Women on the move

In the aftermath of the 2004 tsunami, NGOs poured into the Indonesian province of Aceh to assist in the recovery effort. The NGO that I worked for, like most others, imported a professional gender expert to ensure that gender issues were properly addressed in its aid programmes. She had never been to Aceh, or even Indonesia before. An Acehnese colleague, a Muslim feminist and social activist, unsurprisingly questioned the wisdom of spending a significant amount of our budget to fly in a foreign gender ‘expert’. Aceh’s history boasts a legacy of four queens, a female navy commander, and women warriors; in a more recent century, countless Indonesian women have campaigned for a more just and equal society.

Su Lin Lewis

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Ikeya’s study brought lectures of two of my former teachers to mind. A favourite topic of the ethnologist among them was “Why exceptions?”, while the then so-called non-western sociologist prompted us to always be alert to ‘counterpoints’. However ingenious and plausible, paradigms ‘freeze’ the object of scrutiny, at the same time that things social are always on the move and never fixed. As a result, the absence of exceptions should evoke our suspicion that something is amiss, or missing, at the same time that counterpoints could well be indicators of things to come.

Niels Mulder