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INTRODUCTION

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On 28 September 2018, an earthquake and tsunami hit West Sulawesi, destroying homes, mosques and livelihoods, displacing 80,000 people and killing at least 2000. Immediately, thousands of volunteers mobilized to offer rescue and relief by providing food, organizing shelter and raising money and relief items through social networks and social media (Morse 2018b). These immediate, spontaneous and localized relief efforts preceded, complemented and partly substituted the more bureaucratic and coordinated response of local authorities (Morse 2018a), as well as interventions by specialized international organizations and large NGOs. While the Indonesian government at first declined international aid on the grounds that it could manage the disaster on its own, it accepted offers of relief assistance after the scale of the destruction became evident – albeit selectively and strictly regulating the nature of operations, provision of necessities and deployment of foreign personnel (ABC News 2018; Latiff and Kapoor 2018; Loy 2018a). Obviously, as Christina Bennett, an international aid policy analyst, notes, 'gone are the days when you're going to have a humanitarian sector that comes into a disaster situation with a very heavy footprint and sets up as almost an auxiliary, or a replacement of government services' (quoted in Loy 2018b).

While there has been speculation about the politics of Indonesia's insistence on being able to help its own citizens, its response actually fits well within a broader trend towards the localization of aid, and the increasing prominence of new actors in the quest to provide relief to, and improve the lives of, people in need (e.g. Charter4Change 2018; Fejerskov, Lundsgaarde, and Cold-Ravnkilde 2017). In the context of the so-called afterlives of development (Rudnyckyj and Schwittay 2014), attempts to provide relief in times of disaster and to better the lives of (marginal) populations are now increasingly relocated to initiatives beyond the state and beyond the 'traditional' development expertise of established international organizations. This special issue focuses on the new assemblage of humanitarian and development actors in South East Asia. It analyses how social entrepreneurs, diaspora groups, religious charities, local self-help groups and private investors are involved in initiatives aimed at overcoming poverty, modernizing infrastructure, providing housing, expanding knowledge, organizing emergency relief and addressing social needs. Our contributions focus on the moral politics behind these on-the-ground assemblages of actors and practices. We ask, which tools, technologies and operative logics do these development actors employ? What are their goals and motivations? What claims do they make? How do their interventions play out in local life

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and social relations? What kinds of partnerships and alliances, or forms of competition and conflict, arise? And, what do these practices tell us about their relation to the state and the relation between the state and its citizens? In addressing these questions, this special issue interrogates how the functioning of development actors today is linked to market rule and the state's attempts to govern, control and regulate the lives and well-being of its citizens.

We argue that the emergence of new assemblages of development actors is part of a broader shift from a technocratic to a moral development approach. Tania Li's *The Will to Improve* (2007), much like earlier critical accounts of international development and aid such as James Ferguson's *The Anti-Politics Machine* (1990) and Alex De Waal's *Famine Crimes* (1997), shows how the development industry was organized around a process of 'rendering technical'. This process turns political decisions about property, resources and employment into technical solutions to technical problems, casting socio-political problems as solvable through one-off interventions. As such, issues that 'are rendered technical are simultaneously rendered nonpolitical' (Li 2007, 7). Nowadays, the realities of 'improving and sustaining lives' in South East Asia, as elsewhere in the world, are foregrounded by what we shall refer to as 'rendering moral', a process through which political-economic matters are reframed as moral imperatives. Whether the development is possible thus appears to be dependent on the moral qualities of individuals, families and communities rather than on redressing structural conditions and power relations. At the heart of this moral turn, we argue, is the depoliticization or, as Didier Fassin (2012, 6) puts it, the masking of questions of inequality, domination and injustice. Such questions are gaining urgency in the wake of the politics of privatization, resource extraction and responsibility shifting that are raging in the region – a similar effect to that of the technical fixes championed by institutional development actors years before.

At the same time, actors take part in the present-day development encounter with diverse motives, agendas and interpretations that may or may not correspond to this dominant logic of 'rendering moral'. It is in these politics that we identify a reconfiguration of the role of the state in the region. Yet, rather than a case of the developmental state transforming into a managerial one, as Daromir Rudnyckyj and Anke Schwittay (2014) suggest, the state continues to control the direction in which society and the future should unfold. Instead of retreating because of market liberalization, the state is redefining itself by engaging both the market and society in the work of improving lives and relieving sufferings, increasingly so via moral means. Given greater regional integration and mobility, how societies in South East Asia deal with matters of social rights and protecting citizens against social inequalities and vulnerabilities beyond the nation state is becoming more and more pertinent. By attending to what we characterize as the 'moral turn' of development, this special issue generates fresh insights into the ways in which regional societies are addressing what sociologist Thomas Faist (2019) refers to as the 'transnationalized social question' in our world today.

The afterlives of development and transnational governmentality

South East Asia is emerging as one of the most dynamic hubs of the world economy. Over the past two decades, the region has experienced high economic growth rates, rising incomes, declining poverty, reduced infant mortality and increased life expectancy

(World Bank 2018). Countries like Laos, Cambodia, Myanmar and Vietnam, which in the 1980s were considered to be among the poorest in the world, are now listed as lower middle-income countries, while the so-called tiger cub economies – Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and Thailand – are aiming to move up to high-income status. Yet, as Jonathan Rigg (2016, 3–4) observes, what is missing in this narrative of South East Asia's rise are the people, sectors and regions that have been 'left behind', as well as growth-induced problems, such as environmental degradation, social conflicts and dispossession. If poverty continues to exist, this is not simply, as Rigg argues, because growth has been unequal and certain people have not (yet) been able to benefit from it, but also because 'capitalist growth is harmful to (some) poor people's interests' (2016, 7).

This argument is reminiscent of Arturo Escobar's analysis of how development tends to generate underdevelopment as its flipside. His and other critiques of development in the 1990s saw teleological understandings of development as Eurocentric and as an ideology of the West that legitimizes interventions in the lives of people deemed in need of development (Ziai 2017). In the meantime, as Escobar (1995, 4) suggests, this 'will to transform drastically two-thirds of the world in the pursuit of material prosperity and economic progress' became hegemonic and appropriated by all, including newly independent nation-states that formulated their own development programmes.[1] However, the object of the earlier critique is development as a historically contingent programme of actions dominated by international organizations, backed by powerful Western states, in the decades following the Second World War, and its cultural imperialist undercurrents. In this special issue, we are concerned with a notion of development that, while not totally decoupled from this meaning, encompasses a broad range of directed socio-economic changes aimed at ensuring well-being, relieving suffering and improving lives.

As such, development indeed became a main concern of the postcolonial states in South East Asia, although the programmes for and experiences of development were far from uniform, coordinated or straightforward. Whereas Singapore's programme of export-oriented industrialization served as a model for the market economies in the region, the socialist governments of Vietnam, and to a lesser extent of Cambodia and Laos, initially emphasized (heavy) industry and above all the collectivization of agriculture. Notwithstanding systemic differences and variegated pathways, the state played a major role in promoting, implementing and managing development through the mobilization of economic resources, extraction of natural resources and the creation of industrial capacity (Elias and Rethel 2016; Hayashi 2010; Rigg 2012; Rudnyckyj and Schwittay 2014). Alongside state-led industrialization and agricultural development was often a social contract that guaranteed or at least promised the likelihood of comprehensive state care for citizens, especially in the event of emergent needs.

Although this state developmentalist paradigm has receded, development has never been questioned as a societal goal in the region. Increasing globalization, marketization, neoliberal restructuring and changing geopolitical landscapes triggered a shift from a state-led to a market-led developmentalism[2], as well as from receiving multi- and bilateral

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[1]This preoccupation with development is arguably an aspect of the post-colonial experience. Improvement schemes were already designed and implemented during colonial times. In fact, the idea that colonial subjects, their lives and livelihoods, had to be improved became a justification for colonial rule (Li 2007).

OECD-country funding to aid from a diverse range of other development partners (Ferguson and Gupta 2002; Hettne 2009; Kilby 2018; Sato et al. 2011; Schwittay 2011). Far from marking an 'end of development' as critics had pronounced (e.g. Sachs 1992), these shifts have kept the logic of developmentalism alive in a range of new actors, practices, knowledges and networks that are part of what Rudnyckyj and Schwittay (2014) call the 'afterlives of development'.

This enduring logic is captured by what Li (2007) refers to as the 'will to improve', namely that intent of national and international institutions alike to intervene on behalf of those who are constructed as in need of improvement, which has existed from colonialism until this day. Li's analysis underscores the inevitable gap between what is attempted by those charged with the work of improving, and what is desired by those marked out to be improved, while indicating a certain level of shared expectations between the two sides. This notion of the 'will to improve' continues to capture the spirit that drives people and nations in South East Asia and beyond. As we shall see, it motivates a diverse range of non-state actors and social movements to provide relief in times of disaster and better the lives of (marginalized) populations. These include Islamic charities and philanthropists in Indonesia, citizen-based relief efforts in Myanmar, private aid initiatives in Cambodia, diaspora-for-development efforts in the Philippines and public–private partnerships in Vietnam. Placing emphasis on immediate and direct actions, these very distinct groups and initiatives seek to create a 'more inclusive and fair society' (McCarthy 2020, 25), 'abundance for all' (Kelly and Ortega 2020, 49) or a 'civilized nation' (Horat 2020, 56).

While these goals might not differ from those of past development interventions, what makes the difference today is the rise of privatized and direct approaches that involve transnational private actors and individuals. Increasingly, these actors actively deploy 'moral sentiments' to define and justify discourses and practices aimed at remedying the suffering and misfortune of others (Fassin 2012, 1–2), and hence stake their claims in what Faist (2019) refers to as the 'transnationalized social question'. Rather than being grounded in the welfare state and citizenship as before, the social question today is underscored by increasing connectivity and mobility between global societies, which spawn a heterogeneous transnational field of thought and actions around issues of social protection. The transnational character of the social question is thus not just in the insertion of outside forces and actors into existing arrangements, but in the blurring of boundaries between that which is within or outside of the nation state (Faist 2019, 51). This transnational field of actions, we argue, is not just a ramification of transnational mobility but also the outcome of 'transnational governmentality' (Ferguson and Gupta 2002). More specifically, it results from a process of 'humanitarian governing' (Fassin 2012) that has spread around the world through global alliances and networks. Invoking practices, strategies and logics of state and non-state actors beyond the nation state, this form of governmentality renders certain moral subjects amenable to an approach of 'improving' premised on the mobilization of resources from a broad range of social actors. This moral subject represents what Andreas Muehlebach (2012), writing about post-industrial restructuring in Italy, refers to as the 'ethical citizen'. Deprived of the

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²It is questionable to what extent the South East Asian states actually can be called developmental states, a label that is more often used to describe the East Asian model (Elias and Rethel 2016; Rigg 2012).

structures of solidarity and social protection that had been achieved for a couple of decades in Italy, the ethical citizen is anxious to build the human capital necessary for the market, take personal responsibility for success or failure and possess a compassionate heart.

While most countries in the region are taking a different trajectory to that of post-industrial countries, the 'will to improve' in South East Asia today encompasses a dynamic of transnational governmentality around the shaping of this very ethical citizen. As our contributions suggest, development efforts and humanitarian actions in the region are underscored by promises to raise the 'consciousness', 'civility' and this-worldly meritoriousness of individuals in exchange for helping others or themselves to escape poverty, recover from natural disasters and contribute to social progress. In an age where the sufferings of others are quickly brought closer to home via social media and international social movements, the 'ethical citizen' that Muehlebach portrays is also sensitized to picking up what used to be the responsibilities of governments in countries that are not their own. This seems to underlie the global rise of private aid championed by individuals and private groups (Schnable 2015), including those from diverse diasporas around the globe (Kelly and Ortega 2020). With their 'desire to give' (Bornstein 2012) and 'merciful heart' (Vignato 2018), these different actors are part of an expanding 'moral landscape' that prominently features the ethos of com-passion – yet tends to conceal underlying relations of inequality (Fassin 2012, ix). As Anne-Meike Fechter (2020) shows, this sometimes leads to an ironic situation in which frustrated individuals from post-industrial countries, who themselves might be suffering under restructuring, are channelled into the work of 'improving' in poorer countries.

This moral turn of development, we argue, is further enhanced by the language of efficiency and optimization that permeates the operative logics and actions of different development actors. This language foregrounds the self-reliance of communities and the minimalization of state responsibilities. At times, the idea of technologies as equalizers and solvers of social problems also creeps back in.

Legitimacy, immediacy and efficiency

The politics of mobilizing relief efforts in Sulawesi described at the beginning of this Intro-duction raises the question of who has the capacity and authority to provide support to those in need. Ideally, states protect and provide goods and services for their citizens; in reality, non-state actors supply basic social services to ordinary people more extensively than states in many countries around the world (Cammett and MacClean 2014, 1). As the case of Sulawesi illustrates, however, the state by no means releases control to non-state actors and neither does it equally welcome all non-state actors.

The increased importance of non-state actors in the development is often explained in terms of neoliberal restructuring, which results in state retrenchment and replacement by private actors in the economy and society (Cammett and MacClean 2014, 12–13). The case studies in this volume show, however, that this argument does not fully capture what goes on in South East Asia. Given the changing, but continuing importance of the state in development, the 'retreat' or 'rolling back' of the state argument does not, as Rigg (2016, 16) notes, have as much purchase in East and South East Asia as in other parts

of the world. Indeed, as Retsikas (2017) observes, some South East Asian governments have actually expanded rather than contracted state welfare programmes, such as the health, education and social insurance policies in Thailand and Indonesia. The examples from South East Asia therefore show the multiplicity, incompleteness and ambivalences of neoliberal policies and processes (Ong 2006; Rigg 2016; Schwenkel and Leshkowich 2012).

This is exemplified in the case of Vietnam, where the socialist state increasingly relies on private investors to implement its ambitious infrastructure development plans. Esther Horat describes the case of private investors who built new marketplaces to accommodate increasing trading activities in a village near Hanoi. These private investors are important actors in the country's quest for development, growth and modernization, but they can only operate in alliance with and according to the rules of the state. In contrast to accounts of advancing neoliberalism, Horat's example shows how the specific configurations of public–private partnerships assure that the socialist state continues to be integral to the will to improve in Vietnam (see also Gainsborough 2011; Schwenkel and Leshkowich 2012). This disjuncture between the turn to privatization and the continued socialist claim of being in the service of 'all the people' is adeptly dealt with via mobilizing instruments that appeal to people's wish to belong to certain moral communities and aspirations for a 'civilized' life (Nguyen 2018).

As such, the role of the state has not just changed from promoting growth through a direct investment to managing, promoting and controlling development (Rudnyckyj and Schwittay 2014, 3). It is also expanding the space for incorporating a wide range of actors and movements, elements that do not always fit comfortably in the framework of nation building, such as the diaspora philanthropy in the Philippines that Kelly and Ortega analyse. The Philippine state has increasingly relied on the strategic mobilization of diaspora groups to promote development, and in that process has come to define its own role as facilitating the heroic return of overseas Filipinos while ensuring the care of marginal groups. One of the bigger diaspora groups, *Gawad Kalinda*, cooperates with local government units, as well as landed and business elites, to set up housing projects for homeless and resettled people. Diaspora groups like *Gawad Kalinda* are highly valued partners not only because of their financial capacities but also because they are associated with the entrepreneurial energy and technological know-how deemed necessary for a model of development that promotes entrepreneurship, self-reliance, individualism and market conformity.

The intimacy between the state and these diaspora groups suggests that the logic of development goes beyond economic policies of deregulation, liberalization of trade and privatization of state-owned enterprises. Similar to what happens in Horat's case of Vietnam, the *Gawad Kalinda* example entails a mutual embrace between the state and non-state actors, made possible by their common subscription to market-oriented values of immediacy, efficiency and transparency (Ganti 2014). With that mutual embrace, the state can claim a more prominent role in enabling development with the greater inclusion of non-state actors. In the same vein, Najib Kailani and Martin Slama show how these market-oriented values have come to permeate the work of Islamic charities in contemporary Indonesia. Islamic charities, particularly those based on the obligatory almsgiving practice called *zakat*, have a long history in Indonesia. While initially collected from and distributed among the congregation of the mosque, *zakat* has

become increasingly professionalized and aligned with the state's welfare provision, in particular, under Suharto's New Order regime. Yet, as acceleration has become a guiding principle in many spheres of life, particularly with the advent of social media, Islamic charities are increasingly conceptualizing their actions in terms of efficiency and immediacy, not least vis-à-vis the corruption in government regulation of *zakat*. This explains, as Kailani and Slama argue, the popularization of voluntary almsgiving (*sedekah*) in post-Suharto Indonesia, which promises not only non-bureaucratic procedures and an immediate impact on improving the plight of the poor, but also immediate material and spiritual rewards for the donors. While this rise of voluntary almsgiving may stem from a critique of the state's failure in responding to suffering, it helps to nurture the very moral subject necessary for the course of market reform, the kind of ethical citizen that Muehlebach characterizes.

This focus on charity as a 'street endeavour' that acts immediately and spontaneously in order to relieve the suffering of the needy stands in sharp contrast to institutionalized forms of humanitarian aid provided by the state, big NGOs and international organizations alike. Aid organizations and workers tend to emphasize the professionalism of their work. They seek to distinguish themselves from charity, which they associate with the provision of relief, while humanitarian aid also seeks to foment change or, however modestly, improve the human world (Malkki 2015; Redfield 2012). The examples in this special issue show, however, that the distinction between charity, humanitarianism and development is increasingly blurred. Kailani and Slama's Islamic charities insist on how the immediacy, efficiency and transparency of their actions allow them to leave not only the state but also other humanitarian organizations behind in improving the lives of those in need.

In the meantime, the initiatives of actors, such as charity groups, diasporas or private investors, are not always a response to the withdrawal of existing services and support by the state, and therefore do not necessarily replace them. In certain cases, they concern forms of aid and support that the state never provided (adequately). Although several countries in the region have, or had, developed social policies to provide those in need with access to health, education, housing or social services, these tend to be weak or abandoned while the focus remains on 'familialism, communitarianism and traditional norms of subsidiarity and mutual support' (Croissant 2004, 519). This is apparent in the case of Myanmar civilian relief groups analysed by McCarthy in this issue. McCarthy relates the increased contributions of non-state actors to, for example, infrastructure development or disaster relief in Myanmar in the wake of the junta's shift from an ideological commitment to redistribution and welfare towards principles of marketization from the late 1980s. The involvement of commercial elites, religious authorities or ordinary people in private redistributive initiatives were, as he argues, not an incidental outcome of the junta's retrenchment from or inefficiency in providing social welfare, but rather a result of the junta's explicit appeal to the moral obligations of its citizens. This becomes particularly clear in mobilization of support in the aftermath of natural disasters such as like Cyclone Komen in 2015, which was mostly based on civilian aid centred within religious and community networks and circuits of horizontal solidarity. As McCarthy notes, however, it is possible for the emancipatory solidarity mobilized by religiously and geographically bounded charity to stand alongside the exclusion of ethnic and religious minorities

from these same circuits of aid, further entrenching hierarchies of belonging and citizenship.

Immediacy and efficiency become a central rallying force not just for citizen groups helping the victims of natural disasters featured in McCarthy's work, but also for the increasing number of private aid workers that Anne-Meike Fechter focuses on. In Cambodia, a country that experienced a major influx of international development aid in the 1990s, there has been a surge in small-scale private initiatives by individuals coming from richer countries who wish to make a difference in the lives of the local poor. Much has been written about Cambodia's aid dependency and its detrimental effects on governance throughout the 1990s (Ear 2013; Godfrey et al. 2002). Frustrated with the bureaucratic operations and lack of results within the formal aid sector, Fechter shows, a myriad of citizen aid projects have emerged in an effort to respond more directly to the lack of social support in Cambodia. Again, the emphasis on efficiency and the need to witness directly the effectiveness of their actions come through in the testimonies of the private aid workers she portrays. While building on personalized networks of national and international peers, these actors do not so much counter but rather replicate the ideology of 'the ethical citizen' that underlies the logic of restructuring embraced by both the government of Cambodia and that of their home countries. It is in the figure of the private international aid worker who searches for more efficient ways to carry out the work of improving lives away from home out of their frustration with bureaucratic inefficiency in their own country, that we can see the predominance of market imperatives.

Reconfiguring the state, moral communities and depoliticization

At this point, it should be clear that the inclusion of a broad range of non-state development actors is not a sign of retreat by the state or development 'beyond the state'. Rather, what we observe is a recasting of the role of the state, even as it remains central in setting the conditions and directions of development, especially towards building 'modern' and 'developed' nations. What James Ferguson and Akhil Gupta (2012) term 'transnational governmentality' turns out, in these cases, to be how the fostering of the ethical citizen (Muehlebach 2012) is taking place on a global scale and how this works to extend the role of the state in certain ways. The examples in this volume show that this process of 'rendering moral' works in two ways, namely as a way to 'nurture selflessness' (Muehlebach 2012) and a moral responsibility to act, and as a way to turn beneficiaries into agents that are accountable to themselves and their communities (Rudnyckyj and Schwittay 2014, 6).

The construction of this moral subject gives rise to a social order in which a moral hierarchy is erected to distinguish between the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor, and between the giver and the recipient of welfare, distinctions that go beyond national borders. In most cases, it is the emerging middle class that becomes involved as private actors in development, and who define the terms of their giving while actively taking part in the construction of the needy Other (see Kailani and Slama 2020; Kelly and Ortega 2020). The Philippine diaspora charity *Gawad Kalinga* does not just build houses for the poor, they also work towards eradicating their 'slum mentality' by imposing a series of disciplinary mechanisms to turn them into 'family-oriented,

hard-working, self-sufficient, nationalistic and entrepreneurial' citizens. The development of modern marketplaces in Vietnam by private investors is part of broader efforts to 'civilize' the people and influence their behaviour. It is not only about 'inducing people to improve their own material living conditions, but also to improve themselves in moral terms' (Horat 2020, 57–58). As such, the engagement of these actors reinforces a social order that is most suitable for the purposes of government while contributing to an extension of the reach of the market in the lives of ordinary people in the region (Elias and Rethel 2016).

We do not deny that these actions and networks of non-state actors give rise to moral communities in which people locate the meanings of their actions, express solidarity with the unfortunate, or even channel their wish for a better life. Liisa Malkki (2015) describes how humanitarians not only respond to the needs of those to be helped but also to their own need to help. Humanitarianism is, as Malkki argues, very much about the relation to the self. While this may involve the idea of being part of something bigger than oneself (Malkki 2015, 12), other motivations are also at work. Some of these motivations are couched in religious terms. For example, the concepts of 'meritorious giving' and 'work for others' in Myanmar refer to that which one does for oneself and for society as a whole (McCarthy 2020, 21). Another example is the 'miracle of voluntary alms giving' that motivates people in Indonesia to do good in the here-and-now in order to reap the rewards for this life (Kailani and Slama 2020, 78). Likewise, the notion of civility promoted by private developers of the Vietnamese marketplaces that Horat discusses seems also shared by a broad base of the Vietnamese society as a worthy goal for a country historically ravaged by colonialism and wars (Harms 2016). These religiously and ideologically inspired interventions into the lives of the needy are, of course, not new as such, but they are, as Retsikas (2017, 218–219) observes, reformed and recast as 'a response to new forms of governmentality' and 'geared towards fashioning and shaping the self and the other, the donor and the recipient'.

'Rendering moral' is having the same effect of depoliticizing what is profoundly political, as did 'rendering technical' in the times of state-led development programmes, and yet it helps to consolidate the power of the state in entirely new ways. The moralization of private responsibility, individualized capabilities and community self-reliance diverts attention away from the dispossession and inequalities that are being produced and reproduced in the name of improvement and progress. It disguises the mechanisms by which power relations are maintained in such a way that allows certain groups of people to impoverish and dominate others. At the same time that 'rendering moral' puts the emphasis on the self-responsibility of the citizen, it de-responsibilizes the state, as far as the social consequences of privatization are concerned.

Disclosure statement

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