

Ethnography Inside: Female Imprisonment, “Prison Pain” and the Criminalization of the Acehnese in Indonesia

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Abstract

This article analyses the practical and theoretical process of structuring research fieldwork in a prison, and the specific research topics that it has led to shape. In 2011, my former research-assistant in Aceh, Indonesia, was sentenced to 20 years imprisonment for drug dealing. I subsequently carried out ethnography in the prison where she was detained, in the area of North Sumatra. My main argument concerns the relationship between a prisoner and the State as it is constructed before, during and after prison, and the subjective feelings and prison narratives which such relationship originates. I shall question how the researcher can make sense of prison through the prisoners’ own efforts to that end. I shall analyse the hypertrophic role that the ethnographic vis-à-vis encounter plays when the research develops in a restricted place and consider the “prison mind” as the totalisation of thoughts typical of incarceration. I shall conclude on the possibility of self-rescue that narratives of lived heterosexual love can provide the convicted women with, thus enabling them to tolerate or overcome “prison pain”. Conversely, I shall underline how such individualization of suffering also leads to obliterate the political weight of female criminal sentencing in a post-conflict, post-disaster social environment.

Keywords: Prison, Indonesia, Aceh, ethnographic methodology, anthropology of confinement, anthropology of drugs

This article concerns the practical and theoretical process of structuring research fieldwork in a prison as a part of a larger ethnography on post-war marginality. It was originated by the fact that in 2011, Resti, my former research-assistant in Aceh, Indonesia, was sentenced to 20 years imprisonment for drug dealing. It is rooted in the ethnography carried out between 2013 and 2014 in a female prison in the area of North Sumatra, and addresses the epistemology of research in a restricted compound.

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Ethnography in prison is an essential contribution to understand how national states are constructed through incarceration. I shall consider two different angles.

First, the angle of national integration. Aceh, the Indonesian province which claimed independence and fought a civil war against the national army, had its women jailed in another province for offenses to criminal law. These incarcerations, I maintain, bespeak a process of inclusion of the Acehnese in the national community through the violent subordination of the weakest amongst them: a large group of (mainly) middle aged women who are serving sentences from 6 years to life imprisonment mostly for drug dealing. At the time of my fieldwork, they summed up to half of the inmates of the prison that I studied.

Second, the angle of administration and localities in modern Indonesia. My attempts to access the prison as a researcher delved into the intricacies of Indonesian bureaucracy. The frustrated efforts to help me that a group of North-Sumatranese well-meaning civil servants carried out gave me an insight of what feeling of the State hovers in an Indonesian big city today.

My main argument here moves from such considerations to analyse the hypertrophic role that the ethnographic vis-à-vis encounter plays when the research develops in a restricted place. For an anthropologist raised in awe of “the ethnographic context”, the programmatic lack of the latter raises a problem. Prison only allows “quasi ethnography” (Cunha 2014, p. 224). On the one hand, it is difficult to cross-control the information one gathers. On the other hand, the strong emotions and projective identifications typical of research relationships are hardly deflated and brought back to concreteness by the banality of everyday life, which the researcher only very partly shares with her respondents. In this research, I faced a double estrangement: I came both from a distant society and from a world of free people. In the prison, I was entangled in highly emotional relationships at the intersection of globalized cultures of imprisonment, local cultures of imprisonment and the practice of prison, but lacked ordinary methodological tools to help me see the different layers and differentiate them from my own relational turmoil.

In order to overcome this methodological impasse and restore a research “we”, an intersection between the researcher’s and the “researched” cultural and social worlds, I asked Resti to resume our research partnership within the prison and build a bridge between before and now, outside and inside. But my attempt failed as Resti was too involved in her prison life to consider an external engagement: despite the money I offered, she would not risk the position of power which she had gained vis-à-vis the other inmates. This led me to explore the “prison mindedness” as a site of constriction and the narratives that allow the convicts a liberation from it.

The biographic line spanning over the different situations and the self-description which accompanies it are the narrative thread in this article.

Before, outside: a personal and professional relationship

In 2008 I arrived in Aceh to research Islamic institutions that rescued children in the aftermath of tsunami and at the end of a very cruel civil war. I was in a peculiar environment of research. Tens of NGO and the main international Aid agencies (UN, World Bank, ILO, UNICEF...) had set up programs in support of urgent relief, first, reconstruction and long-term rehabilitation later¹.

This is when I first met Resti², who at the time was 19 and had worked as a fieldwork researcher for more than one of the aforementioned agencies. She was brilliant, spoke excellent Indonesian and good English and enjoyed thoroughly the young, enthusiastic, idealistic and generous international social environment of post-disaster Banda Aceh³. In spite of the Sharia being rapidly implemented, she got drunk at parties, hardly ever wore a jilbab and had a Swedish boyfriend. We saw a lot of each other and shared friends.

When the post-Tsunami and partly, the post-conflict reconstruction ended (2010), most NGO moved out of Aceh. Irish pubs, Italian restaurants and French bakeries closed and Banda Aceh became what it is now, a provincial town mainly inhabited by Acehnese and other Indonesians.

Resti needed to work and, like many other young people in the aftermath of the Tsunami and the Peace, could hardly put up with the discontinuous, low-wage tasks one could be employed to perform by small, scarcely funded local NGO or the few long-term researchers like me. She missed the inter-

1 This research would not have been possible without the precious help of prof. Iqram Sahlin, criminologist, and dr. Truly Hitosoro, political scientist. I thank them both for the generosity of their efforts.

2 Aceh is a small place and stories are known. I have systematically changed all the references in Resti's life and erased what might help identify her. Moreover, I only wrote about what she allowed me to write and what is known to her prosecutors and guardians. Still, if I can decide what I write about me in our relationship, I cannot verify with her. I cannot submit to her what I write as I should either do it illegally or have it pass through the scrutiny of the prison authorities. Also, what I do and where I have been is well known to Acehnese authorities, so I might help identify her just by being myself. If I don't mention she is from Aceh, the basic terms of the discourse loose interest and groundedness. I can only declare that what I write is a mixture of a real person and an intentional and heavy set of camouflage, leaving (in my view) the truth of the person, her actions and words but changing just about everything else.

3 For a very original glimpse on humanitarian in Aceh see Grayman 2014. An overall consideration of the influence of International Aid in Aceh is largely described in Samuels 2012, particularly chapter 1 and 5.

national environment and felt unhappy with and unwanted by Acehnese young men so she finally migrated to Jakarta to look for a job, thus following a pattern of mobility which is typical of many provincial youngsters throughout Indonesia as well as specific to Acehnese fleeing danger and poverty during the civil conflict.

For a year or so I didn't hear from her. Then a common friend told me she had been sentenced to 20 years imprisonment for drug dealing. She was detained in a prison in Kuala Jaya, in the outskirts of a big city outside the province Aceh.

The prison enters research: a methodological challenge

"Prisons generate a high degree of curiosity for those whose only knowledge is gained through popular media", writes life-long prison researcher Yvonne Jewkes (2012, p. 64). Indeed, the idea of an Indonesian prison emanated a gust of pop exoticism that attracted me. It was not solely out of affection that I paid Resti a first visit in 2013.

Resti was not an isolated case. Out of 450 female prisoners of the State prison of Kuala Jaya (Lapas Kelas II), more than half were Acehnese and except 2 of them, all were detained for drug dealing. Questions arose spontaneously concerning if and how this was related to the post-war, post-tsunami environment, why these women were detained outside Aceh, what is female criminalization in a war context and finally, if drug addiction is really such a serious problem in Indonesia. Foucault (1976) has once and for all underlined how prison is, in Cunha's terms, "an analyser of society" (2012, p. 219) far beyond its walls, and for sure, for me Kuala Jaya prison could become a new lens to view my fieldwork. Unsettling though it might be, multiplying standpoints and including unexpected sources is one of the characteristics of contemporary ethnography.

In a mixture of empathy, morbidity and intellectual challenge I decided to know more about Acehnese and drugs from the prisoners' point of view and planned an ethnographic fieldwork in Kuala Jaya prison. I asked Resti to work as my assistant within the prison.

The gift balance and the researcher's wishful thinking

Being my assistant would make Resti some money and enable me to do research: it seemed an equal deal. In fact, the equality of the deal is fundamental in non-colonial research and the gift balance between a researcher and the people she does research with, or upon, is becoming more and more of a theoretical challenge in ethnographic practice.

The ethnographer, in many regards, breaks in and takes. Hastrup writes that there is always a degree of symbolic violence in the ethnographic encounter as it “demands that some people break a silence and open up to some revelation about themselves” (Hastrup 1995, pp. 142-143). This is certainly a relevant aspect of my encounters with prisoners, whose repeated question, “Why do you want to know?”, was often followed by comments like “I don’t know why I tell you all this” or “I am ashamed to tell you about this” and even “please write this in your book”. I both forced talking and made it possible, thus playing an ambiguous role. Certainly, the break-in allowed me to fabricate academic goods, with little reward for the people I took from; but it also created a voice which might otherwise stay muted. In any case, it was a very asymmetrical relationship which called for balance in the present.

It is a common experience that, during fieldwork, the ethnographer must materially “counter-give” to her respondents⁴: money, support, presence, work might be expected. There is a personal moral dimension in such counter-giving, which considers whether and when respondents should be paid or helped. And there is a political dimension in counter-giving which considers what the European research planners call “dissemination of results”: taking sides, forging judgments and making them known to the politicians or the people in charge – the latter being a particularly relevant theme in prison studies (Rhodes 2001, Phillips 2010, Liebling 2015).

Including Resti in my research seemed to answer both requests, moral and political. She could make use of her new position, I thought, being paid by me and I might be able to give a hand to whoever wanted to – well, to better understand imprisonment in Indonesia.

Prisons and the modern Indonesian state

Imprisonment is a meaningful symbol of modern Indonesia. Over the last 50 years it has been sadly present to Indonesians’ minds. Davis & Dent (2001) argue that in contemporary societies, prisons are intrinsically colonial institutions and indeed, not only were most Indonesian prisons built by the Dutch but also, the punitive colonial criminal code was untouched until 1964 (Asia Watch 1990, pp. 4-6;). After 1965 coup, though, when president Sukarno was made to resign and Suharto took the power (New

⁴ Can emotions be enough of a restitution? Different anthropologists have given different answers, some pleading that yes, they can (Fassin 2000; Fassin, Pandolfi 2010) and others that the exchange must be such that ethnography becomes a shared concern (Crapanzano 1980, Biehl 2013). Here I plead for the importance of the material gift when in situations of social inequality.

Order, *Orde Baru*, 1967-1998), a modern ideology of correction became an essential feature of the New Order harsh politics of political imprisonment. During Suharto's dictatorship, in the name of correction, thousands were imprisoned under political charges in the "*Lembaga Pemasarakatan*", "Social Institutes", as the prisons are called until now in Indonesia (Atmasasmita 1992). Abuse and torture brought many to death in legal and illegal ways; beating or lashing was forbidden by law only in 1981 (Asia Watch 1990, p. 8).

These long-silenced deaths surface today in a different political environment and what has happened in famous state prisons has become a subject of debate within the country. Autobiographies and accounts of prison life by *tapol*, "political prisoners", are a literary genre *per se* since the world-renowned writer Pramoedya Ananta Toer published his notes of prison while he was in Pulau Buru (*Nyanyi Sunyi Seorang Bisu*, Jakarta, Lentera 1988)⁵. More novels were published after the Truth and Reconciliation Commission about political prisoners (1999-2003) finished its enquiries (*Tapol*, by Ngarto Februana, Yogyakarta, Pressindo 2002; *AMBA*, by Laksmi Pamuntjak, Jakarta, Gramedia 2014; *Merajut Harkat*, by Putu Oka Sukanta, Yogyakarta, Pustaka Pelajar 1999).

This popular evocation of prisons as places of state-organized injustice and violence matches a new attention of the Indonesian authorities to what happens inside the country's jails. Rebellions are troubling penitentiaries all through Indonesia. In the same year I conducted my fieldwork (2014) the Minister of Justice and Human Rights repeatedly expressed his concern for the serious overcrowding and the need for rehabilitation programs, taking distance from the position that consider suffering in jail as a well-deserved complement of the deprivation of freedom for the criminals (see for example Movanita 2014).

In his public statements, the Minister does not mention that overcrowding is the consequence of a politics of imprisonment and severe punishment that sets Indonesia within the worldwide "rise of the penal state" (Wacquant 2003), including a programme of prison building and a much mediatized tightening on criminal law. The "war on drugs" is declared and has led to massive incarceration, although a big effort is made to differentiate "mere users" (*pemakai*) from couriers and dealers (*pengedar*), on the one hand, and on the other hand, to free the great numbers of prisoners whose terms of detainment are over even before trials (Sudaryono 2014). Many authors underline how worldwide, politics of imprisonment are more and more relevant in general politics (Bourgois 2003; Wacquant 2010; Sparks 2007, p.

5 Political prisoners' writings have played an important role in the XXth century, see for example Gramsci's *Quaderni del carcere* or, in a completely different way, Solženitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago*.

73), and this is true for Indonesia as well. Tightening the rope on drugs dealers has been one of the first moves of the (then) newly elected president Joko Widodo⁶. As I was writing the first draft of this article, in 2014, the highly mediatized execution of 8 drug smugglers, 2 of whom Australian citizens, has altered the composition of the so far enthusiastic support to president Joko Widodo, both diminishing it for some and strengthening it for others.

The people I met in Kuala Jaya prison were a typical example of the Indonesian politics of nation building through the implementation of prisons. My friend Resti and the couple of hundred other mainly middle aged or even elderly Acehnese women who were in Kuala Jaya prison were suffering the immediate consequence of the "war on drugs", as most of them had been judged and incarcerated between 2007 and 2011. At the same time, with a couple of exceptions, all their stories, the 142 I collected through a questionnaire and the 8 I deepened in interviews and informal conversation, were connected to the civil conflict: some directly partaking to the exchange of arms and drugs but most, because their mobility and desperate search of any kind of income depended on extreme poverty. They were stranded in jail as if they had been dropped there by the long undertow of the conflict immediate consequences – poverty, circulation of arms and drugs, lack of men in villages and persistent illegality.

Yet, "Acehnese in jail" means, or meant at the time of the conflict, something specific in Indonesia: terrorist framed. The scarce mentions of the civil war on the public media depicted the partisans as rebellious troublemakers, while their incarceration was part of a general political use of prisons as lieu of deportation for protesters of all kinds. Independentist struggles have been brought to political imprisonment even after the fall of Suharto, as dissidents⁷ know very well; during the Acehnese civil war, political prisoners were often displaced to Java, for example (Siapno 2009, p. 51). Although individually not involved in rebellion, the Acehnese women who were serving long sentences in Kuala Jaya were a transformation of a figure of Acehnese rebel into a figure of Indonesian criminal, an indonesianisation and normalisation of the picture.

6 "Ideas, techniques, slogans and catch-words (such as 'risk assessment', 'selective incapacitation', 'truth in sentencing' and 'zero tolerance') scurry around the world with accelerating rapidity", observes Jewkes (2007, p. 82). See also Wacquant, 2003, 2010. Widodo was re-elected President in 2019.

7 East Timorese independence leader Jose Alexandre "Xanana" Gusmao was sentenced to life imprisonment in 1993 and released in 1999 and imprisonment and deportation of dissidents was a regular action, see Amnesty International 1985. Maluku conscience prisoners are detained in Javanese prisons (see AI 2014) and the same goes for Papuan independentists.

Prison climate: localized power and fieldwork in prison

Entering a prison puts the researcher in a specific dialogue with the State and sharpens the perception of some of its functioning. When I decided to enquire in Kuala Jaya jail a colleague whom I had asked for help suggested that I keep a low profile and gain access through some people she knew who worked there. I was asked to hand out “cigarette money” (“*uang rokok*”) for those who took the trouble to help me, as we needed a lubricant (“*pelicin*”) for the informative and bureaucratic machine to function. My colleague, other friends in the city of Kuala Jaya, Resti’s relatives, all seemed to imply that through delicate bribery one achieves whatever is needed in State-related matters. In Kuala Jaya prison like in other Indonesian prisons, rich VIP prisoners can outplay the walls and the security system. They enjoy well-equipped VIP cells which they fund and build (see also Mac Dougall 2014 and Atmasasmita 1992). In Kuala Jaya, former provincial delegates, tycoons, renowned judges or rich ladies are said to attend ceremonies outside their jail and receive their family privately. Unlike VIPs, I and the people who helped me were not in the unethical domain of “*amplop*” (“envelopes”), straight corruption, but in the reasonable world where one shows gratitude for the help she receives from a civil servant. I asked for nothing illegal, just a permit (*ijin*), like a passport. There seemed to be no reason why this should not work, and I ended up trusting that because I was in Indonesia, I would be able to access the prison in a smooth way, through whatever porosity there was between the institute and its social surroundings.

For all my low-profile functioning, all I obtained was a spoken agreement that I could enter as an ordinary visitor and be granted some extra time in the parlour over lunch break, as are many other visitors, too; I should not take notes, talk to more than a prisoner at a time or come too often. A couple of days should do: in other words, I was denied research entrance. Authors show that prisons are not separate islands in alien territory, even though and even when they are conceived as such (Combessie 2002), and argue that non-Western prisons should not be apprehended as a less perfected variation of the Western institutions, including their specific position in their territory (Bandyopadhyay, Jefferson & Ulgevik 2013; Piacentini 2007). It is this territory that I misjudged.

I was not part of the prison territory and those who belonged there knew it: they could take my money and not feel obliged, as my requests were impossible to satisfy and I was in no position to claim anything. Upon learning through the social media of my failure at organizing a proper ethnographic field with her as a research assistant, politely scandalised Resti declared that in Indonesia the State is the State, it has got principles, how could I dream to ignore them? Like her, all those who had encouraged me to pay my way to an informal authorisation commented that one does not fool the State.

That was a first methodological lesson to be learned: the usual double code when dealing with civil servants – both considering them as totally honest and understanding that some financial help might be part of what they consider as their informal salary – requires particular skills to be handled properly when it comes to security matters. Stakes are higher. One has to be meaningful in that context if one wants something in exchange.

Thanks to a research network, I finally obtained from the Ministry of Justice in Jakarta a top-down authorization to carry out research within Kuala Jaya prison premises. "In a culture of surveillance, participant observation is ... a form of complicity with those outsiders who surveil", underlines Rhodes (2001, p.73). This is true for prison workers as well as for prisoners. I was received by the prison guards and administration as a menace, a nuisance and a spy from the Ministry. In spite of the permission I had been granted, I was warned to keep to myself and subjected to personal control. The only form of interaction that I was allowed was to administrate a questionnaire. In the culture of surveillance, I was ranked by the lower grades with the higher surveillance.

A researcher who enters the spot where the Indonesian State is organising its new justice system and elaborating past violence through administration is more disturbing for the local Government officers, directly dealing with people and running the places, than for the central authorities. One is not welcome.

Kuala Jaya prison officers' fear to be suspected of KKN, an acronym that stands for "corruption, collusion and nepotism" because of me was rooted in a tense context. A large upheaval had just taken place in Kuala Jaya compound, in the neighbouring male prison and a few prisoners had escaped. The fire had been set to the prison by revolted inmates as a protest, it was said, but also because some had planned their escape and had paid the "right" people for it to happen. Chief officers in Kuala Jaya Department of Justice had just been removed because of the upheaval and the new ones, those I was meeting, although quite friendly, were scared to do anything if only vaguely irregular. Was I a Human Right person (*orang HAM*)? A member of an NGO? A journalist? Who would my research profit to? Was I going to report nasty things about the system or the way they worked? In my permit it was specified that I would not be allowed, unless accompanied and at the local guards' discretion, in the prisoners' cells. This was explained as a measure of security for myself but it also voiced the fear that I might check upon the standards of the inmates' life. The idea of a neat prison with a researcher giving a hand to its implementation did not displease the central Ministry, but it was quite disconnected from the penitentiaries' reality.

I was at the joint of different and differently embodied forms of state. It ranged from the prison guards, entangled in a small-scale corruption in line with the old, Suhartian habit for civil servant to integrate their salaries

with “cigarette money”; to the local authorities, freshly installed to deal with further corruption, violence, violations of human rights, personal interests and fear; to a new management of Justice and prisons in line with a world trend. On the whole, my attempts of access from the immediate outer environment had enabled me to start sensing what Martin etc call “the prison climate” (2014, p. 7): a specific mixture of relationship and physical context, of language, history and stories that makes one prison different from another.

Victim, perpetrator, criminal: the multiplication of self-narrations against the individualization of pain

It’s time about Resti enters the picture⁸. During my first interview with her, and the subsequent exchanges we had through social media, she wanted to explain what happened, why she was finally caught while bringing 5 kg. heroin into the country. She put her deeds (“*pembuatan*”) upon two states of mind. A state of confusion, sufferance and loss (*tersesat, kabur*) and then, her love (“love”, “*cinta*”) for the man who involved her into the drug trade. It is interesting to underline how her experience of professional growth in the international post-tsunami and mostly post-conflict aid environment structured a view of herself as a weak victim, which she emphasized with me, who belonged to that period of her life. And how, the further she got from that time, the more she found a different, more self-asserting attitude which nevertheless moved her identification pattern from the victim to its reciprocal figure, the perpetrator.

“Problematic” childhood: culture as a psychological problem

Resti’s feelings of confusion and powerlessness preceded and caused her migration to Jakarta. When still in Banda Aceh she often said that she suffered because of her difficult personal story. She blamed her mother, who had disavowed her and her older sisters when she remarried, after the girls’ father’s death, “because she liked to have fun” (*suka hepi*). The girls “quarrelled with their stepfather” (both Resti’s and her sister’s words) and accused their

8 I hold Resti’s self-narration from three sources: her own words before imprisonment and both in our first, short encounter and over the 3 weeks of my in-prison fieldwork; her long written self-description at the back of the questionnaire I used at the beginning of my stay; and the social media, where she holds a variety of profiles. On no occasion could I record her. Unlike other prisoners Resti never agreed to being recorded. Each time I report her words, I take them from my scribbled notes or from her own writing.

mother to use their dead father’s money in order to lead a luxurious life with her new husband and son, while her first marriage daughters were in need.

This emotional configuration is both a common feature in re-marriages and a specific Acehnese case. In Aceh, because of matrifocal and partly matrilineal kinship arrangements, it is quite current for women to be the owner of a house or to feel and be entitled, in case of separation, to stay in the house of their first marriage with a new husband. For the children, in their mother’s re-marriage, “to quarrel with the stepfather” is a trope. The mother’s new husband is often considered a stranger who ejects children, especially girls, from their own house⁹.

This being said, a condition of residential and family tension does not imply that one becomes a drug dealer. After all, whatever the reason, it is quite common for Acehnese young people to live outside their household while attending school. The accusation that a mother spends her first marriage-children’s father’s money in order to provide for a new husband is a cultural banality in Aceh. And yet, for Resti, it was “a psychological problem”.

Let’s examine Resti’s peculiar social environment in Banda Aceh. When she first talked to me of her “problems” (she used the English word), she depicted herself as a girl who had a psychological difficulty because of a “traumatic” childhood and adolescence. The three NGO workers who had introduced me to her, Javanese Yanti, Swedish Kirsten and Acehnese Mami endorsed that description, although it had different nuances of meanings for them. While Yanti, deeply Muslim and strongly optimistic, identified Resti’s problem in her moral attitude and saw a possible solution in a stronger self-analysis and mystics, both Kirsten and Mami put the blame on society and, more precisely, on Acehnese men who are so macho (Kirsten) and lazy (Mami) and Acehnese women who are ready to do anything to keep them home – an idea which many Acehnese following a modern idea of Islam are incline to subscribe.

Resti used both the above narratives to describe herself as a weak and unlucky victim of social contingencies. I think that in doing so, she was voicing a cultural shift which outlived the NGO season and was only partly depending on it. Certainly, through the humanitarian aids, the international interpretative standard of suffering has become of common use in Aceh (Grayman 2009; see Smith 2017 for a brilliant discussion on trauma); but international standards are also the consequence of global Islam and national neo-liberal, middle-class oriented ideologies. Resti’s appreciation of her own childhood must be seen in this light. By becoming the “victim” of a

⁹ This does not mean that a woman’s new husband is necessarily rejected by her children. On the contrary, it rather signifies that there is a cultural definition of his place (Vignato 2012a).

“broken family”, as modern-educated social workers often define cases like hers in Aceh (Vignato 2012a) she tuned into both a modern Muslim moral definition of self (see Yanti’s moral discourse) and family (Mami’s idea) and to a Western conception of gender equality (see Kirsten’s estimation): her cultural tradition was thus experienced as her personal problem.

She described sickness and victimhood as eroding her moral resolution. “I was not serious” (“*kurang serius*”) Resti writes now, when explaining her life before crime. Yanti and Mami had always warned me that she was not “serious”. They underlined how she was constantly looking for a job as a penniless student but never set foot in the campus; when she did work she was often unreliable; she was looking for a boyfriend to marry but did not behave like a “proper” girl.

She missed sex with a boyfriend, she said to me, she needed a good, well paid job and rebelled against the idea of being poor for the rest of her life; at the same time, she agreed that indeed, she was not serious and that is why she ended up being confused. She was individualizing her sufferance: her culture was her problem, her inability to deal with it and with the decline of well-paid jobs in the humanitarian trade was a moral weakness. Not only did she describe herself as the victim of an unjust mother and society, she also felt a guilty victim. Such situation was hardly bearable.

Confused girl meets evil boy: from victim to perpetrator

When Resti decided to leave Banda Aceh and move to Jakarta she was warned by many that she would be in great danger. This, again, is a trope of the imaginary relationship that the Acehnese often have with “outside Aceh”, most often described as Medan or Jakarta: dangerous places of disorder and low morality. Those were affectionate warnings she received. Friends thought that she would not be strong enough.

In Jakarta, Resti found no job – she had no skills and no degree and would not accept a job which did not grant her enough to eat – but she met Adam, a Nigerian man whom “she fell in love with”. If I can venture again on cultural tropes, that Nigerians are *mafiosi*, violent and drug dealers is an all-Asia cliché because of the well-spread and ferocious criminal network of Nigerian clans implanted in the whole region. It is therefore unlikely that she did not at least suspect what relating to Adam might introduce her to. Nevertheless, during our first encounters she emphasized her astonishment when she found out about the drug dealing. She described her love story as the consequence of her deep confusion, stupidity and lack of experience, and described his love as a misleading feeling grounded on low moral strength. This was also the narration that she prepared for the trial: she was a suffering girl who had been seduced by a ruthless criminal.

Parallel to this, she also told me a different story where the relationship with Adam appeared as an appropriate answer to her confusion and mainly, her own choice. She liked him and she liked the disturbing idea to be with a black man ("I am so black myself," she jokes). Adam never let her down, she said. He offered her a place to live and treated her as his own wife. He was jealous and insisted on her wearing a jilbab, for example, even though in Jakarta, Muslim women are not required to as in Aceh – that, according to Resti, was a sign of respect of her as a woman and as an Acehnese.

Although Resti was very scared upon discovering his criminal activities, she was keen on entering business with him. She told me that at first, he did not want her to get involved in his business, "because he loved her", but she insisted. She believed that it would be the lucky stroke, the one-time shot that would settle her life with or without him. Adam and she were caught upon a denunciation while trying to smuggle 5 Kg heroin into Indonesia from abroad and underwent trial and sentence together.

The arrest and the trials were, as it is often the case, an extremely shocking and violent experience for Resti. Adam was sentenced to death and then, upon appeal, to life imprisonment as a major dealer, whereas she was sentenced to 20 years imprisonment as a courier. Her sister has described the trial to me over and over, protesting her own despair at not being able to help – she had tried, in her own words, to buy a judge but it was too expensive and the lawyer said that he could not grant her acquittal, so she saw no point in hiring him. Resti described the trial as a sort of negative marriage that unites her and Adam in destiny. With Adam, she was no longer a victim but a more powerful perpetrator.

Multiple narratives of life in prison

Resti's multiple narrations of herself developed further during our relationship in the prison. At first, she presented her life in prison as a thoroughly depressive state which she opposed with a volunteeristic idea of resisting and putting up with it (*tahan*). She insisted on her effort to develop self-confidence (*percaya diri*) and to keep planning her future in spite of her long sentence. She gave me some crochet artefacts begging me to set up a commerce for them in Europe and asked for some painting equipment, because, so she said, she knew that painting was good for her. In short, she described herself as a still confused but well-intentioned model prisoner, luckily assigned to a small cell – only 8 people – and working on her personal growth. She said that she felt lonely and awkward as most other inmates were Christian, so suggesting a strong involvement in Islam. She had appropriated the rhetoric of individual change and moulded it coherent to what I represented in her former life, the West, progressive Islam and humanitarian interpretations.

Coherent, too, with what defined her psychological suffering as “personal problem”. She was a grateful victim.

When during my stay in the prison, I (unknowingly) showed siding with a certain group whom she did not like, Resti started resenting me and underlining another side of herself by asserting her smartness and her power as an inmate and as a callous criminal. She was not “lucky”, but smart enough to bribe her way to a smaller cell, she said, where she had a good position. Thanks to the past drugs business, she could pay someone to carry her water and do her laundry. She was feared. Using some of Adam’s capital, she has actually tried to start business again within and from the prison, although without much success¹⁰. As she was caught, she spent a month in the “dark cell” (*kamar gelap*), which was horrible but, so she explained, could happen for stupid, unfathomable reasons too, like being found with a smartphone, so the risk was worth taking. Now she knew that business within the prison was a bad move. She was focusing on buying her way back to an Acehnese prison as she was sure that her sentence would be shortened more easily there through appropriate bribing (in Kuala Jaya, she said, people were really wicked and unreliable, you paid and had nothing in exchange: was I not the living proof of that?), and anyhow, in Aceh more friends and her sister could come visit. Such a narration was a perfect conjunction of her criminal identity and her carceral one. She was asserting her power over mine but mainly, over the other inmates.

While in prison, she had also subsumed a third narration. She ran her small power both with poor Acehnese women and with non-Acehnese girls and women. The latter were, for the most part, drug dealers and sex-workers coming from a metropolitan environment and had a relational ease that Resti liked and appreciated. Still, she now turned towards the group of Acehnese women to claim their common victimhood in a criminal world that they did not master properly, run by serious dealers, corrupted police and army and former rebel combatants turned into gangsters. Unlike the Kuala Jayanese girls who were bred in the realm of sex and drugs, said Resti, they, the Acehnese, belonged to a healthy and moral society and had been victims of its rotten agents. It was a moral claim to a certain integrity because they were Acehnese and Muslim, and had had to endure political oppression. Because some of them had entered prison in 2007-8 and had been disattended by their families, they had little knowledge of what Aceh has become 10 years after the Peace Agreement and still pictured it as the violence-stricken territory that they had left. Resti has then developed an Acehnese-specific resentment to whatever the Indonesian state had done to them Acehnese, although she never declined responsibility for what she did.

10 Adam had just been suspected of handling an Indonesiawide traffick of methamphetamines fabricated inside Cipinang prison in Java.

This was the case of at least half of the Acehnese prisoners held in Kuala Jaya. Before the Peace Agreement, between 1998 and 2003, stories had circulated of “old ladies” who farmed cannabis around remote, forest villages and declared to have hardly any knowledge of the trade marijuana-against-weapons run by the combatants of GAM (*Gerakan Aceh Merdeka*, Free Aceh Movement). After 2005, the production of cannabis became an established business largely run by the same people and drew on the same or very close networks as in wartime. Between 2008 and 2012, large cultivations of *ganja* were identified by air and destroyed by the police. It is difficult to disentangle need, coercion, business and clear minded illegality, especially for women, who are rarely in power in the drug trade. None of the inmates in Kuala Jaya was a producer or a farmer, but quite a few had been sentenced to very long terms for taking part in the transportation of *ganja*, and fused the violence and the injustice that they endured by the police and in jail with the repressive action of the Indonesian Army that everybody had to endure during the civil war. Other prisoners, both dealers and consumers of crystal meths, partly depended on former combatant networks, too, and partly, on the new generation of small dealers (Vignato, 2017). Like Resti, the latter both owned their offense and felt manipulated and violated. Like Resti, they fluctuated between the victim/perpetrator symbolic poles.

“Quasi ethnography”: subjects and context in a non-free space

So far, I kept contextualizing Resti thanks to my acquaintance with her before arrest and prison. “Context”, though, is a problematic notion when it comes to ethnography in prison. 250 Acehnese are a part of Aceh, although encrusted in an ethnicity-blind, indifferent State mechanism through confinement. By being with them I met all the elements of the Acehnese society that I had come to know in post-disaster Aceh: Islam, food, poverty, migration, memories of disasters, to quote a few. I was told that stationing in a prison, like stationing in a Koranic school (*pesantren*), was a form of this *rantau*, “migration”, that is one of the outstanding features of traditional Acehnese societies: even the prison was reconducted to sense of ethnicity. But apart from Resti, I could not check on those stories otherwise than by hypothetically linking them to the Acehnese context I knew.

In prison, individual stories had to be considered with a sharpened critical approach. All the women I met sometimes in a face-to-face setting and some other times in a group understandably wanted to appear to me as more than what I could see: they claimed, cursed and partly invented their former life, offering a narration which I could not verify. I navigated imaginary pasts where some notions kept coming back – corruption, poverty, fear, denunciation – but no other faces could be brought in except those prison-ones.

Even the jail I could not fully apprehend as a context. I was not really “there”, to resume Geertz’s famous definition of fieldwork (Geertz 1988): never at night, never at sunrise, I never spent 16 hours on a raw locked up in an overcrowded cell or ordered somebody to bring water into the cell bucket so as to wash privately. Some places of the prison I never visited and for the rest, I was basically confined to three places: “my cell”, that is, the unused medical room; the common area in the centre of the space where the cells opened; and on some occasions, the parlour. Cunha speaks of “quasi-ethnography” in a prison “given that fieldworkers’ access to carceral settings with little or no institutional filters is rare in international prison research” (2014, p. 224).

Individual characters and interactions become an important field of enquiry when the access to the context is limited. When I actually started meeting Resti in her prison social life, beyond our vis-à-vis first meetings, in different parts of the prison, I found it difficult to renew a sincere contact with her: she was hardly interested in my presence and even the small amount of money that I granted her had no power of bonding.

Prison had changed her. This is not a surprise as the whole practice of imprisonment relies on the hypothesis that through the experience of pain, constriction and specific “rehabilitating” activities, whatever had previously led to crime disappears from the prisoner. In prison, one is *supposed* to change as *an individual*. Foucault calls the prison workers “behaviour engineers, orthopaedics of individuality” (1975, p. 302). Interestingly, while tracing the history of the idea of psyche which is underpinned by carceral politics, Haney argues that “prison is a supremely individualistic response to the social problem of crime” (Haney 2005, p. 85). Neither crime nor individual behaviour, continues Haney, are the fact of some kind of “true self” which might be changed, as “the situation of the moment plays an enormously powerful role in the often automatic activation and regulation of complex human behaviour” (Mischel 1997, in Haney 2005, p. 76). Prisoners become “prison minded”, that is, dominated by the prison structure and whatever is needed to survive in it. In this view, Foucault’s techniques of the self serve the same individualistic ideology which structures prisons.

However, Resti’s survival strategies were not only playing along the individualistic pattern of self-improvement. Rather than modifying her hypothetical moral self, she had sealed it and multiplied her self-narrations to the point that one could no longer catch her as a subject. She had crafted various worlds, various settings for her life to take place, in a sort of anti-individualistic response to prison. She had thus outruled the “true self” hypothesis.

All this considered, uncatchable Resti and her response to my presence were still my entry points into the prison. I needed to collaborate with someone in order to gain some understanding of what has drawn 250 Acehnese women to be imprisoned for drug dealing outside their region and the only person that I could sense in a wider context than prison was Resti, but she resisted and es-

caped. I had to reconstruct an intersubjective exchange which would include both her and me inside and outside the prison, and could become a shared enquiring subject in my research, a “we”. Resti herself was both my embodied context and the chance to have a critical look onto it.

Love pain and prison pain: a code for suffering

As we saw, Resti’s talks were full of half-truths or straight lies as she related to one of many narrative lines. “She’s a liar” other convicts said: still, in order to preserve some privacy, everyone was a liar.

Love talk was the only narrative line of hers which kept on making sense to me and covered both before and after arrest and conviction. Her relationship with Adam did not end with the beginning of incarceration. At the time of my fieldwork, they were detained in neighbouring prisons and regularly spoke on the telephone and through social media. He sent her money, as he apparently still controlled or owned some capital – that is why, in Resti’s words, he succeeded in avoiding a death sentence. At a certain stage of our interaction in prison, I asked her to enquire if I could go visit Adam but Adam refused protesting his feeling of shame “as his English was bad”, so I never managed to have a first-hand impression of him (I learned through the press that right then, he was being interrogated for further trafficking, so I suspect he feared that I was sent to spy on him). Resti said that she knew that all her troubles were due to Adam’s influence but still, she was happy to have him by her side. She needed a man, she said in tears.

Like most criminal men partners, Adam was far from being considered a positive character by Resti or other inmates. Resti’s sister called him “beast” (*binatang*) and Resti herself sometimes did too, but it didn’t last for long. He was so close, she said. “I know he is the cause of all this and still, he looks after me and talks to me” she repeated, once again unveiling a victim-perpetrator bond in her original relationship with him. Still, there was more to this. Everybody, in the prison, knew about them and spoke of them in admiration as everybody liked romantic love (*love, cinta*) and most longed for sex, even the sex that Resti and Adam could have through the phone. In fact, any form of adult sexualized love is an asset to survive prison, both a valuable strategy to gain prison advantage (protection, money, better conditions) and to explode, if only temporarily, prison mind.

The power of “love”

Resti’s was not the only prison love-story I became acquainted with. One in particular made me see her love talks in a wider picture.

A prisoner fell in love with a young *tomboy*¹¹, that is, a transgender woman-to-man, who was detained in a female prison. They became a couple and were acknowledged as such by all. The prisoner *girl*, as are called *tomboys'* lovers in Indonesian, served a short sentence and was released, whereas her lover was into a longer detention. The newly free *girl* was desperate. She hung around the compound for a few weeks until the guards took pity of her and “employed” her, for free, as a gardener. This entitled her to enter the prison in daytime and be with her lover until they were both free.

The story was told to me by a few inmates when I steered our conversation towards love. They described the three *tomboys* detained in Kota Jaya as happy creatures who could have plenty of girlfriends and sex: a *tomboy-girl* relationship was not considered same-sex love. In fact, my interlocutors were eager to differentiate themselves from the lesbians (*lesbi*): some claimed that homosexuality “could not happen” to them because Islam forbids it while others put it bluntly in terms of their own undesirability (they were old and poor). Still, as everybody considered the *tomboys* as men, the *tomboy-girl* story concerned the exceptionality of a heterosexual love in prison¹² as well as of a feeling extending beyond the duration of the punishment and across the walls of prison.

The same episode was related to me by a guard. In her narrative, she insisted on how humane the guards are nowadays and how much they try to ease the relationships between visitors and inmates, the problem being that most people do not receive enough visits rather than some visitors being denied entrance. The *tomboy-girl* story, said the guard, was the example of how “their” prison could be a warm, friendly place which one would want to go back to rather than escape from. In fact, like the prisoners, the guards too were “prison minded”: their whole universe revolved around prison strategies, prison advantages and prison risks. The prison was a familiar place that they owned and ruled: not only their working place, but also their beauty parlour (the guards would receive hair and facial treatment for free, as well as massage, by the inmates), laundry service and babysitting facility. For them, the *tomboy-girl* story was not about a relationship which could go beyond the prison boundaries, but about the guards' effort not to feel that they were just the embodiment of repressive power and the exploiters of those submitted to it.

By chance, back in Aceh, a woman who was detained in Kuala Jaya prison at the time of the facts related the very same episode. She said that of course the *girl* did not want to separate from her *tomboy* lover. The latter was fruit-

11 Blackwood's enlightening book (2010) has pointed out that Indonesian *tomboy* are not lesbians but transgenders.

12 A similar transgressive story concerned the young pregnant woman who managed to become pregnant with her unmarried lover in a small prison common parlour.

fully continuing his deals in crystal meths drugs from within the prison, made some money out of it and lavishly provided for her. What would she do outside without his support? When her *tomboy* lover was finally released too, so said my informant, the *girl* only lived with him for a while and then fled for a career in sex work and illegality.

Money, protection and other material advantages are always part of an affectionate relationship but in prison, the narrative of heterosexual love signalled the individual’s right to a wider life transcending the “prison mind” even for the guards. In heteronormative Acehnese society run by the Islamic Law, the social power of “love” could only be valid in a man-woman relationship, exactly what could not happen in a prison. Paradoxically, the only person who narrated the story from afar was also the only one who erased feelings from it, as if “love” itself – an emotional dimension – was no longer meaningful.

Smart love and prison pain

It was only when some ethnographic context was brought into my “quasi-ethnography” that Resti’s love story appeared as paradigmatic both of the use of love narrative in prison and of the experience of woman-man relationship in times of social violence and destruction. My respondents started telling me about this when, in a certain way, it was clear that prison mind was affecting me too, that I, too, reasoned in terms of prison advantages and prison risks.

During my fieldwork, the first time that a raid (*razia*) was suddenly enforced, I behave as I was told: leave everything and stand in front of “my cell”, the medical room. The inmates, though, started throwing small forbidden possessions such as handphones or perfume bottles in the gutter ditch running by the cell doors, so that these things would not be discovered in case their cell was selected to be thoroughly searched. My neighbour silently signalled me to pick up her handphone from the ditch and hide it, counting on the unlikeliness of me being selected. I acted on impulse and collected whatever was there: phones, perfume, money. I instantly regretted it and felt scared, picturing myself thrown out of the country or even arrested and jailed if I was discovered¹³.

After this episode, the woman whose phone I had saved changed her attitude towards me. She admitted to having thought that I was Resti’s ally, and in her view Resti was a dangerous and evil woman, who reported to the guards upon other inmates. Also, she had feared that I might denounce the

13 I am aware that this is the prison-version of Geertz’s police raid at the outset of his 1971 essay “Deep play: notes on the Balinese Cockfight” (2005), in all its implications.

guards' own misbehaviours to upper layers of penitentiary power, which in turn would cause the guards to retaliate and the prisoners to suffer. But now I had risked and I had helped.

"Without the handphone there is no hope", she said, thankfully retrieving her device. She explained the importance of handphones to make money which was indispensable for food, clothes, medicines, bribes and legal matters. Most convicts from Aceh never received any visit: husbands, if any, had disappeared, and families were too poor to afford the trip or had no reason to do it, as they could not offer any support in money and goods. The Acehese women held in Kuala Jaya prison were caught with their merchandise outside Aceh, or else they would be detained in Aceh: families were far away.

In Aceh, it is men's traditional role to provide women and households with money and clothes and there is an outspoken expectance, on women's side, that they fulfil this duty – not to nourish them or provide a home, but specifically to provide money and clothes (Siegel 1969, p. 144). This does not imply, in contemporary rural Aceh, a total economic dependence, because women own the houses and the farms, and are skilled entrepreneurs; nor does it exclude sincere feelings. Still, it lingers in gender ideas. Now, some Acehese men are interested in jailed women. They can be prisoners themselves who are willing to have a wife when free, divorced men who can't afford to plan an ordinary wedding and even married men who want to flirt without risking to be caught. Clearly, they are acquainted with prisons and prisoners and most likely, with the drug dealing environment. They get in touch with the woman convict by SMS or social media through mutual acquaintances and start chatting away and sending small sums. In many cases, they further help by running a small dealing activity outside the prison, mainly of crystal meths drugs, which they start on the woman's savings or through her network. Both my two cell neighbours had a boyfriend outside who dealt, whom they had only met in the prison parlour, in one case, and never met at all, the other. This did not make their relationship uniquely business-oriented, on the contrary: it seemed to empower them.

Syakilah, the one who had never met her boyfriend, gave me some insight on why she felt stronger thanks to this relationship. Born in 1973, she had married at 14, and divorced at 19, after bearing 4 children in a growing political and military tension. She had been urged to marry by her mother and her violent and possessive husband vanished when her last born was still a small baby. In the mid-1990s, when the civil conflict underwent one of its worst periods (DOM 1998) she met a man who was a fighter in the Free Aceh Movement (GAM) and who involved her in the army-for-drugs trafficking across the Strait of Melaka. As a very young single mother during the conflict, she said, she had to find money to feed her children amidst insecurity and danger; she also felt that being a fighter's woman gave her some steady social status. While she had little to say of her former husband

Syakilah talked at length of her submission to her GAM boyfriend and his group. She spoke of him in despise and anger, as, so she thought, he had reported her to the Police and caused her arrest out of jealousy after they had split, when she had successfully started dealing on her own. Given this background, she described her present faceless man and business partner in a cool-headed attitude: she had looked for a verified partner, not for a sweet-talking lover, she said. She described her actual self as smart and determined. She claimed her night trips by speed-boat to and from Malaysia with weapons and drugs as a high time of her life because she had felt elated and powerful, she said, but they were not worth 8 years in a prison because of a man's jealousy; now she didn't want to repeat the same mistake. At the same time, she fantasised about this unmet man as about a passionate lover and as the outcome of a well thought choice, someone "one could open her heart to". Last I heard of her, after she was released, she was living with her mother in her home village.

Prison love as an individualization of social suffering

Sexual repression is one of the main consequences of imprisonment and for sure, a great source of suffering. Prison pain, argue criminologists, is not a part of the punishment but an unnecessary harm (Irwin & Owen 2005) which stems directly from the very principle of prison and will probably annihilate any "correctional" effect (Haney 2005). Anybody who wants to survive prison, though, needs to come to term with its intrinsic pains. Besides, Liebling and Maruna underline that "the point of studying prison effects is not just the need to understand the potentially brutalising aspects of institutional living, but also to document and learn from examples in which prisoners (...) have overcome these substantial social forces" (2005, p.22).

Considering Resti's self-narration, prison symbolic love stories like the *tomboy/girl* relationship, and Syakila's love over the phone it appears that lived love allows an evasion, literally, which is both structural (there is a link beyond the prison walls) and imaginary. Despite its limitations, it is a more concrete experience than a phantasy like making love to an actor or being suddenly freed. Resti's account of her couple includes the time before prison and is made stronger by the acknowledgement that all the groups involved in prison – inmates, guards and even outer society – show about the existence and the dignity of that dimension. Syakilah, in a different and probably, more mature attitude reflects about her past relationships by establishing a new kind of partnership.

Lived love is speakable as a painful condition which is not determined by the prison itself, and thus challenges the prison mind. In prison, Resti suffers of depression, lack of personal space, lack of occupation or opportuni-

ties to further her education, ill health through overweight, unjust punishment from the guards, misfortune in illegal business, fear and many other ailments. But only love is a speakable suffering, with a known language and dignity. Like Resti once wrote in English in the Facebook¹⁴ status of one of the many profiles she holds, “love pains are so sweet”.

This is not to conclude about the saving power of love imagination, on the contrary, it points to where the prison violence becomes most destructive and not only because few inmates can boast of lived love, although many, especially among the non-Acehnese younger convicts, practice insider same-sex love.

While love pains are speakable and deserve being listened to, exploding the constricting and obsessional prison mind, they also allow, once again, the individualization of all the social aspects of pain. As we have seen, Resti and Syakilah have different attitudes towards their past and they are of different age. Nevertheless, when seen in the group of Acehnese convicts, they appear as the embodiment of the conflict direct and mediated violence as well as of the societal lack of interest for its weakest members.

While giving them psychological and material relief, their love bond has made them more and more an Indonesian ordinary criminal rather than an embodied witness of the difficult normalization of life in post-conflict, post-humanitarian Aceh.

The moralisation of conflict suffering

In this article I have detailed how it happened that I include prison in my anthropological fieldwork research and how this choice has called for a sharper methodological awareness. I have described how prison is an important lieu of constitution of Indonesian contemporary society and suggested that important political changes entail changes in imprisonment (or execution) policies. I have finally related the story of my relationship with my former assistant after she was imprisoned and underlined how her becoming a drug-criminal, in my view, is strongly enmeshed into her growth in a post-conflict, post-tsunami society.

I make this point through two main arguments. First, I underline how by being in Kuala Jaya prison, Resti shifts from her original narration of herself as an individually traumatized girl to a new one as a victimized Acehnese woman, thanks to the identification with the larger group of Acehnese women detained for long sentences.

I then highlight how the victim-perpetrator semantic couple, as largely explored by Resti during the post-disaster/post-conflict context, defines her

14 Handphones are forbidden in Indonesian jails but most prisoners I know use one.

"criminal self". Her original daring freedom, or her "lack of seriousness", becomes an intentional criminal action within her couple relationship with Adam. I proceed to illustrate how a similar gendered genealogy of criminality concerns other women as well, like early, married Syakilah, and how it is related to the war and its consequences.

Prison mind and prison pain are my core analytical tools. All the contrasting self-narrations, which Resti manages as separate sectors of her life, are pulled together in the "prison mind", the performative and obsessional experience of a total institution. Heterosexual sentimental and sexual relationships in an all-female prison appear as a powerful tool to break out of the "prison mind" and thus release the prison pain which is its funding root. But while Resti seems symbolically trapped in an exploitative relationship, Syakilah uses her nearly disembodied "love" affair also as a reflexive tool that illuminates her past experience.

My ethnographic experience pointed to the limits of classic ethnography when it comes to an institution of confinement, where the context is restricted and only partly entangled in the prisoners' life networks. My effort to establish a plural subject of research, a "we researchers" that is indispensable in contemporary social sciences, led me to perceive some fundamental aspects of the relationship between Acehnese marginal people and the Indonesian state. Because of the restricted freedom, the very construction of the "we" has become my ethnographic context.

I would like to conclude by reverting to the Acehnese detained in Kuala Jaya as figure of the normalization of post-disaster suffering. We have seen that a prison is in constant change, partly because rules and laws change, partly because the prison locality changes and partly, because inmates change. Six years after my fieldwork, Resti succeeded in being moved to a prison in North Aceh, Syakilah is free and about 20 among the poorest long-term detainees, including the woman sentenced to life imprisonment, are still in Kuala Jaya. By now, they are not distinguishable from other ordinary criminals according to the Indonesian law, as in Aceh, too, Acehnese resistant ethnicity turns into ordinary Indonesian citizenship. Even drug dealers have shifted from the old-conflict related generation to a new, younger one.

More and more, incarceration appears as a policy to handle marginality. Thanks to such policy, the conflict and post-disaster suffering has translated into prison pain: social suffering is thus individualized and moralized, and political responsibilities disappear.

I do not really know what is happening to Resti now as her Facebook profiles become more and more standardized and when I speak on the phone it is emotions and cries for help that dominate – besides, conversations are often interrupted.

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