Beyond Youth ‘Inclusion’: Intergenerational Politics In Post-Conflict Bali

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BEYOND YOUTH ‘INCLUSION’:
INTERGENERATIONAL POLITICS IN POST-CONFLICT BALE
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Abstract

Increased attention to the predicaments and potential of youth in conflict has moved the conflict resolution field in important new directions. However, our understandings of and approaches to youth in conflict have been limited by an emphasis on the inclusion of youth in peacebuilding projects without a correspondingly thorough analysis of the often-contested social categories of youth in conflicts. Drawing on in-depth ethnographic work with youth in post-conflict Bali, Indonesia, where attempts to promote a local project to memorialise victims of mass violence exposed deep-seated intergenerational tensions around the meaning and relevance of ‘youth’, this article offers both an analytic reframing of youth in conflict and suggestions for more effective and reflective conflict resolution practice.

Keywords: conflict; youth; Indonesia; Bali; peacebuilding; ethnography

How and why do youth matter in conflict? Analytic and practice engagements in settings of violent conflict and its aftermath increasingly use ‘youth’ as a stakeholder category, held to represent a particular social group whose unique experiences, perspectives, needs and hopes must be acknowledged and included for programmes to be comprehensive and thus broadly transformative. This new attention to the predicaments and potential of youth has emerged in part out of the growing visibility of young people in conflict and post-conflict zones, itself a reflection of contemporary forms of warfare and mass violence in which civilians comprise the vast majority of casualties (Machel 1996, 2001; Rothbart & Korostelina 2011) and youth may be deployed (often involuntarily) in an expanding array of combat roles, from soldiers to human shields to sexual slaves (Sommers 2002; McEvoy-Levy 2006). This focus on youth has sharpened our analyses of conflict, enriching our understandings of identity by challenging notions of homogenous, fixed cultures and urging us to recognise how experiences of both war and peace take place at the intersection of social differences, including generation, gender, class, caste, race, region, religion, and power (Crenshaw 1991; McCall 2005; Merry 2008). Engagement with the concerns of youth, especially those that take seriously their creative capacity to imagine beyond the present-day confines of conflict, have led the field in exciting new directions, towards attending to the long-term social processes and perspectives through which youth support or undermine peace and reconciliation (McEvoy-Levy 2006; Borer et al. 2006; Magill & Hamber 2011), the crucial role of both formal and non-formal education in peacebuilding (Mundy 2011; Paulson 2011), and the complex social routes by which youth come to perpetrate or reject violence (Boyden & de Berry 2004; Schnabel & Tabyshrailova 2014). Youth peacebuilding programmes, from Israel/Palestine to Northern Ireland to Bosnia, have been cited and supported as indispensible investments in peaceful futures (Schwartz 2010). In short, youth have become increasingly central to both thinking about and addressing conflict.

At the same time, however, as youth have been targeted for inclusion in conflict and post-conflict programming, ideas of youth — the narrative frameworks and categorisations
by which youth become culturally recognisable and socially and politically relevant — have provoked a good deal of anxiety and critique. In attempts to identify a bounded social group that can be solicited for participation, youth are frequently defined by what they appear to be not. Viewed as neither ‘children’ nor ‘adults’, neither fully naïve nor vested with social and political maturity, the blurry middle ground youth are given to occupy often becomes a screen on which to project images created of and for them. These representations of youth may mirror Western colonial genealogies of human development that link adolescence to both a romanticised state of nature and a turbulent excess (cf. Lesko 1996; 2001; Bucholtz 2002). They may overlap with narratives that position postcolonial others in neo-evolutionist terms as childlike creatures who must be guided through predefined projects lest they become threats to hegemonic forms and processes of authority. Conversely, youth may be subject to overly idealised representations that portray them as inherently progressive, free from the constraining conservatism of their elders, ideally positioned to transcend the cultural norms and political habits that may be driving conflict (Sanchez-Eppler 2005; Hesford 2011).

Indeed, these ambiguities surrounding the questions of how to locate and define youth may take on sharp ethical and political valence. On the one hand, the discursive scaffolding that is often evoked to support humanitarian and other interventions in conflict — discourses implicated in what Fassin and Rechtman (2009) call a ‘politics of life’ dividing those agents who act to save others from those who are portrayed as able only to wait passively to be chosen for rescue — often draw heavily on one-dimensional characterisations of the presumed vulnerability, political innocence and helplessness of youth (Berlant 1999; Moeller 2001, 2002; Bhaba 2006). In such framings, youth experience of conflict is made iconic, cast as an easily translatable denouncement of the senseless horrors of war and violence. Such portrayals can be seen, for example, in politicised uses of statistics noting the high percentage of children suffering from clinical symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder during wartime (Fassin 2008), or in visually compelling stereotypes of a feeble, unnamed Third World child who must wait for aid to arrive from a benevolent outside (Kleinman & Kleinman 1996). Youth become idealised victims, innocent — but ultimately passive — reminders of the senseless horror of war. On the other hand, assumptions of youth threat, including securitised frameworks that draw causal links between demographic imbalances — ‘youth bulges’ — and rising conflict, offer up similarly undifferentiated and one-sided images of youth. Here youth as ‘out of school, unemployed, loose molecules in an unstable social fluid that threatened to ignite’ (Kaplan 1996, 16, cited in Sommers 2006, 2) are dangers that must be defended against through realist strategies of containment (‘keep them off the streets’) or defusion (including narrowly framed disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration [DDR] programmes that fail to support alternatives to combat or that struggle to ‘return’ war-transformed youth to a state of idealised childhood they may never have inhabited in the first place). We can see such ambivalences in perhaps starkest relief in the figure of the 300,000 ‘child soldiers’ whose participation in violent conflict has come to signal a shocking violation of social order, capable of eliciting both compassion and fear in a way that statistics of the 2 million youth civilian deaths from war in the last decade or the 1.5 million child deaths each year from preventable diarrhoeal diseases have not been able to do. Essentially powerless or essentially menacing; youth are frequently positioned as either poster images or problems to be solved, rather than as diverse agents with their own complex relationships to conflict and peacebuilding.

If we are to more deeply understand the predicaments of youth in conflict and post-conflict settings and productively address their concerns — including what is at stake for them in evocations of ‘peace’ — clearly we need analyses that avoid these representational
extremes. That these framings still dominate our understandings is indeed far less a matter of their facticity or efficacy at organising peacebuilding interventions than their long-standing embeddedness within structures of hierarchy — structures that marginalise the experiences of youth themselves and make little room for knowledge outside deeply rooted Euro-American paradigms. Diagnosing the very real damage suffered by youth in conflict zones does not mean we must construct flattened images of a passive, apolitical youth defined only by his or her vulnerability. Nor does recognising how youth may resist established social orders, or fall prey to the lures and pressures of conflict, mean we must conjure a Hobbesian caricature of amoral youth whose presumed ‘natural’ energies risk exploding to the social surface without the firm hand of strict governance. Youth are disproportionately affected by conflict not simply as suffering victims or brainwashed perpetrators, but as social actors with creative and critical capacities, making their contributions to national and local peacebuilding processes of vital potential.

This article argues, however, that effective programming depends not merely upon recognising this resilience and agency of youth and inviting them to participate in post-conflict peacebuilding following a model of ‘inclusion’. Rather, it suggests, drawing on long-term ethnographic fieldwork in post-conflict Bali, Indonesia, that understandings of youth as one of many stakeholder categories with specific defined interests during and after conflict may fail to account for actual social experience in a number of critical ways. Frameworks of inclusion cannot easily capture how the contours of the category ‘youth’ may be contested not only in outsiders’ imaginations of them but by youth themselves, nor can they account for the social tensions that may emerge in the aftermath of conflict when youth engage with globalising models and discourses for social repair. Ultimately, by suggesting we move beyond notions of inclusion in considering analyses and projects that involve youth, this article poses a broader challenge: how might a focus on youth make transformative, rather than merely additive, contributions to post-conflict peacebuilding?

To illustrate these arguments, this article draws deeply on ethnographic material. It first outlines the shifting, overlapping categories that Balinese themselves use to frame youth, categories that sometimes mark off defined social groups, but at other times gesture out past the specificity of the local to call upon powerful globalised themes of modernity, resistance, transformation and freedom. It then briefly describes one youth-led justice programme, a monument/discussion space to memorialise the experiences of victims of the 1965–1966 state-sponsored anti-communist massacres, in which an estimated 1 million Indonesians lost their lives. It explores how the emergence of the ‘1965 Park’ set competing constructions of youth against each other. After discussing the intergenerational tensions this project provoked, and the structures of power and marginality it inscribed, it concludes by considering how we might more effectively incorporate insights by and about youth into post-conflict analytic and practice frameworks.

Locating Balinese ‘Youth’

The challenges of using ‘youth’ as a self-evident demographic category are illustrated quite clearly in the Balinese context. In Bali, concepts of ‘youth’ indeed exist, but in very different form than in the Euro-American world, and the meanings of the category itself have shifted dramatically, aligned as it has been with multiple and often conflicting social values and political movements. Indeed, questions of who youth are, how youth
should act, and what relationships they should have to others, have often been at the heart of local social conflicts.

In the Balinese language, teruna (m.)/teruni (f.) refer to those unmarried members of local hamlet associations who, by virtue of their stage in social development, are accorded membership through customary law (adat) in the sekehe teruna-teruni, the hamlet youth group which is called upon for manual or artistic labour during local religious ceremonies, village development projects, or state-sponsored inter-hamlet competitions. While such customary youth groups have long been part of Balinese social life, they have taken on both greater importance and greater formality since 1998, when the end of former President Soeharto’s 32-year dictatorship gave rise to new calls for regional autonomy vis-à-vis an overly centralised state, as well as the preservation and empowerment of local cultural traditions. Outside the context of this formal membership, young people may be termed bajang (a young woman who has passed the ritually marked stage of first menstruation but who has not yet married) or simply nak mude (young person), a reference to social status that does not locate someone within a particular corporate group. More esoteric Hindu-Balinese philosophy, which filters unevenly into society through its production and maintenance by high-caste priestly (Brahmana) and royal (Ksatria) cultural elites, also provides conceptions of youth through ideal-type categorisations of the Balinese stages of life: brahmacari as the time before marriage when young people seek their life path; grahasta, the time after marriage when the responsibilities of a householder and community participant are predominant; wonaprawsta, when one’s children are old enough to take over the duties of home and society and one begins to focus on higher spiritual matters in preparation for the complete retreat from worldly matters that constitutes the last stage of bhiksuka. The national language of Indonesian, used in schools, media and government programmes, also has specific terms for young people, including pemuda, which, half a century after Indonesian independence, still carries strong connotations of nationalist allegiance, evoking the anti-colonial vanguard who linked the emergence of a new united nation with modernity and the vibrancy of youth (Vickers 2005). Today, the youth wings of Indonesia’s many competing political parties and mass religious organisations are often called pemuda (e.g. the Pemuda Ansor, Pemuda Muhammadiyah), as are several urban paramilitary groups (e.g. Pemuda Pancasila, Pemuda Panca Marga), indicating the ways in which these ideas of nationalist youth energy have been co-opted for other ends. Other commonly used terms include remaja, which closely corresponds to the English ‘adolescent’ with its connotations of biological liminality, and the slang acronym ‘ABG’, for anak baru gede (roughly translatable as ‘just barely grown-up’), which carries a strong elitist connotation of consumerist youth who, freed from the demands of labour that fetter their working-class peers, spend their time in Indonesia’s class-segregated urban cafés and shopping malls.

As is clear from these multiple, often-overlapping conceptions of youth, Balinese understandings do not map cleanly onto the demographic categories of ‘young people aged 15–24’ generally used by the United Nations or the World Bank. Programmes targeting youth based on these different categories could thus be expected to have quite different orientations and provoke contrasting responses. For example, interventions that took teruna/teruni as their primary constituents (something that is frequently done in Bali as such institutionalised corporate groups are easy to locate and access), would inevitably evoke for Balinese participants and observers something of the newly resurgent authority of ‘tradition’ and customary law, rather than, say, the possibilities of youth creativity, much less resistance to or desire to transform established social forms. Such programmes, given that membership in customary law-based youth groups is generally based on genealogy, would also effectively leave out many non-Balinese whose parents have
migrated to the island seeking work in the tourism industry. Programmes that solicited pemuda would likewise tend to carry connotations of militaristic nationalism, while the use of categories of remaja or ABG would likely create strong class overtones that might make it difficult to address how issues of economic inequality or unequal access to the citizenship rights have driven many of Indonesia’s conflicts. All this is not to say, in any overly simplistic way, that cultural difference precludes effective intervention on issues of youth and post-conflict justice because Balinese think about youth differently from those non-Balinese who participate in designing programmes for them. It is, however, to suggest that even if we commit to including youth in post-conflict programming, taking them to have active, creative capacities rather than merely dangerous ones, we have not escaped the need to seriously consider how shifting cultural frameworks, processes and contestations set limits and possibilities for youth agency, and how the identification of youth may in fact play into long-running social conflict.

Youth in the Aftermath of Conflict: The Case of Bali

To give a better sense of how youth themselves have negotiated these tensions, I turn now to the work of a group of young Balinese, who in 2005 inaugurated a local ‘monument’ to the victims of the 1965 mass violence in Bali. These youth’s ages ranged between 12 and 50, with a median age of approximately 25, reflecting the broadness of the category ‘youth’ to include those who have not yet married or devoted themselves to the reproductive and livelihood activities of social adulthood. The conflict their work addressed was one that had deeply marked their lives and that of their elders: the 1965 state-sponsored massacre of alleged communists, in which some 500,000 Indonesians, including 100,000 Balinese (5–8% of the island’s population), lost their lives and tens of thousands of others experienced long-term social marginalisation and the strict curtailment of their civil rights. These young students and activists, who had grown up with parents and grandparents marked with the dangerous stigma of ‘communist’, and who themselves had often suffered social marginalisation due to their designation as sharing a politically ‘unclean environment’ (tidak bersih lingkungan), built what they called the ‘1965 Park’, a small square of lawn and concrete in the midst of their extended family home, a walled compound shared by approximately 150 residents. Inspired by globalising discourses of transitional justice and reconciliation that stress the importance of publicly articulating the truths of the past, these young people hoped to create a ‘monument’ to a community’s suffering that could act as a catalyst to local political transformation and as a challenge to erasure of the massacres from official Indonesian histories. Their intent was to use this space dynamically, as a call to collective memory and as a meeting place that could host exhibitions of justice-related art and performance, along with discussions about the community’s history. In addition to hosting lectures, artistic events and community discussions, the 1965 Park youth self-published a volume of reflections on the park’s aims and its members’ experiences (Wardana & Hutabarat 2012) and engaged in several research projects to gather testimonies of survivors of the massacres.

These youth themselves had not been targeted for interventions by national or international organisations — indeed, there were no formal programmes operant in Bali to address this history of mass violence, with the exception of one small branch of a national victims’ rights association that had organised several gatherings for former political prisoners to share their stories. These youth were familiar, however, with the vibrant debates that, since the fall of Soeharto’s regime in 1998, were taking place in Indonesia’s major cities about the promises and possibilities of national reconciliation.
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and post-conflict justice. They also had access to national and international Internet media, which helped convince them of the basic assumptions of much international transitional justice work: that histories of state violence and human rights violations must be addressed, that speaking publicly about the past is necessary — if painful — work for communities wishing to foster peace, and that true social reconciliation must be grounded in truth-telling (International Center for Transitional Justice 2008).

In constructing the 1965 Park, these Balinese youth drew as well upon what they had seen or heard of projects to memorialise the past elsewhere. Many of them had, as schoolchildren, viewed images of the New Order’s monumental ‘Museum of the Indonesian Communist Party’s Treachery’ in Jakarta, which concretised an official history of the military’s triumph over leftist threat in celebratory statuary and gruesome dioramas. All of them had heard the public calls to commemorate with a monument the victims of the 2002 Bali bombings, those 202 mainly foreign tourists who had perished in the terrorist attack the then-governor of Bali had termed ‘the worst tragedy the island had ever experienced’ (Beratha 2002). The 1965 Park was to be, they explained, a kind of counter-monument to these suspect framings of the past that, in their eyes, concealed far more than they revealed in their hard stone surfaces. Where the Jakarta museum wrote a teleology of a triumphant nation, the 1965 Park would remember those denied not only citizenship but a recognition of humanity, challenging the state’s claims to represent its people. And where the Bali bomb memorial called for the mourning of an innocent island of peace and social harmony senselessly attacked by Islamist outsiders, the 1965 Park would draw aside the curtain of Bali’s exoticism, exposing internal histories of terror and betrayal that challenged the touristic commodification of silence about violence. And in contrast to both of these monuments, the 1965 Park would be designed not as an authoritative text to be passively read, but as a space that, once empty, could now be filled by a community’s active engagements with its experiences and with each other.

The 1965 Park youth also positioned themselves in relation to both local and globalising ideas about youth as a social category and political force in their attempts to turn their memorial park into a community ‘movement’ (gerakan). Their (varied) command of foreign languages — many of them had studied English and several, thanks to an uncle who had escaped the violence by moving to Europe, spoke French — allowed them to access foreign media, which in addition to rendering them fluent in transnational ideas of youth as ‘agents of change’ gave them a sense of themselves as more worldly and progressive than their parents. Their understandings of justice thus became inflected with globalising meanings, at the same time as they became a symbol of a new, self-ascribed status as competent to navigate the public domain of community leadership in ways traditional Balinese concepts of the life cycle would not recognise until they had households of their own. Indeed, the 1965 Park youth often consciously positioned themselves against what they saw as the restrictions of tradition, viewing Balinese customary practices as ‘apolitical’ and socially reproductive rather than as a resource for change. Thus they resisted both the Balinese label of teruna and any more than minimal participation in the activities of the customary youth group. They also explicitly rejected the class-denoting categories of ABG and remaja, as well as the nationalist militarism evoked by the term pemuda, preferring to call themselves simply nak muda, or ‘young people’, while explicitly eschewing role hierarchies within their group and deliberately opening their meetings and events to youth from a range
of class, caste and ethnic backgrounds. At the same time, however, they drew upon the flexibility offered them by Balinese concepts that located them in the stage of life prior to grahasta, when they would be expected to devote time to practical material needs rather than ‘discussion’ or ‘social critique’. This led to a certain tolerance for the youth taking over space within a shared family compound, and using it for often-heated seminars and public events that might otherwise have been viewed as unproductive or even disruptive of the family’s daily life.

Justice and Generational Tensions in Bali

Stone by stone, idea by idea, the 1965 Park took shape. Yet this project to commemorate and consolidate a community through explicit reference to a violent past soon proved to be far more complex than first envisioned. In the aftermath of violence, when suspicion and surveillance had been embedded in social life, this process of circumscribing a community defined by shared origins in and orientations to the past faced multiple challenges. What emerged from the 1965 Park project was not a collective social memory standing outside, and in resistant opposition to, state history. Nor was it a brave ‘breaking of the silence’, a straightforward speaking of and to power that could coalesce political will. Instead, the Park provoked claims and counterclaims over suffering and its representation, memory and its multiple forms, and the possibilities and limits of ‘community’ after atrocities at once mass in their scope and intimate in their impacts.

One of the most powerful questions the 1965 Park provoked was what it means to mark off a social and political category of ‘victim’ of violence. Since the fall of Soeharto and the slow emergence into Indonesian public culture of stories of state-sponsored terror and repression, those who had been targeted as ‘communists’ or labelled as having an ‘unclean political environment’ through their familial or associational ties to alleged leftists, have had the opportunity to recast their identities as ‘victims’ or korban. This new marker of identification has been felt as empowering by many Indonesians, who have used this designation to claim rights that had been unjustly abrogated, to form social links among those who had been alienated from full national or local social belonging, or to find shared languages to describe experiences that exceeded the bounds of commonplace speech (see McGregor 2009). This description of the 1965 Park as ‘a space for victims to share their experiences’ was also comfortably resonant with powerful globalising assumptions about the prerequisites for social repair, which stress an inherent connection between speaking of the past and personal or communal healing. What soon became clear, however, was that there were serious challenges to the shared articulation of experience that reflected and intensified tensions among youth, as well as between youth and their elders.

Once the 1965 Park had been planted with lush grass and the low concrete wall surrounding it set with stones arranged to shape the numbers ‘1965, 1965, 1965’, its planners held an open discussion to lay out their aims. Their enthusiasm was palpable, but not universally shared. Several weeks after the discussion, I spoke with one young man I call Madé (not his real name) who had sat in silence as his peers had spoken of the need for victims to tell their stories. He told of how their words had brought his memories back to being a young boy, fascinated by a glimpse of his grandfather’s sword, hidden in the recesses of a cabinet. He said he had not thought much about it until the Park’s inauguration, when he felt called upon to take up the name of ‘victim’. He had gone then to his grandparents and heard their reluctantly told story of how his grandfather had joined an anti-communist militia, helping to slaughter residents of the village in, he claimed, an attempt to ensure the safety of his immediate family. ‘What kind of victims are we? And how can I tell this story
to those who lost their family members?’ asked Madé, sharing a deeply painful sense that the 1965 Park’s narratives could not easily ascribe him a political position as supportive of ‘truth-telling’, yet torn by his love for and desire to understand his grandfather, whose experiences and choices felt alien and troubling from the perspective of the present. And Madé’s story was not the only such talk to emerge.

As the 1965 Park project got further underway, tensions over how to make sense of the past often reflected generational differences, and sparked questions about what it meant to claim the past as one’s own. For the children and grandchildren of survivors of the violence who were active in the Park’s creation, 1965 was ‘their history’ as well as their elders’, despite the fact that most of them had been born after the massacres. Many of these younger people described how their planning discussions allowed them to assert an origin point for certain aspects of their selves, helping them to restructure personal biographies that had often been marked by struggles for social acceptance, foreclosed educational or economic opportunities, and confusion about the secrets that seemed to saturate their family histories. This socially mediated recognition of having been shaped by the state’s designation of them as anak PKI or ‘children of the communist party’ worked against state aims of fragmenting potentially resistant solidarities. Where the state had attempted to alienate survivors of violence from each other by monitoring public speech and recruiting citizens through fear and indoctrination to self-surveil their communities, staking an identity in a shared relationship to the past raised the possibility of directing widespread social suffering into focused political energy. Yet by claiming 1965 as ‘their history’, as a kind of cultural property in which they held equal share, paid for in the currency of pain, these young people often ironically ended up acting in ways quite resonant with state practices. They sometimes grew frustrated with those elders they saw as reluctant to tell them about what they had experienced in linear, expository form, using a language of ‘rights’ and ‘responsibilities’ to attempt to elicit — or sometimes force — oral histories. These calls to narrate and witness were often received uncomfortably by those who had felt terror first hand, and who had, over the decades, found non-verbal ways of expressing their memories — including, especially, through ritual — that posed less risk of arousing the wrath of the state. These survivors were not, as their children assumed, simply silent, muted by power and awaiting the release of their words. They had long used languages of karmic justice to whisper of the misfortunes of killers or the corruption of the judiciary, or communicated with those who had been executed through ritual trance or divinations to discover who had reincarnated in their families’ children. Yet such ceremonial work of remembering was often discounted by the young activists, for whom religious practices resonated politically with state attempts to control Balinese subjectivities by asserting an apolitical cultural traditionalism.

These generationally contested understandings of the social life of history also marked off gendered divisions, when older women who showed ambivalence about openly sharing their memories were cast by the younger people as ignorant of politics or trapped by a misplaced maternal protectiveness supposedly inherent to a traditional feminine self. That there were stories these women did not desire to tell was difficult for the Park’s planners to accept, and difficult for these women to communicate when they felt there was no public, shared language in which to speak, especially, stories of the sexual assaults many of them had suffered at the hands of local militias. Women who had lived through ‘examinations’ for bodily signs of communism — searches by
military or militia personnel for a fantasised hammer and sickle tattoo on the vagina or lower abdomen, which were often followed by rape — did indeed say they wished to protect their children and grandchildren from the knowledge of their abuse, less out of a feminine shame or self-blame than out of a concern that this information would spark retaliatory violence in the neighbourhood among young people who did not yet have the maturity to manage their anger or to socially map the neighbourhood and its sites of potential tensions. But they also explained that newly popular discourses of transitional justice, which called on Indonesians to decry state violations of human rights, and to resolve legacies of conflict among neighbours, seemed to offer them little space for their own stories. While the gendered violence of 1965 was enabled by military propaganda that demonised women’s political participation as a transgression against sexual order, it was also deeply embedded in structural inequalities that have continued to shape Balinese gender relations, marginalising women from formal political participation and offering them unequal access to inheritance, rights within marriage, and custody of their children. To the extent that their stories refused a conciliatory stance with such inequalities, and exposed the implication of cultural values in violence, they were much harder to read as heroic local ‘resistance’ or compromise-based ‘peacebuilding’.

Ironically, even when older women showed support for the youth’s efforts, providing coffee and food for their meetings and taking breaks from their daily activities to sit and listen to their discussions, they were generally still assumed to be there primarily in a maternal, caretaking role, rather than demonstrating a real engagement with the Park’s aims. The few suggestions for the Park that older women made, including the idea that a Balinese pelinggih or ancestral shrine be erected in the corner so that spirits of those killed in the massacres could return to visit their families, were immediately dismissed as insufficiently ‘political’ — this despite the fact that for these women, the domain of reincarnation and deification of the dead was one of the major sites where they contested the New Order state’s attempts to erase alleged communists from national memory. The naturalised exclusion of older women from an arena marked ‘political’ became especially apparent when a plainclothes agent from the local military intelligence unit visited the Park, asking the young planners questions about upcoming events and who would be attending them. The young people insisted that they were not afraid of such surveillance; they had nothing to hide, and besides, it was now a new era in Indonesia, when they knew their rights and were prepared to defend them. What they worried about, they said, was the possibility of a traumatic impact upon the older women who had lived through the violence, whom they saw as needing to be sheltered from awareness of the Park’s potential repercussions. ‘If they knew, they wouldn’t be able to handle it’, worried one young man, his genuinely heartfelt concern seeming to overshadow his awareness of just how much these women had already ‘handled’. Indeed, the discourse of victimhood these young people were operating within seemed to offer two gendered polar positions for post-conflict subjects: the heroic victim, who finds a political identity in the resistant articulation of experience, and the tragic victim, whose inability to utter the past leaves her trapped in a voiceless, vulnerable state of ‘trauma’.

The tensions between the youth and the older men of the family took a strikingly different form, with men’s opposition to the Park explained by both youth and elders in much more antagonistic terms. For those men who had spent decades struggling to downplay their political marginalisation as ‘ex-communists’ within village economic and political structures, the attempts of their sons to cast ‘1965’ in concrete in the space of their home’s courtyard seemed foolhardy at best, and treacherous at worst. Like the older women, they doubted the ability of their children to navigate the fraught local landscape of memory, and
to avoid resurrecting issues that could be used against them, as their communist links had been manipulated in the years after 1965 to force them to labour on public works projects and to deprive them of a number of tracts of family land. Those men who had been barred from the vast civil service due to their political stigmatisation, and who had later found a modicum of success in the private tourism sector, were especially ambivalent about the benefits of articulating the violent past. They knew quite well that Balinese tourism is driven by images of harmonious, aesthetically appealing ‘culture’, not by memories of mass killings and protests against human rights abuses (see Santikarma 2005). Like so many other Balinese, they viewed speaking about the histories of violence within their communities as potentially undermining an industry on which they depended for their livelihoods, participating in tourism’s erasure of the massacres from public culture.

To the older men, the Park in fact seemed to challenge the choices they had made to keep their families safe, and to be moved by a naïve, thrill-seeking resistance — a lomba keberaian or ‘bravery competition’, as one man disdainfully put it — that drew recklessly on the energy of youth to claim erroneously to speak on behalf of a community. For their part, the young Park planners saw their elders as ensnared in the past and bounded by the circumscribed space of the village, unaware of the cosmopolitan currents now flowing through Indonesia to bring new options for addressing political matters. ‘They don’t even know the word rekonsiliasi (reconciliation),’ another complained, before launching into a parody of an imaginary Balinese peasant trying to pronounce the unfamiliar Indonesianised English term. Inasmuch as the youth perceived transitional justice ideas to have originated in a modern, elite, educated international space, they could draw upon their self-positioning as conceptual gatekeepers to ascribe to themselves a privileged status in hierarchies of progress and sophistication, challenging not only ideas about how to grapple with the past, but ideas about the role and power of youth in the present.

Soon, however, these tensions grew even more heated, as some supporters of the 1965 Park started to see the opposition of older men not simply as an old-fashioned conservatism but as a potential sign of complicity with power. One of the park’s supporters commented, ‘I think it is very possible that those who disagree with the park are trying to hide their own involvement in 1965’, referring to the long-standing rumours that moved surreptitiously through the neighbourhood concerning who might have informed on their relatives in order to manoeuvre themselves into positions of local power, or to deflect threats to their own lives. ‘You know, we can use the 1965 Park as a kind of “diagnostic tool” (alat diagnostik) to discover the truth of the past,’ he claimed. ‘Those who are against it, we should ask if they have something to hide.’ What the park’s presence had diagnosed, he continued, was a particularly pathological effect of violence. ‘Our real enemy is not the state,’ he said, ‘it is our own families.’

**Beyond ‘Inclusion’: Learning from the Experiences of Balinese Youth**

What, then, might we learn from these experiences? Elsewhere I have discussed how globalising conceptions of post-conflict peacebuilding and transitional justice exist in tension — sometimes productive, sometimes problematic — with Balinese strategies of navigating memory (Dwyer & Santikarma 2006). Here, however, I wish to conclude with some practical reflections on how this case may offer broader comparative lessons for thinking about and working with youth in post-conflict settings. First, frameworks for defining and engaging youth may differ from context to context, and may themselves be
highly contested, especially in the aftermath of conflict when social worlds have often radically shifted. The kinds of questions that need to be asked upon beginning such work include not simply what words one should use to literally translate a term like ‘youth’, but how categories of youth and adulthood are locally framed, who are included in and excluded from particular framings, and how these categories may be shifting or under debate. Do young people agree about what it does — or should — mean to be a youth? Do older people view youth in the same ways as youth see themselves? How do understandings and imaginings of youth participate in the processes of narration and silencing that shape conflict? Asking these kinds of critical questions mitigates the very real possibility that post-conflict interventions fail to engage local currents of meaning.

Second, programmes that seek to empower youth in the wake of conflict may exacerbate or create generational tensions. They may offer youth unprecedented authority in their communities — as when young Balinese claim control over family space or history or reject the roles assigned them by customary law. They may introduce new concepts and frameworks that may both broaden and limit political possibilities — as when ‘justice’ expands to encompass new genres of speaking against power but contracts to marginalise ritual or gendered languages of reconciliation. Or they may position youth as conceptual gatekeepers whose fluency in globalising languages of justice or conflict resolution provides them with a privileged relationship to outside interveners or their elders — as when Balinese youth can say they know what ‘reconciliation’ really means. This certainly does not mean that youth programming must necessarily be socially conservative — much less that it should avoided. It does, however, indicate the importance of attending to the possible unintended consequences of interventions, to the tense power dynamics they may create, and to the value of reflective forms of practice that acknowledge such outcomes (see Cobb & Rifkin 1991; Cheldelin et al. 2004) and consider strategies for addressing them.

Finally, viewing youth as simply another stakeholder category is clearly insufficient. Not only may categories of ‘youth’ be fuzzy and overlapping rather than clearly bounded, but ‘youth’ may take on social meaning as a process, as a site of tension, or as a symbol of broader ideas — modernity, creativity, underdevelopment, danger, freedom, vulnerability potential, threat. It is here, I would suggest, at the dense nexus where young people’s diverse experiences of conflict and their agency in shaping post-conflict landscapes intersect with what is expected, feared and hoped of them, that we must enter into more sustained dialogue. And it is the questions that emerge from such engagements that have the potential to transform not only how we understand youth, but how we understand post-conflict peacebuilding itself.

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Endnotes

1 The perceived threat of a ‘youth bulge’ refers to the belief that large numbers of young men represent a potential source of social unrest, particularly if this group makes up greater than twenty percent of a given population (see Hendrixson [2003] and [2004]; see also Goldstone [1993] and Huntington 1996 for examples of how this concept has been applied).

2 Much has been written about the history of the category pemuda in Indonesia that is outside the scope of this paper, including the roles and representations of pemuda in Indonesian nation-building (see Foulcher 2000; Parker & Nilan 2013), and the relationships of pemuda groups to criminality (see Ryter 1998; Aspinall & van Klinken, 2010; and Wilson 2015).

References


Magill, C. & Hamber, B. 2011, “ ‘If They Don’t Start Listening to Us, the Future Is Going to Look the Same as the Past’: Young People and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland and Bosnia and Herzegovina’ in Youth & Society 43: 2: 509–527.


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