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Zones of Control & Civilian Strategy in the Aceh Conflict

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How do civilians respond to and shape civil war? Dominant approaches emphasise territorial control, while rival sociological explanations understand civilian behaviour as rooted in justice, pleasure, and social norms. This paper assesses these divergent sensibilities by examining rebel-controlled areas from Aceh, Indonesia. Many civilians provided the rebels with symbolic support, information and provisions, support that deepened over time as the rebels established control. By disaggregating 'civilians' into social groups, a more complex story appears. Only some civilian groups supported the dominant armed group, suggesting that control and sociological approaches can be complementary in explaining civilian behaviour.

Literally about life and death, armed conflict has long been the subject of scholarly research. Studies have focused on why men rebel, how states can best respond and how to protect civilians caught in the crossfire. Civilians are hardly inert though. In all conflicts, civilians navigate local political orders, pursuing personal goals, contributing to violence and shaping armed groups. Part of the turn towards the micro-dynamics of civil war, studying civilian action promises to deepen our understanding of civil wars considerably. What drives civilian strategy in armed conflict? This fundamental question has generated a variety of answers. Stathis Kalyvas suggests that civilian behaviour is determined by the dominant local armed group, with civilian action informed by a desire for security as well as profit and consequent social pressures.[1] Rival approaches understand civilian behaviour in terms of sociological factors; civilians often act despite great risks, perhaps supporting rebels against strong state forces or resisting both sides. There is little agreement regarding whether civilian action is best understood in terms of material self-interest or sociological other-regard, representing divergent understandings over the nature of war.

This paper seeks to make sense of these contending explanations. Based on extensive fieldwork in Indonesia, it focuses on rebel strongholds in Aceh's secessionist conflict (1976–2005). I find that considerable civilian action in Aceh supports Kalyvas' control theory, with civilians providing a range of support to the rebels

that deepened over time as they established control. This said, a more nuanced story appears when we disaggregate the broad category of 'civilians'. While women, Islamic leaders and activists mostly sided with the rebels within their strongholds, other groups behaved differently. Young men fled the conflict for jobs in Malaysia. While later supporting the rebels, activists initially confronted state forces within state strongholds. Even supporters resisted the rebels on a few occasions, namely when the rebels attacked ethnic minorities. Finally, village chiefs did not support the rebels, maintaining neutrality in order to manage village affairs. While zones generally explain civilian support, strategies such as flight or voicing resistance cannot be accounted for by materialist logics alone. It seems that the types of civilians motivated by material factors are determined by social conditions, demonstrating a complementarity between rationalist and ideational understandings of armed conflict.

CIVILIAN STRATEGY AND CIVIL WARS

Early studies of intrastate conflict prioritised two actors, states and rebels, as the study of war was essentially limited to those who wage it. Writers focused on 'why men rebel'[2] in an effort to overcome rebellion, or at least stymie the negative conditions that make it occur. After the Cold War, efforts to expand the meaning, referent and scope of security led to new studies of intrastate conflicts.[3] New approaches to human security prioritised civilians, moving beyond the focus on states and insurgents to consider humanitarian aid and a responsibility to protect. This shift to studying civilians as victims sparked greater attention to helping people, but also may have obscured our understanding of civil war. For Kalyvas, civil wars are often 'contaminated' by a 'discourse of condemnation'.[4] Humanitarian approaches are premised on civilians being neutral and innocent, typically in the midst of anarchy. In such contexts, the idea of civilian action makes little sense, except insofar as they are forced to act.

Others have utilised quantitative data to unravel the causes (and correlations) of violence against civilians.[5] Some explain violence against civilians in terms of rebel capacity and state strategy,[6] while others explore the forms of violence utilised by armed groups[7] and how the organisation of armed groups shapes violence against civilians.[8] While these and related studies offer valuable insights, civilians exist only to be killed or not killed by armed groups. Civilians remain dependent variables. This is problematic because it is so widely understood that civilian support sometimes means the difference between survival and defeat for rebel groups. While portraying civilians as victims, Mason and Krane suggest that 'their support and loyalty are what ultimately determine the outcome of the struggle between the regime and its opposition'.[9] In other words, civilians may also represent independent variables, even if they are treated as inert. The fact that civilian support and its absence are so integral to explaining the outcome of civil wars makes it all the more puzzling that many scholars have overlooked. It is not that civilian action represents a mere blind spot – their decisions are integral to explanations for abuse and the success or failure of rebellion.

The reluctance to treat civilians as actors may be due to an understanding of civilians as victims or of armed conflict as anarchic, with power limited to military

might. It may also be due to a difficulty in conceptualising wartime behaviour beyond taking up arms. Macartan Humphreys and Jeremy Weinstein explore 'participation' in civil wars. By 'participation', they seem to mean joining an armed group, but their key term is left undefined. The authors differentiate between 'those who are mobilized from those who remain on the sidelines', and since to mobilise means to join an armed group (and joining an armed group should entail no longer being a civilian), civilians are automatically relegated to being bystanders.[10] In assessing explanations for participation, the authors refer to studies that are primarily about civilian support for rebel movements, not about becoming rebels.[11] The authors' survey data is limited to why civilians did not join armed groups, obscuring other forms of participation in wars. For an article entitled 'Who Fights?', we are given no sense of civilian or combatant identities.

Are unarmed forces limited to inaction? Peace Studies scholars have shown that civilians can be crucial actors in terms of reconciliation and peace-building.[12] Unfortunately, this line of research is typically limited to post-conflict environments, neglecting how these civilian groups can affect conflict dynamics within the fog of war. Anthropological research such as Chris Coulter's study of Sierra Leone reject characterisations of civilians as 'more peaceful or merely as victims', prioritising how civilians strategise to survive and even prosper.[13] Similarly, Henrik Vigh shows how young women exercised agency in Guinea-Bissau's civil war[14] and Mats Utas looks at youth agency in Liberia.[15] These accounts, while limited in terms of scale, show quite clearly that civilians are hardly hapless bystanders and are often not innocent. Civilians can play important roles in shaping the organisation, ideas and power of armed groups. Borrowing from the social movement literature, Elizabeth Wood explains how rebels in El Salvador benefited from connections to social forces.[16] Thomas McKenna's study of the Mindanao conflict makes similar points, noting that the Moro Islamic Liberation Front developed as a 'professional coalition' involving civilian activists and Islamic leaders.[17] Zachariah Mampilly's work on rebel governance shows how civilians interact with insurgents to produce order.[18] Our appreciation of civilian agency and action continue to develop. Instead of studying civil wars only in terms of armed groups or civilian victimisation, civilians are actors in armed conflicts. Their decisions shape the successes and failures of armed groups, patterns of violence, mass displacement, conflict resolution and more. The question remains – What motivates their behaviour? What drives civilian action in civil wars?

Material Factors: Zones of Control

Perhaps the most obvious explanations for civilian behaviour are material ones, namely that civilians are driven by a need for security and a desire for economic gain. Civilians are by definition unarmed, so must base many of their wartime decisions on a desire to avoid violence and to survive. A desire for security is a primary cause of flight,[19] evident in the terms 'forced displacement' and 'forced migration'. Security is also a core factor in support for armed groups. If one side makes demands with the threat of coercion, many persons will fulfil these demands, and if one side offers protection, many will support their defender. Jeff Goodwin suggests that civilians support rebels when there is *No Other Way Out*; people mobilise not for noble

ideas of ideology or inequality, but instead because of the 'brutal and indiscriminate violence' utilised by counterinsurgency efforts and a desire for security.[20] For David Stoll, people join a rebel movement 'less because they share its ideals than to save their lives', adding that just because an insurgency grows with peasant support does not mean that it is popular.[21] These and other authors provide persuasive arguments for the centrality of security in shaping civilian action, which in this approach, consists of reacting to armed groups and security environments.

Writers have also noted the propensity of civilians to act in terms of economic self-interest, protecting and expanding their wealth in times of war. Civilians may flee or support armed groups due to economic grievances, such as inequality, poverty, landlessness or relative deprivation.[22] They may also flee in order to escape war-torn economies in search of wealth, or may support armed groups to gain access to rewards, commissions, jobs or resources. While most peasants 'care about themselves, their families, their friends, and their villages', Samuel Popkin suggests that individuals remain self-interested.[23] Describing the Spanish civil war, Michael Seidman suggests that 'many if not most workers, peasants, and soldiers were not militants but rather opportunists' who supported a particular side 'to get jobs, food, and health care'.[24] He distinguishes between opportunists who side with whomever has power and cynics who work solely in terms of self-interest, portraying civilians as motivated by economic goods. Economic explanations relate to security, in that civilian action is driven by material, rational and more or less individual factors.

Perhaps the dominant approach to understanding civilian behaviour in civil wars, integrating various materialist approaches as well as some sociological ones, is Stathis Kalyvas' theory of control. Militaries have long understood civil wars in terms of zones of control, speaking of red or liberated zones in a variety of conflicts. Kalyvas argues that civil wars are not about front lines or hearts and minds, but instead about degrees of control over territory.[25] He arranges zones of control along a five-point scale, from total state control, to partial state control, contested areas, partial insurgent control and total insurgent control.[26] These zones are said to determine civilian behaviour. It is not that civilian behaviour totally features as a dependent variable though. Kalyvas shows that widespread collaboration with one side (and a lack of collaboration with its rival) reinforces capacity, moving armed groups from partial to total control. Overall though, civilian action flows from control rather than vice versa. Kalyvas uses the term 'collaboration' purposefully, emphasising opportunism; 'irrespective of their sympathies … most people prefer to collaborate with the political actor that best guarantees their survival'.[27] Later, he notes that 'although control and collaboration interact, control may trump the political preferences of the population'.[28] The mechanisms through which zones of control shape civilian action are diverse, including violence, shielding, credibility, the provision of benefits, monitoring, recruitment and popularity. Civilians support regionally dominant armed groups not simply for security, but also due to social pressures and moral reasons. As armed groups establish control, they can demand compliance, although involuntary support is more costly and less reliable than voluntary support. They also win the favour of locals because as control deepens, armed groups gain the capacity to utilise selective violence, diminishing potential grievances among civilians.

Meanwhile, their weakened rivals lose access to information so are forced to utilise indiscriminate violence, deepening support for the dominant armed group.[29]

While many studies of civil war suggest that civilians are inert, including research that seeks to help them, the above scholars portray them as rational actors that are driven by a desire for security or profit. The most sophisticated approach is Kalyvas' zones of control, which by including security, economic and social factors, seemingly subsumes rival theories. Control does not simply trump civilian preferences, it generates them. This wide range of mechanisms is what makes zones of control such a convincing explanation for civilian action.

Sociological Factors: Pleasure in Agency

While Kalyvas admits that some die-hard supporters may not conform to zones of control, his theory predicts that we should see consistent civilian behaviour throughout zones. We should also see combatant control precede civilian support temporally. These predictions provide ways to challenge the control theory. Far from gaining security and profit, civilian supporters may sacrifice both by supporting rebels. And while control explains collaboration, this is not the only option open to civilians, as control is less convincing in terms of explaining other strategies.

Several studies emphasise ideational, sociological drivers of civilian behaviour over material causes. As Coulter observes, 'War is not exempt from the social'.[30] Roger Petersen argues that 'Whether individuals come to act as rebels or collaborators, killers or victims, heroes or cowards during times of upheaval is largely determined by the nature of their everyday social, economic, and political life, both in the time of the upheaval and the period prior to it'.[31] Petersen explains resistance in the face of powerful armed groups in terms of strong communities. Not only are the social resources of a given community necessary to resist control, the nature of control may also spawn resistance despite coercive power, as perceptions of injustice shape civilian behaviour.[32] Against individualist explanations for rebellion, Michael Taylor also locates incentives and capacity to rebel in community norms.[33] In Latin America, Timothy Wickham-Crowley identifies 'rebellious cultures', areas historically supportive of rebellion whose norms and networks make them receptive to a variety of rebel groups.[34] By identifying zones that are likely to provide support even before a conflict begins, Wickham-Crowley shows that control does not always precede collaboration. Elizabeth Wood suggests that even within areas of El Salvador partially controlled by the state, approximately one-third of peasants supported the rebels, even though doing so led the army to target them and the rebels were unable to protect their supporters. For Wood, 'while material grievances … played a role … emotional and moral motives were essential' to civilian support for the insurgents.[35] This support was largely voluntary and enthusiastic, with civilians providing food and information to the rebels, as well as joining related associations.

While materialist explanations for civilian action focus on self-interest, sociological explanations focus on what Wood calls 'other regard', challenging the assumption of individual rationality smuggled in from economics and rational choice theories.[36] They refer not to individual rationality, but instead to collective norms of appropriate behaviour. How can we evaluate these rival approaches to explaining

civilian action? How can they complement one another? Is it true that, while sociological factors matter, that civilian strategy is essentially driven by military control?

In order to assess these approaches, it is useful to disaggregate the unwieldy category of 'civilians'. While not going so far as to utilise the individual as a unit of analysis, treating civilians as anonymous collectives is insufficient. It may be true that some sociological groups are prone to follow material incentives, while others follow social imperatives. While Peace Studies scholars often distinguish between religious, civil society, village and other leaders in sustaining peace, disaggregating civilians into social groups is surprisingly rare in the civil war literature. Ana Arjona rightly insists that, despite internal variation, individual civilian strategies translate into outcomes only through aggregation, namely geographical zones.[37] We may also aggregate civilians sociologically, necessary to assess territorial theories of civilian action. Approaching civilians as sociological groups illuminates interesting conflict processes. While Wood speaks broadly in terms of *campesinos*, some of her most interesting findings relate to specific types of civilians, as women were especially likely to provide support to the rebels and Evangelicals usually supported the state.[38] Petersen suggests that support for armed groups typically begins with youth groups and activists, who later enlist new supporters through class and ethnic groups.[39] Disaggregating civilians into societal groups allows for a useful assessment of material and ideational explanations for civilian action in war.

ACEH: CIVILIAN STRATEGY UNDER A REBEL FLAG

The below discussion is based on primary ethnographic fieldwork carried out over the past decade. Early fieldwork in 2003–04 was part of a project with Forum-Asia, a Thai human rights organisation, focused on persons displaced by the Aceh conflict. I conducted over six months of interviews between 2007 and 2009, with additional fieldwork in 2014. This has provided me with nearly 300 interviews with about 500 respondents representing a range of societal forces, allowing me to assess patterns of civilian activity across and within zones of control.

Located on the northern tip of Sumatra, Aceh has a long history as an independent Sultanate leading to its forceful incorporation into the Dutch East Indies in the nineteenth century. After making significant contributions to Indonesia's war for independence, Aceh took part in the Darul Islam Rebellion in the late 1950s to demand Islamic law and autonomy.[40] The secessionist conflict formally began in 1976, when a company owned by Acehnese entrepeneur Hasan di Tiro lost a support contract for the Lhokseumawe gas fields, prompting the eccentric businessman and his associates to declare independence. Early on, the Free Aceh Movement (GAM: *Gerakan Aceh Merdeka*) was primarily aspirational. It was a classic example of what Paul Staniland refers to as vanguard insurgent groups,[41] led by intellectuals with limited ground forces, in this case Darul Islam veterans and youths from di Tiro's home district of Pidie, specifically his family's subdistrict of Tiro. The rebellion was extinguished, but returned in the 1980s with Libyan-trained rebel Commanders and a province wracked by intra-military struggles over drug trades. The 1990s saw significant human rights abuses by Indonesian security forces, leading to widespread

anger that burst with the Fall of Suharto in 1998. As the army cracked down on human rights and referendum movements, GAM finally became the champion of the Acehnese. A series of failed peace talks and continued assaults by an increasingly cohesive Indonesian military led to a decline in GAM power by 2004, when a massive tsunami accelerated incipient peace talks, leading to the 2005 Helsinki Agreement. Today, the former rebels dominate local politics through popularity, force and corruption, a situation vastly improved from decades of war.

Zones of Combatant Control

Conflict dynamics varied significantly across Aceh. Until the late 1990s, the conflict was confined to northeastern Aceh, where Indonesian authorities utilised 'Shock Therapy' to scare villagers from rebellion. In these areas, GAM defended Acehnese villagers and evolved considerably popularity. The densely populated Acehnese heartland, stretching from Aceh Besar through Pidie, Bireuen, Lhokseumawe and Aceh Timur became GAM strongholds and by 2000, was partially governed by the rebel movement, which provided schools, courts and infrastructure.[42] Distinct dynamics existed in the provincial capital of Banda Aceh, which remained a state stronghold; the west coast, populated by ethnic Malays and Acehnese settlers; and the province's mountainous interior, home to a range of ethnic minorities that did not identify with GAM ethno-nationalism.

Evidence of these zones can be found in terms of human rights reports and electoral data. A simple content analysis of district and town names among major human rights reports between 1990 and 2004 shows that northern districts reported far more conflict, with 225 references to North Aceh, 173 for Lhokseumawe, 154 for Pidie and 154 for Aceh Timur. From 2000, references to western districts such as South Aceh (102) and West Aceh (32), as well as interior locales such as Takengon (36), begin to surface, with no more than six references for southern places, such as Tamiang, Southeast Aceh, Kutacane and Singkil. The clearest evidence is found in electoral data. In less than democratic New Order elections, Suharto's Golkar dominated the interior and the capital city, while northern Aceh supported the state-sanctioned opposition.[43] In 1999, GAM called to boycott the elections, with turnout falling to 10 per cent in northern districts, but remaining above 80 per cent elsewhere.[44] After the peace agreement, former rebel gubernatorial candidates won over 2/3 of the vote in the northern districts, but under 1/3 in the interior and south. In the 2009 legislative elections, *Partai Aceh* secured 45 per cent of the provincial vote, anchored in northern districts where they earned 70–90 per cent, but in the interior, extremely fragmented electorates returned pluralities for national parties.[45]

Zones of control in the Aceh conflict defy standard accounts of conflict geography. Kalyvas notes that in most cases, 'towns, plains, key communication lines, and accessible terrain tend to be associated with incumbent control, whereas mountains and rugged terrain are generally insurgent strongholds'.[46] In Aceh, while towns and highways tended to be state domains, GAM controlled low-laying, densely populated ethnic Acehnese coastal areas, while the state dominated isolated mountain areas. The reason for these patterns is that the conflict was rooted in ethnic identity, as GAM ethno-nationalism spoke to many ordinary Acehnese and spoke against

migrant and indigenous minorities, who identified more with an inclusive Indonesian nationalism. Ethnic identity is clearly prior to rebel control, which expanded to fit the territorial confines of Acehnese and minority settlements. What became GAM strongholds featured rebellious cultures, as they were also home to anti-Portuguese, anti-Dutch and Darul Islam conflicts. While one hardly wants to sound primordialist, zones of control in the recent conflict were shaped a great deal by ethno-historical factors, and could have probably been predicted prior to the conflict.[47] Since this is not a product of geography, with rebels ruling lowland hills and the state ruling the mountainous interior, we must treat seriously the importance of civilian support as an independent variable. Patterns of support were prior to rebel power, so that control cannot be granted primacy in shaping civilian strategies in Aceh.

While the geographies of respective zones of control may not fit standard expectations and the ethnic composition of these zones challenges Kalyvas' control theory, patterns of violence within respective zones conforms more closely with expectations. Kalyvas suggests that with control, the dominant armed group can utilise selective violence, while the weaker armed group is limited to indiscriminate violence, reinforcing combatant control.[48] Aceh demonstrates this phenomenon clearly. While the rebels were selective in their coercion, targeting informants and ethnic minorities, northern districts saw intense human rights abuses by the Indonesian army, making rebel popularity deep as well as understandable. Meanwhile, GAM was a totally different group in ethnic minority areas, where they arrived to expel Javanese and tax indigenous farmers. GAM's virulent Acehnese ethno-nationalism pushed away non-Acehnese residents, who resisted the rebels and supported state forces, which in minority areas were more restrained and professional. Although the distribution of zones were shaped by historical-cultural factors, patterns within them seem to conform very well to the control theory, although a closer examination is in order.

Civilian Action in Rebel Zones: Material Drivers

This section emphasises how civilian behaviour in GAM strongholds conformed closely to the control hypothesis. Civilian support for the rebels within their strongholds was considerable and deepened over time with rebel control. Rebel support came in many forms. One dominant form was provisions, as civilians provided rice, meat, fuel, money and cigarettes to GAM soldiers. Civilians also provided information to the rebels and denied information to the state. While Indonesia had employed various informants (*cuak*) within rebel zones in the 1990s, as GAM came to dominate, civilian intelligence enabled GAM to kill off state informants with apparent precision.[49] Losing information caused the Indonesian military to operate blindly, generating indiscriminate violence and increasing GAM's popularity. GAM developed an 'extensive network of informers … [which] provided intelligence and early warning of the movements of the TNI and the police'.[50] One GAM Commander explained that:

> Some of the best help we got from the people was when they told the army we went one way, when we really were close. This allowed us to escape or to ambush the army. One time, an old woman ran to the TNI crying, saying that

> GAM killed her son, and they have to hurry to catch them, leading the army into our ambush.[51]

Along with providing information to GAM and misinformation to the army, civilians also refused to work with Indonesian state agencies or mobilise community defence organisations.[52] The rebels also gained symbolic support, with civilians playing rebel music, producing pro-rebel graffiti and flying GAM flags. While armed groups may punish civilians for not providing information, symbolic support seems much more likely to be voluntary. Civilians also took part in GAM rallies, with parades moving across villages. For one villager, 'people here started wearing red and black in support of GAM and raised GAM flags. We lived under a rebel flag. We wanted GAM to know we support a Free Aceh (*Aceh Merdeka*)'.[53] Not only were villages littered with pro-GAM messages, rebel slogans and symbols were etched into trees and bridges, suggesting that symbolic support was sometimes more or less private. As GAM established control, deeper forms of civilian support became possible. Civilians came to serve as GAM civilian officials in village government through which the rebels could communicate with Acehnese communities, and vice versa. In this way, civilians could join the rebel movement without having to take up arms.

That support within GAM zones was extensive and deepened over time affirms the centrality of control in shaping civilian action. This holds for many societal groups, even if we disaggregate the category of 'civilians'. Youths and elders – especially males not expected to take up arms – provided the rebels with specific forms of support. Youths served as couriers, spies and lookouts, with some joining rebel 'scout' organisations. Reports of Aceh's 'child soldiers' actually describe support, not enlistment; 'when they were aged about 14–17, they were pressured by [GAM] to run errands, look out for police and purchase supplies'.[54] Veterans of the Darul Islam Rebellion also provided support, encouraging young men to fight and providing information to the rebels.[55] While not developing a formal institution, GAM Commanders encouraged networks of veterans to support their cause.

The most consistent support for Aceh's rebels was provided by women, Islamic leaders and activists. While this speaks against the trope of 'innocent women' so widely proclaimed by humanitarian groups, it makes sense, given that in many conflicts, women are barred from taking up arms but may feel every bit as motivated as their brothers, husbands, fathers and sons. Villagers explained that, with men killed, in jail, joining the rebels or working abroad, villages were primarily female, and women provided the bulk of rebel support. Women enjoyed explaining how they brought food to the rebels. They initially hid food within firewood bundles, but soon discovered that they could fill empty fertiliser canisters with rice and leave them at the edge of their properties.[56] Women also provided some rebels with housing, but only the rebels they recognised from nearby villages. For one woman, 'the best place to hide GAM during army sweeps was under the kitchen hearth. It is a big space, and since it is outside, we could deny knowing about it if GAM was found'.[57] Women were also primary conduits for information. If the army was approaching, women would jump on motorcycles and inform GAM representatives; 'the army was less likely to suspect women of helping GAM. If they caught up and asked where we were going, we could blame it on women's issues that men should not talk about,

like needing to breastfeed our babies or having cramps. Then they were quiet'.[58] Women also served as nurses and recruiters,[59] and were the bulk of attendees at GAM *dakwah* rallies.

With deeper rebel control, more institutionalised forms of collaboration became possible for Acehnese women. They developed a support organisation known as *Inong Balee*, a historical term referring to legendary female Admiral Malahayati's widow's brigade. While sometimes viewed as soldiers, especially as GAM took publicity photos of them holding weapons to show their movement includes women – images then used by anti-terrorism reports hungry for armed Muslim women wearing headscarves – these photos were staged. Suraiya Kamaruzzaman notes that, despite being 'used in media campaigns to show women's role in GAM's struggle', no women appeared on the list of combatants provided by the GAM to international observers for post-conflict assistance.[60] According to one former *Inong Balee*, 'no, none of us ever shot a gun. What we did was as important, helping our brothers by healing the wounded and feeding the hungry'.[61] Many *Inong Balee* decided to live in GAM camps; 'they regarded themselves as soldiers, and even became arrogant to women who did not live with GAM. Their main roles were cooking food, helping men who were hurt, and organizing information'.[62] As rebel control diminished in 2004, support from women declined. Instead of encouraging recruitment, they now pushed their husbands, brothers and sons to desert the rebels and come home. Losing civilian support reinforced GAM's decline, caused by battlefield losses against Indonesia. As control weakened, collaboration waned, affirming the centrality of control in driving civilian action.

Other major rebel supporters were Islamic leaders. Aceh's *ulama* and *imam* exemplify the primacy of control in shaping civilian action. Despite the fact that the conflict lacked religious goals, the Indonesian state received considerable support from Islamic leaders in its strongholds, Islamic leaders provided mixed or no support in contested areas, and the rebels slowly cultivated tremendous support from Islamic leaders in its zones.[63] The rebels were not natural allies for Islamic leaders, with GAM leaders espousing a secular vision and socialist rhetoric. Islamic leaders were initially critical of the rebels, but as Indonesian abuses mounted and rebel control deepened, skilled GAM Commanders courted the *ulama*, many of whom knew former students who had enlisted. This led the *ulama* to become crucial, unexpected rebel supporters. As GAM established control, *ulama* became major supporters, but only among those residing in rebel zones, affirming the theory that control determines patterns of collaboration.

Islamic leaders supported the rebels in a variety of ways. Villagers explained that *ulama* provided guidance to rebel soldiers, but their primary role was 'convincing villagers critical of GAM that the rebels were okay and helping them was halal'.[64] *Ulama* aided GAM by sounding the call to prayer or traditional drums when Indonesian soldiers were nearby, allowing the rebels to flee.[65] They also supported GAM financially through roadside donations for fund mosque construction as well as through *zakat* (alms). Islamic boarding schools were also used to hide weapons and soldiers: 'I helped hide GAM, and with time, they attended my classes by day, becoming normal students, hidden from the army'.[66] As the army utilised

indiscriminate violence and began torching Islamic boarding schools around Pidie, *ulama* flocked to the rebels. Many joined as Islamic judges 'or as *imeum teuntara*, men who gave religious training to other fighters'.[67] These GAM *ulama* performed religious duties in the jungles for GAM soldiers, such as religious education and prayer, helping the rebels' morale as well as image.[68] Powerful *ulama* joined the rebels as judges and advisors, and since the end of the conflict, many have remained allied to the former rebels, organised through the *Ulama* Council of Nanngroe Aceh. Despite initially opposing the rebels, Islamic leaders became core supporters in response army abuses and rebel popularity.

A final source of support for the rebels was found among student and civil society activists. Like *ulama*, activists were hardly natural allies for the rebels. While GAM spoke in terms of Acehnese identity, violence and a Sultanate, students spoke in terms of Indonesia, protest and democracy. In the 1990s, these very ties to pan-Indonesian networks led Acehnese activists to protest New Order abuses. In 1999, Acehnese activist networks were arguably more popular than GAM, leading massive referendum rallies and demanding investigations into human rights abuses. While the rest of the country democratised, Aceh remained authoritarian, and security forces interpreted civil society criticism as support for the rebels. By 2000, Indonesian forces attacked activists across Aceh, leading many to flee, some from Aceh and others to GAM zones, where they aligned with the rebel movement. Like Islamic leaders, activists merged with GAM, helping them to established systems of governance as rebel bureaucrats and teachers. Islamic leaders also provided public relations expertise, shaping the rebel movement's message in terms of human rights frames. During peace talks, many rebel negotiators were drawn from the ranks of civilian activists. Again, social groups came to collaborate as rebels established control, support that deepened over time and reinforced these zones of control.

The Free Aceh Movement gained immense support from civilians in its strongholds. Support came in a variety of forms and from a variety of societal forces, especially women, Islamic leaders and activists. These examples make it clear that in Aceh, insurgent control shaped civilian strategy, although support in turn reinforced rebel dominance. One village leader struck a similar chord: 'The army killed people because it had no support here and GAM was strong. This made GAM stronger because people wanted to punish the army'.[69] While reinforced by social dynamics, control was a product of military power, and this largely drove a great deal of civilian action in the Aceh conflict.

Civilian Strategy in Rebel Zones: Social Drivers

Although there is no doubt that the control hypothesis explains a great deal, incorporating security, profit and some social pressures, it also falls short in a number of ways. It must be remembered that civilians often sacrifice wealth, and perhaps security in supporting insurgent groups, but do so anyways because they agree with their aims. It is sometimes argued that civilians are driven by morality and social justice in place of security and greed. In Aceh, studies have found precisely this, that many civilians were motivated by a desire for revenge and justice against Indonesian attackers.[70] Women explained that they supported GAM not because they were

scared – they supported them despite fear, as they sympathised with the fighters, agreed with their aims and wanted to resist abusive Indonesian forces.[71] According to one Islamic leader, 'Our help was entirely voluntary … we only gained the opportunity to see justice'.[72] However, this hardly challenges Kalyvas' theory since the weaker party is more likely to utilise indiscriminate violence and the dominant armed group can then defend civilians, demonise the other side and control its own use of violence. Principled support for the dominant local armed group thus does not challenge the control theory. Given that control represents such an expansive theory, subsuming many rival approaches rooted in ideational factors, it is indeed difficult to locate evidence against this approach.

While control helps to explain support, this strategy hardly exhausts the options available to civilians. Control does not provide as convincing of an explanation for other potential strategies, such as taking flight or voicing resistance.[73] Many young Acehnese men fled rebel and state strongholds, bound for Malaysia or North Sumatra. Fleeing rebel strongholds represents an alternative to collaboration, a strategy that is outside of the control theory. Young men fled to avoid being pressured to enlist or collaborate, but also to earn money for their families in more stable economies. The flight of ethnic minorities from rebel strongholds, as well as the flight of ethnic Acehnese in state strongholds, conforms better to the control theory, as groups that expected to be threatened based on their ethnic identity made the painful decision to leave, in effect sorting themselves into distinct ethnic zones. Territorial control helps to explain patterns of flight; a strategy rooted in material incentives, but only explains part of the decision to leave.

Zones of control have even less to say about voicing resistance, failing to explain when civilians might communicate, resist or try to transform armed groups. Armed groups rarely take kindly to civilian resistance in any zone. In Mindanao, Thomas McKenna notes that as civilians grew tired of war, even rebel supporters, they began to portray the once popular MNLF as a spent force, speaking out against the rebels and demanding peace.[74] In Aceh, many civilians in rebel zones flew United Nations or white flags instead of GAM flags, a subtle challenge to GAM power.[75] Villagers spread rumours of GAM leaders being in league with the Indonesian army, GAM leader Hasan di Tiro's Jewish wife, and GAM's lack of Islamic credentials. When ethnic Javanese were forced out, Acehnese villagers challenged the rebels by helping their neighbours. In one rebel stronghold, two ethnic Javanese residents who had assimilated into Acehnese society were defended by villagers, with neighbours risking their lives confronting GAM. When the rebels said that the Javanese villagers may live, but must leave Aceh, civilians protested, demanding written approval that the villagers to stay. GAM finally agreed to this after two weeks of tense relations.[76] Zones of control cannot explain civilian desires to speak out in ways that are at odds with the demands of dominant armed groups. The rational peasant would presumably remain quiet to gain security and rewards, but instead, we see civilians taking risks for moral reasons.

It is useful to revisit Aceh's activists, whose behaviour seemed to conform to the control hypothesis. Unlike women or Islamic leaders, activists did not vary by zone. Primarily urban, activists spoke out against Indonesian authorities from within state

strongholds, facing reprisals as a consequence. They did so because they identified as human rights activists and believed that Indonesian soldiers must face justice. Activists thus sacrificed security in ways contrary to naked self-interest. Many activists fled state strongholds, leaving Aceh, residing in contested areas or seeking security in rebel areas. While fleeing to rebel zones partly conforms to the logic of zones, control can hardly explain the desire to speak out in the first place. And while some activists came to join the rebels, others criticised abuses by both sides, despite the extreme risks in doing so.[77] Speaking out and demanding justice can be explained by zones if criticisms are directed only towards the distinct, weaker side, in effect supporting the dominant local order. But if criticisms are levelled against the stronger or both sides, then zones of control cannot account for civilian behaviour.

A final example of civilian action that does not conform to materialist logics, and in some ways confronts them, is found among Aceh's village chiefs (*keucik*). While Islamic leaders are typically referred to as the village mother (*ibu gampong*), chiefs are seen as the village father (*bapak gampong*). Acehnese villages are deeply influenced by their chief, a figure that reigns more than rules, lacking coercive power, but instead playing mediation and advisory roles. During the conflict, *keucik* did not support the dominant armed group, but instead remained neutral. Villagers explained that the positions of chiefs during the conflict were especially difficult since they stood between two rocks and could never move too close towards either side without upsetting a delicate balance. Across the province – in state, contested and rebel zones – chiefs acted with remarkable uniformity, serving as village diplomats and lawyers. When an armed group entered a village in search of provisions or to make demands, village chiefs had to engage with them and negotiate. Chiefs routinely underreported village supplies and exaggerated what the other side had taken in an effort to preserve village wealth. When a villager was arrested by either side, they would represent them as a lawyer, approaching army and rebel outposts to do so. Chiefs might vouch for, plea bargain or pay fines to help arrested villagers. In one example, a villager was arrested in 2003 for providing intelligence to GAM forces. The chief represented the villager in discussions with the army. The case was particularly difficult, but the chief ended up pledging his life to free the villagers; 'I said if I am wrong, they can shoot me. I thought they would probably shoot me anyways if I betrayed them. In the end, he was released. I could never do this, talk sincerely to the army, if I was not neutral'.[78]

The diplomat and lawyer roles of chiefs demanded strict neutrality in relation to armed groups. For one chief, 'Both sides understood what I have to do for my village and why I am neutral'.[79] Chiefly duties and neutrality represent robust cultural norms in Aceh,[80] norms that armed groups either believed in or at least did not want to openly oppose, even though support from village chiefs would have been helpful. When I asked one hardened GAM Commander why they tolerated chiefly neutrality, he thought my question was stupid: 'It is their responsibility. They have to. What do you mean why?'[81] Chiefs managed to maintain neutrality through communication; 'when new Commanders came, I would build the courage to approach them and introduce myself. I explained that the other side will come to the village too, but I will not betray them'.[82] I looked for chiefs that supported one side, with locals

responding that a chief might actually like one side in his heart, he must always be neutral, otherwise villagers might reject him. All told, chiefly neutrality, a cultural role exercised uniformly across the province, challenges the logic of civilian strategy as driven by territorial control of armed groups and by purely rational, individualist logics.

The above examples suggest that powerful ideational factors are at play even in times of war, with social norms driving civilian action in ways that either cannot be explained by or which contradict rationalist explanations rooted in security, profit and control. This points to an important role for identity in driving civilian action, as who one is drives what one does or does not do. Aggregating all persons without guns into homogeneous 'civilians' washes out this interesting, systematic pattern of civilian action.

IMPLICATIONS

Most of the armed conflict literature overlooks civilians as actors, even studies that seek to protect them. Even those focusing on civilians typically suggest that they are driven almost entirely by the interests and actions of armed groups, limiting civilians to dependent variables. Of course, civilians are actors in wars, often finding ways to shape armed groups and conflict dynamics. Civilian agency becomes more visible when we consider sociological factors, with civilians shaping and driving some aspects of war. Understanding what drives civilian action helps us understand the very nature of war. If civilian action is rooted in violence and a need for security, then war can be best represented as an anarchic world in which might makes right. If we include profit as a complementary motivation, then war remains one against all, a world of self-interest. If civilians are driven by combatant control, then war is less anarchic, but life within zones remains defined by power and local political orders. If we take into account sociological factors, such as a desire for justice, pleasure in agency, social norms and related factors, then war contains social orders and things seem a little more human.

Kalyvas' 'zones of control' approach represents the dominant explanation for civilian action for good reason. This theory is based on material factors, such as security and profit, but also integrates social norms, which reinforce the dominant armed group's control. My work in Aceh has led me to believe that this approach is largely correct, in that combatant territorial control leads the dominant side to become better, its rival to become worse and even principled civilian support follows more opportunistic collaboration. I have shown, though, that control is not a complete explanation for civilian action. Of course, Kalyvas does not frame control as a complete explanation for civilian action, but he does state that it trumps independent civilian preferences. In Aceh, zones of control followed ethno-historical patterns that were clearly prior to conflict dynamics. If we disaggregate civilians by social groups, we discover mixed evidence for the control theory. Elders, youths, women and Islamic leaders seem to conform to the control theory, as their collaboration deepened with rebel control. While this support reinforced rebel power and state weakness, it was primarily caused by rebel control. Other civilians behaved

differently though. Many activists were core rebel supporters, but mobilised in state strongholds, resisting human rights abuses despite great risks. Many Acehnese men fled instead of supporting or joining the rebels. Aceh's village chiefs operated in a world outside of zones of control, consistent across time and space in their neutrality, a form of voice which while not confrontational was nonetheless a challenge to armed groups and to the theory of control. Control represents a theory of civilian support, but civilians possess more options than this. The control theory explains collaboration, but does not represent a theory of civilian action, which is also rooted in sociological factors.

Those that do not conform to zones of control are hardly just noise, random actors who wash out in aggregation. By looking at social groups rather than individuals, I have noted patterned behaviour that lies outside of the logic of zones. While some may believe that zones of control come first, with outliers explained by culture, that trusty variable of last resort, I see things differently. Even in war, social norms essentially shape which strategies will be taken up by which civilians. Identity demarcates ethnic lines and informs who will flee, support armed groups or speak out in a given society. In other words, the groups driven by materialist logics are determined by social norms, demonstrating a complex interplay of rational and ideational factors in wartime behaviour.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTOR

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