance]"). A row of dancers sang texts about fishing with the added Islamic phrase *Assalamulaikum* (Peace be With You), and engaged in sitting body percussion as they clapped and beat out repeated rhythmic motifs on their thighs and shoulders, then wove a piece of rope into a fishing net.[16] Finally, they kneeled up on their forelegs and sang about the birth of the Prophet, accompanied by a shawm (*seurune kalèe*), cylindrical drums (*geundrang*) and frame drums (*rapa'i*). The Islamic references in the lyrics and the Arabic-sounding melodies served as powerful therapy for the survivors.

The film also showed how the musical arts can help a team of newly arrived foreign aid workers communicate with a traumatised local community. The NGO, *Aloe*, gained the trust of the people in its chosen village by first asking their artists to teach them about their

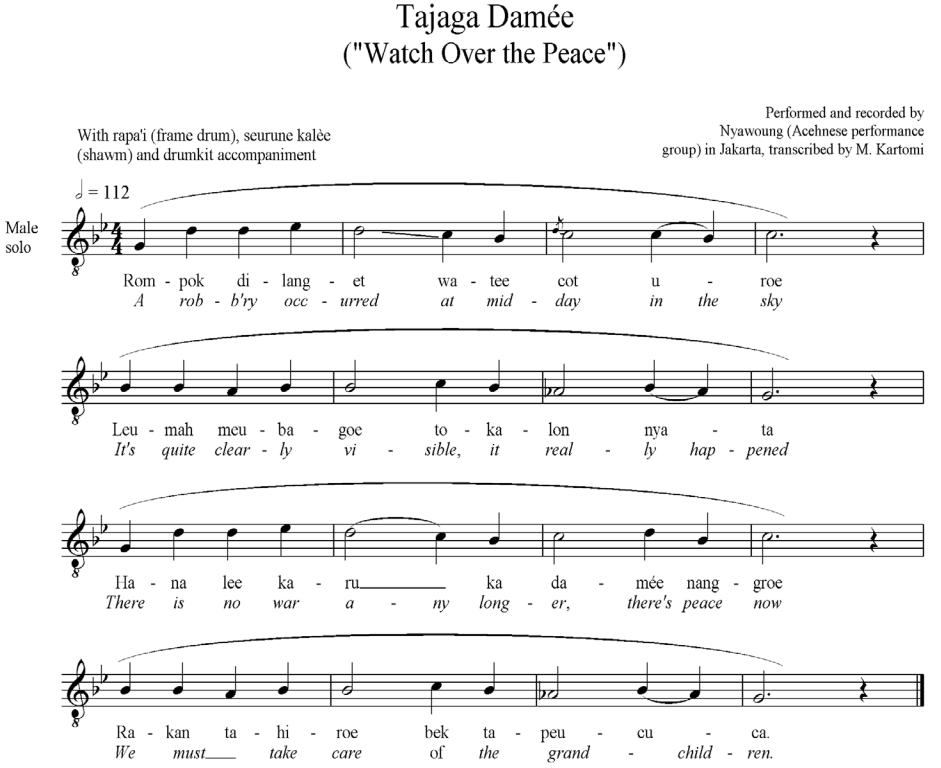
artistic and cultural activities. This surprised and pleased the people, raised their determination to find ways to restore their livelihoods, and made them receptive to learning ways of cooperating to improve their farming and fishing pond techniques for full recovery. The film showed them performing their sitting (*duek*) song-dances with stirring body percussion (*ratōh duek*); a bamboo flute (*serdam*) player accompanying tragic footage about the fate of the many orphan children; and a shawm, drum *(geundrang*) and frame drum (*rapa'i*) ensemble accompanying some traditional standing and stepping dances. Some scenes were accompanied by newly-composed music "with a Muslim flavor" (*yang bernafaskan Islam*), which used Arab-sounding tonal materials played on an electronically simulated Western orchestra.

GOVERNMENT ACTIVITIES

The government also tried to resolve tsunami trauma by holding annual tsunami commemorative ceremonies (*Peringatan Tsunami Resmi*). They took place on the anniversary of the tsunami—26 December—at the mass graveyards (*Kuburan Massal*) in the seaside village of Ulhe-lèe (in the Meuraksa subdistrict), in the cemetery in Kecamatan Lamburu just outside Banda Aceh, and near the beach where the tsunami struck at Meulaboh. At each location the Governor or other high officials were present. During the first annual commemoration on the beach where the tsunami struck in Banda Aceh, an orphan choir sang regional Acehnese songs and Rafly's "Tsunami Orphan Song", and Rafly sang a lament between the prayers, Qur'an-reading, and speeches.

Soon after the tsunami, the national government's Planning Body for National Development (Badan Perencanaan dan Pembangunan Nasional, BAPPENAS) launched a Program for the Socialisation of Peace and Reintegration of Aceh, with the aim of invigorating the growth and development of Acehnese culture after the damage caused by decades of war. It included a Peace Song Competition for composers, poets, dramatists and choreographers. A selection of the resulting works that combined traditional Acehnese and Western pop attributes were performed by leading Acehnese musicians in Aceh and the diaspora, recorded and distributed on VCD, cassette, video and ringtone. For example, the song *Tajaga Damée* (Watch Over the Peace)[17] begins in bardic-style free metre and then launches into a quadruple

metre section with a characteristically Acehnese hexatonic melody in harmonic minor with an alternating tone 2 and lowered tone 2, accompanied on frame drums (*rapa'i*) and an Acehnese shawm (*seurune kalèe*) (Transcription 3). The classical Acehnese *pantun* (rhyming quatrain) text draws attention to the joy felt by the people at the achievement of peace after "a crazy war when impossible things happened, such as a robbery in the sky".



Transcription 3 *Tajaga Damée* (Watch Over the Peace)

CONCLUSION

Since the tsunami and the signing of the peace accord, many Acehnese trauma victims were able to resume normal life again, mainly through distinctively Acehnese-style coping mechanisms, including—though in a limited number of cases—through music and art therapy that was provided for children and adults by NGOs and the government.

The essentially Acehnese mechanisms were two-fold: people's participation in Muslim religious activities and worship, and as artists or onlookers in traditional functions at which group music and dance is normally performed, such as weddings, circumcisions, passing of Qur'an-reading examinations, new house celebrations, Muslim holy day observances, and performances at local and provincial art festivals (e.g., the *Pekan Kebudayaan Aceh* [PKA, Acehnese Cultural Festivals] held in 2004 and 2009).

On the personal level, there was a great upsurge in family ceremonies involving traditional group performances in the years following the peace accord, largely because the security problems and frequent curfews during the lengthy conflict had forced people to postpone or cancel their celebrations. In local regions (*kabupaten*) and districts (*kecamatan*), there was also an upsurge in art festivals and competitions, which galvanised the artistic activities of hundreds of groups throughout Aceh, who travelled substantial distances by road to attend.

Across the whole province, the obvious joy felt by the population from 2005 at being able to hold their life-event ceremonies and religious holidays again with the usual artistic performances after years of curfews and violence translated into a surge of creative activity, with enormous benefits for many deprived young people and children who were able at last to receive training in the arts. As all group dances feature rhythmic beating of the body parts and singing, they have a social bonding effect on novices and seasoned performers alike, and because they strengthen group solidarity they have proven to be ideal activities for curing trauma. When artists sit close together in a row and beat out rhythmic patterns on their

bodies in virtually perfect entrainment, they experience a heightened sense of solidarity in the aftermath of the massive tragedies they have experienced together. Acehnese children learn to perform the sitting song-dances with Muslim texts (*ratèb duek)* and the traditional customs-based song-dances performed at family celebrations that have either mystical Acehnese-Animist or secular lyrics. The newly composed peace and disaster-related songs and dances created for competitions, festivals and schools stressed healing and togetherness.

The fact that national and local television channels played Acehnese lament songs for months on end also promoted the feelings of togetherness. The pop songs and films about the tsunami and the armed conflict created by professional and semi-professional groups served to reduce the trauma of some victims by means of their media and commercial distribution, including by cassette, VCD, DVD, ring tone, and the Internet, thus reaching younger consumers. These Indonesian-language songs helped to raise sympathy for Acehnese victims among the whole population of Indonesia, and this was followed by massive private and public donations. Also contributing to the reduction of trauma were performances of traditional and popular tsunami-related performances that stressed healing and togetherness at government functions and art competitions. Songs that combine traditional Acehnese styles with an Islamic message and style have grown in popularity and commercial success.

Despite the war and the tsunami, the people's belief appears to be as strong as ever that Aceh's *adat* and artistic identity must be maintained and developed. Only now, common wisdom says, can the devout properly practice their religious duties, such as safely joining in evening praise-singing sessions in the local *meunasah* (men's meeting houses).

Most commentators have expressed the view that the trauma-resolving and reconstruction efforts by government and NGOs have been remarkably successful. The 2009 International Tsunami Legacy Project reviewed the lessons learned by the international aid and government sectors and concluded that Indonesia's approach to rehabilitation and reconstruction was the most effective of 15 countries affected by the tsunami. Aceh-specialist political scientists such as Aspinall (2011) also agree that there are clear signs that the peace

will last. Once the Indonesian government swallowed its pride, negotiated peace with the insurgents, acknowledged its deficiencies, invited in foreign expertise, and adopted a visionary policy to rebuild Aceh under an elected, ex-GAM governor, it succeeded better than any other country at removing the scars of the tsunami and the conflict.

Among the reasons for the relatively quick psychological recovery was that the Acehnese people's coping mechanisms were already highly developed through decades of armed conflict, based on their firm belief in their religion and traditional customs. Despite the fact that corruption, rehousing the homeless and providing work for the unemployed still remain problematic, the recovery has been remarkable. Life is still imperfect, but it is better than most people can remember in terms of having access to land, education and the arts, and the people are therefore unlikely to want to resume armed conflict again. Assisted by arts therapy offered by the NGOs and modern communications, the applications of specifically Acehnese solutions to their widespread recent trauma, including their universal adherence to the tenets of Islam and traditional customs and their expressions in the traditional and popular arts, have on the whole, worked.

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NOTES

1. This article is based on data gathered on my annual field trips to Aceh in 2005–2011, when I recorded artists' performances and interviewed traditional and pop musicians, poets, filmmakers and government arts officials in many urban and rural areas of the province. I had useful discussions about aspects of the arts and society with victims and personnel in the tsunami relief barracks and camps, the Governor of Aceh Bp. Irwandi Yusuf (in 2006 and 2008) and Bp Yarmen Dinamika

and Bp Dino Umahuk of the Government Peace Campaign in Banda Aceh (in 2008 and 2009). Thanks to the Australian Research Council for a grant to study the topic, to Hidris Kartomi and Iwan Dzulvan Amir for permission to reproduce their photos, and to Bronia Kornhauser for her valued research assistance.

2. Although the Greek root of the English word trauma means "a physical wound", in modern English parlance it may also imply serious psychological wounds.

3. This Acehnese proverb reads: *Matèe aneuk meupati di jeurat nyoe gadoeh adat ho tajak mita.*

4. While the Acehnese phrase *reusam nibak Meukuta Alam* means "customs originating from Sultan Iskandar Muda" (Aceh's seventeenth century "King of the World"), *reusam nibak entu gata* means "customs originating from the ancestors."

5. Only 2 of the 41 *sanggar* heads whom I interviewed in 2005–2009 had received any funding, and that was from NGOs who had commissioned traditional instrument makers to replace *rapa'i* (frame drums) lost in the tsunami.

6. Sutton's book contains chapters on such topics as the neurological, social and cultural perspectives on trauma and music, and the contextualising of contemporary classical music and conflict. Other authors have mentioned the therapeutic effects of music in treatment of the traumatic ordeals of Jewish victims during the Nazi Occupation, including how music helped a pianist and composer survive in the Warsaw ghetto (Stein 2004).

7. In 1988, Edith Hillman Boxill founded the organisation *Music Therapists for Peace* which opened up a systematic dialogue among music therapists, music educators, musicians, psychologists, physicists, physicians, and other health professionals to explore the unique potential of music to affect the health of victims of war and other disasters, including communicating with young

children, as reported in Carolyn Kenny's editorial in *Voices: A World Forum for Music Therapy* (Kenny 2005: 1). Also see Boxill's Letter of Invitation in Music Therapy, the journal of the American Association for *Music Therapy* (Boxill 1998).

8. The policy was to try and connect the children with family members, but there were some unscrupulous child operators. International adoption is banned. Social workers are in short supply: only one Indonesian university trains social workers (Jerome and Rubin 2005: 1).

9. This was clearly a *ratèb duek* song-dance, where *ratèb* implies use of a religious text and *ratōh* a secular one.

10. Material in this paragraph is based on interviews with artists during my four trips in Aceh in 2005–2009.

11. I recorded these performances in the Arts Center in Banda Aceh in July, 2005 (also see Kartomi 2006).

12. Philip Visser, a facilitator and trainer in conflict resolution in civil society, raised US$12,000 from guests at a wedding he attended in California in 2007 (Visser, pers. comm., Banda Aceh, March 2008).

13. See Rafly 2007. *Atjeh Loen Sayang, Rafly Special Edition* VCD.

14. This is according to my own experience, both in Aceh and on satellite Indonesian television stations aired in Australia.

15. For example, an English translation of a sentence in Hadith 510 reads "O Muhammad! Allah will hold the heavens on a Finger, and the mountains on a Finger, and the trees on a Finger, and all the creation on a Finger, and then He will say, 'I am the King.'"

16. "Sitting body percussion" (*peh badan duek*) in Aceh is an umbrella term for music made by a group of male or female singer-dancers kneeling closely together in a row who clap, snap their fingers and/or beat their thigh(s) and shoulder(s) and may also clap their neighbours' hands in short and sharp rhythms or interlocking rhythmic episodes.

17. The songs *Tajage Damée* and *Aman Duniaku*, performed by the Nyawoung Group, may be heard on Compact Disc AMAN (*Album Dame Aceh*, Acehnese Peace Album) published by Badan Perencanaan dan Pembangunan Nasional, BAPPENAS (National Planning and Development Body), Banda Aceh, no date.

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