



Eric Grigorian

History Grows in Our Kampong

Notes from Aceh, Tsunami Hot Zone

Mardiyah Chamim



Ford Foundation



Foreword

History grows in our kampong tells us about the coastal region of post-tsunami Aceh from the viewpoint and experience of Mardiyah Chamim, a female journalist of *Tempo* weekly newsmagazine.

Those involved in the aftermath of the killer tsunami, which devastated parts of Aceh province, undoubtedly have deep impressions of the tragedy. Mardiyah, a professional journalist, is no exception.

Journalists are people who know a lot of things. They are trained to record events in their minds and later write about them for the general public, but how much they can write is often constrained by the publication's space limitations and policy as well as the editor's selection. Many journalists are limited by these constraints and hence write only abridged reports that media circles classify as "newsworthy". Trapped by such limitations, journalists then adopt their own attitude and tend to become exclusive, as if denying that the things not included in their reports simply never happened. They know all too well about newsworthiness but acknowledge nothing beyond it. Even if they acknowledge such things, they consider them unimportant because the news is seemingly not worth covering.

This book, written by Mardiyah, contains stories about Aceh that mostly have not been reported by the media. Hopefully, readers will understand that Mardiyah has undertaken a great effort to recount her experience, far beyond her obligation as a journalist, thereby intending to make us all aware that those who play roles in reconstructing and rehabilitating Aceh are far greater in number and far more complex than that reported by the media.

The tsunami disaster claimed more than 160,000 lives, damaged lots of property, and ravaged parts of the province. Despite the tragedy there is a real opportunity for establishing an Aceh with a bright future and making its people developed, dynamic, and prosperous. This book tells us that amidst heartrending stories and anguished feelings, optimism still shines brightly.

Hence we all need to wisely join our brothers and sisters in Aceh to formulate their future clearly as they have already suffered for a very long, long time. I congratulate Mardiyah for her book, a product of a journalist who has an iron will to depart from her professional convention. Instead she comments on the tsunami tragedy with humane commitment and understanding.

(Ir. Sarwono Kusumaatmadja)

Defeating the tyranny of space limitations

To a writer and journalist, producing a book is a crowning achievement of his or her career. Writing a book, especially for a journalist, is a means of fighting the media's tyranny of space limitations. Perhaps, this was what Mardiyah Chamim, a *Tempo* journalist, had in mind when she was dispatched to Aceh to cover events following the tsunami tragedy. She spent many a week in the province—experiencing the stench of decomposing bodies and rotten debris and garbage, meeting with thousands of anguished people who had lost loved ones and personal possessions. But “Jakarta” needed only a few reports, each consisting of a few thousand characters: Too many stories, too little space!

Diyah did not succumb to the tyranny of space limitations. In the midst of her activity as a reporter, she meticulously studied the notes she had jotted down, recalling what she had experienced and felt during her assignment in Aceh. Her deepest feelings have been expressed in long articles and are published in this book.

I myself was in Aceh when Diyah was assigned in the province. The difference was that, unlike an observer, I was a volunteer who undertook fieldwork, doing whatever I could to help: acting as a pall bearer, unloading foodstuffs from ships and then reloading them onto trucks, and doing other “dirty” work that volunteers must do. I was one of the thousands of volunteers who had come to Aceh from the four corners of the world who might have said in an arrogant manner: “Hey, look! I’ve come here to help you all!” Such a manner was also noticed by Diyah.

But I think Diyah also shared the depressing moments that I experienced. We spent many nights, with muscular aches as we lay down on thin mats to rest. Exhausted as we were, we nevertheless could not sleep as our minds were preoccupied with the dreadful natural disaster: lifeless bodies which people carried on their shoulders, faces full of both sorrow and hope, waiting for family members who had not returned home. Also etched in our minds was the anger of hungry survivors because food aid had been “grabbed” by others who did not experience the tragedy. All these visions flashed through our minds against the backdrop of ruins and damaged towns.

Diyah has written about all these happenings in this book. Her keen observation as a journalist enabled her to meticulously record and recount all phenomena of the tragedy. This attests the theory of journalism which I used to give to young reporters: the laws of input and output. Without appropriate input, it is impossible to produce output in the form of a nice and well-written piece of writing.

Diyah was lucky because she was “brought up” in the *Tempo* environment which adopts literary-style journalism, enabling her to write her reports elegantly. Her tender heart adds to her fine and delicate storytelling without making it dramatic. She saw and heard everything with her keen journalist's eyes and ears, filtering all the facts and data with a clear conscience and amazingly wrote it with the literary-style journalistic technique.

I congratulate her on this book, and hopefully there will be more books written by her in the future.

(Bondan Winarno)

Intentions Are Magnets

As a journalist, I was lucky to witness historical events which occurred in Aceh after the Tsunami in 26 December 2004. This was the biggest disaster in the history of modern civilization. It is a tremendous honor to be a part of the testimonials on this ultimate event.

After I have thought back about it, I realized I have experienced a lot of magical things. I never understand. How could I be strong enough to go to Aceh, which during that time, was under very chaotic situation? How could I be strong enough to be in the 'Tanah Nanggroe' for more than a year during the intense situation?

A few days after the Tsunami, all alone I went to Adam Air's representative office -the airline was officially closed in 2008. I requested free seats to send 15 volunteers coordinated by *Tempo*.

I took an *ojek* motorbike to get to Adam Air's office, which that time, was at a shophouse, at a narrow street near Cengkareng. A place I had never been before.

I faced the bosses of Adam Air all by myself. They stared surprisingly at me. "What do you think you can do?" they asked, despising me. It was a normal question. I have never joined a nature club, I do not possess any wilderness survival skills, and I am not a brave person at all. I do not have much money either. I am just an ordinary person.

Then suddenly, all doors seemed to open. I believed there was a magical power that made everything ran smoothly. Eventually, I went to Aceh, leading a group of volunteer "McGyvers" from *Tempo*.

Next, I witnessed post-disaster dramas. There was history in the making around and right in front of me. Therefore, I was determined to perpetuate the growth of Aceh's history as much as I could.

Every night I made notes. Sometimes on my notebook, sometimes on my old laptop. One time when I was typing a note on my laptop, the electricity went off and my friend spilled coffee on the keyboard. I was very sad. Fortunately, my laptop could be saved and so did my notes.

In the late December 2005, in the first anniversary of Tsunami, pieces of stories that I experienced were published in a book titled "Sejarah Tumbuh di Kampung Kami" (*History Grows in Our Kampung*).

A few weeks ago, a best friend of mine, a photographer poet, Henry C. Widjaja, extracted my journey. According to him, what I did in Aceh was a proof that intentions are magnets.

"Intention works like magnet, it attracts what we needs, that's the way we met. A friend indeed," Henry said. During that conversation in a gloomy afternoon, Henry kindly took a photo of me to be uploaded on this website.

So that is what happened. My good intention is welcomed by the universe. There were many of my best friends and philanthropists who helped me going through the obstacles during my journey in Aceh.

“Journey to Aceh” was established by the magnet of good intentions. My best friends have been working hard to help me. They are Avi Mahaningtyas, who initiated ideas, and Dwi Lestari Rahardiani, who worked really hard on managing the flow of the program. There is also Dudi Gurnadi Kartasasmita, who designed the whole system of this website together with Nurudin Jauhari and Aris Bangun Wismo Aji. The graphic design of the e-book was done by Catharina Dwihastarini.

Eric Grigorian, a photojournalist who won the 2002 World Press Photo, also shared his fantastic photo collections on this e-book and blog.

Through this website, I sincerely present you “Sejarah Tumbuh di Kampung Kami” in e-book format -in both English and Bahasa Indonesia. Feel free to download it. I would be delighted if you would share this e-book with your friends and relatives.

Happy reading!

(Mardiyah Chamim)

A note of thanks

Thank you all for making this e-book come true

Publishing “History Grows in Our Kampong - Notes from Aceh, Tsunami Hot Zone” in e-book format is really a genuine breakthrough to me. Through this digital bilingual format, my book could actually reach all around the world. Its really an honour to be the first journalist who release e-book in Indonesia.

I sincerely thank all my friends who graciously worked hard to help me. Those are Avi Mahaningtyas and Dwi Lestari Rahardiani managed the flow of the program. There is also Dudi Gurnadi Kartasasmita, who designed the system of this website together with Nurudin Jauhari and Aris Bangun Wismo Aji. The graphic design of the e-book was done by Catharina Dwihastarini. Eric Grigorian, a photojournalist who won the 2002 World Press Photo, also shared his fantastic photo collections on this e-book.

*Banda Aceh, 22 April 2009
(Mardiyah Chamim)*

Mardiyah Chamim

Has been working as a journalist for *Tempo* since 1998. She has explored various areas such as economics, national, health, science, lifestyle and investigation. In January 2009, she was appointed Executive Director of the Tempo Institute, which was established to become the center for journalism development in Indonesia.

Chamim graduated from the Faculty of Biology at Gadjah Mada University, Yogyakarta in 1996. She then joined *Warta Ekonomi* magazine in 1996 as a research staff and became a reporter for *Panji Masyarakat* magazine in 1997.

E-BOOK

HISTORY GROWS IN OUR KAMPONG -- Notes from Aceh, Tsunami Hot Zone (published in December 2005)

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Editor English Edition : Oei Eng Goan, Richard Bennett

Graphic Designer : Catharina Dwihastarini

This e-book also proudly presents photos by Eric Grigorian, winner of World Press Photo 2002