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INONG ACEH:
An Analysis on the Changing Position of Women in Aceh

Iwan Dzulvan Amir

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the degree of Masters of Philosophy in the Department of Anthropology and Archaeology Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies The Australian National University
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I declare that this thesis is my own composition,
and that all sources have been acknowledged.

Iwan Dzulvan Amir
Ta kirem doa kepada korban,
semoga Allah beu geubri syurga.
Keu ahli wareh keluarga korban,
beutugoh iman beurayoek saba.

We pray for the victims,
so God may place them in heaven.

For the family of the victims,
so they may remain faithful and patient.
For my niece Zhara
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<td>ajaran</td>
<td>Teachings.</td>
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<td>ANTARA</td>
<td>Indonesian State news agency.</td>
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<td>Banda Aceh</td>
<td>Provincial capital of Indonesia.</td>
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<td>berhala</td>
<td>Idols, often associated with pre-Islamic practices of animism.</td>
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<td>Daerah Istimewa</td>
<td>Special region status, currently attached to two provinces, Aceh and Yogyakarta.</td>
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<td>Dayah</td>
<td>Islamic religious school, much like a pesantren (its Javanese counterpart).</td>
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<td>Gayo</td>
<td>An ethnic group living in the inner highlands of Aceh.</td>
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<td><em>Himpunan Ulama Dayah Aceh</em>. The Association of Dayah Ulamas or Dayah leaders in Aceh.</td>
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<td>kafir</td>
<td>Indonesian (derived from Arabic <em>kafr</em>) for infidel, more often used by Muslims to describe non-Muslims.</td>
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<td>kanduri</td>
<td>Acehnese feasts conducted to celebrate events, a practice common throughout the Malay world.</td>
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<td>kaphé</td>
<td>Acehnese for <em>kafir</em>. See <em>kafir</em>.</td>
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<td>Kapolda</td>
<td><em>Kantor Polisi Daerah</em>. Provincial Police headquarters.</td>
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<td>Kodam</td>
<td><em>Komando Daerah Militer</em>. Provincial Military Command.</td>
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<td>Kyai</td>
<td>Honorary title (usually Javanese) to a Muslim religious leader, usually a head of an Islamic school.</td>
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<td>LSM</td>
<td><em>Lembaga Swadaya Masyarakat</em>. Indonesian for NGO.</td>
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<td>Majelis</td>
<td>Indonesian (derived from the Arabic <em>majlis</em>) for council.</td>
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<td>Mecca.</td>
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<td>Meunasah</td>
<td>Islamic religious school which is not subsidised by the state and do not implement any state curriculum.</td>
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<td>MUI</td>
<td>Majelis Ulama Indonesia. Official state organisation of Islamic religious leaders.</td>
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<td>NU</td>
<td>Nahdatul Ulama. Indonesia’s (as well as the world’s) largest Muslim organisation.</td>
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<td>PD Inshafuddin</td>
<td>Persatuan Dayah Inshafuddin. The Inshafuddin Dayah Association.</td>
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<tr>
<td>PPP</td>
<td>Partai Persatuan Pembangunan. The United Development Party, one of the three political party in New Order Indonesia.</td>
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<td>Syariah</td>
<td>Islamic law.</td>
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<td>Tgk.</td>
<td>Short for Teungku, Acehnese honorary title conveyed to religious teachers or leaders.</td>
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<td>tradisi</td>
<td>Indonesian (derived from English) for tradition.</td>
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<td>Ulama</td>
<td>Arabic honorary title conveyed to Islamic religious leaders.</td>
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<td>Uleebalang</td>
<td>Pre-Indonesian independence Acehnese aristocracy.</td>
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<table>
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<th>Term</th>
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<td>Umara</td>
<td>Arabic honorary title conveyed to Islamic political leaders.</td>
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<td>Umat</td>
<td>Arabic word referring to the group or collective of believers, specifically the Muslim communities.</td>
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<td>Ummah</td>
<td>See Umat.</td>
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<td>Ustads</td>
<td>Islamic religious teacher, usually teaches how to read the Quran.</td>
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<tr>
<td>ziarah</td>
<td>Pilgrimage to holy sites (usually graves or tombs).</td>
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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

During the preparation of my field work I have been guided by my co-supervisors Prof James J. Fox, the Director of the Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies (RSPaS), and Dr Kathy Robinson from the Department of Anthropology and Archaeology at RSPaS, at the Australian National University (ANU). I would also thank Dr Patrick Guinness and Dr Margot Lyon from the Faculty of Anthropology and Archaeology, the Faculties, at the ANU for their guidance in pre-field work preparations.

During my field work, I was attached to the Pusat Pengembangan Studi Kawasan (the centre of the study of regional development) under the tutelage of my field supervisor, Prof Bahrein T. Sugihen, professor in Sociology and head of the centre at the University of Syiah Kuala. I was fortunate enough to be able to learn many things about Acehnese society as well under his patronage. I also thank the entire Sugihen family who have accepted me in their home during my research. I would like to thank the following institutions for their support of my research: the central library of Unsyiah, Pusat Penelitian ilmu Sosial dan Budaya (Research Centre for Social and Cultural Sciences) at Unsyiah, Pusat Studi Hak Asasi Manusia (Centre for Human Rights Studies), Flower Aceh (women NGO), KOMNAS-Perempuan (National Commission for Women) and the BPS (Bureau of Statistics) in Banda Aceh.

I would also like to thank the following individuals for their assistance in the field. Without them I would have been lost. They are, in alphabetical order, Ibu Khairani Arifin, Ibu Suraiya Kamaruzzaman, Ibu Rosnani
Financially, this research has been made possible by the Graduate Program scholarship granted by the Department of Anthropology and Archaeology at RSPaS, ANU. I would like to thank Dr Minako Sakai for her support during my “difficult times” in Canberra. I also thank (also in alphabetical order) Dr. Ed Aspinall, Dr. Rachel Bloul, Prof. Lance Castles, Mrs. Susan Cowan, Dr. Ibrahim Hasan, Prof. Dr. Abdul Choliq Husaery, Prof. Margaret Kartomi, Dr. Lesley McCulloch, Bapak Rizal Panggabean, Teuku Adnan Pmtoh, Prof. Dahlan Tayib, Dr. Iwu Utomo, Prof. Teuku Yakob, Dr. Daud Yusuf and Dr. Sulaiman Yusuf. for their invaluable input. I thank my friends and family for their continuing faith in my ability to survive this journey which is yet to finish.

Finally I would like to thank the Acehnese people for allowing me a glimpse of their rich and colourful lives. They have my sincere admiration for despite their misfortunes have remain adamant that justice will in the end prevail.
Introduction
INTRODUCTION

Aceh is a province in Indonesia currently known to the world as another hotspot due to prolonged armed conflict. It is a troubled (or troublesome if viewed by the military) separatist province that has suffered a long period of oppression and injustice. Its natural wealth and riches have become a source of sorrow rather than prosperity.

Aceh today is often equated with the dominant ethnic group who live in the coastal area of the northern tip of Sumatra. However, the province itself is inhabited by various ethnic groups with their own distinct languages and cultures. The ethnic map provided on the previous page only lists the officially acknowledged suku bangsa which very roughly means “ethnic groups” as classified by the local state government. The rough terrain of Aceh contains several suku terasing or isolated tribes relatively unaffected by the socio-political changes in their surrounding region.

Despite this diversity, the current conflict in Aceh involves the construct of Aceh as a singular identity. Though GAM (Gerakan Aceh Merdeka or the Free Aceh Movement) claims to strive for the reestablishment of the 19th century kingdom of Aceh – whose borders even at the height of its power excluded the Gayo, Alas, Singkel and even Jaméé territories – their claim encompasses the provincial borders as established by the modern Republic of Indonesia. Indeed, the recent push made by the Galaksi (Gayo-Alas-Kluet-Singkel) coalition for the formation of a new province within Indonesia separate from Aceh (Anh, 2001:A14) is violently rejected by GAM leaders who accuse the central government of devising
such a divisive idea and admonish the Galaksi leaders as ignorant of history
(SERAMBI, 2000b).

Notes on Recent Literature

This tendency to create a united Aceh identity within the political sphere is also reflected in writings on Aceh for the last decade of the 20th century. As part of the research, I have reviewed over 2000 news articles (mostly domestic) and much of the published literature on Aceh between 1990 to 2002. I have classified this material roughly into four categories: politics (statements, negotiations, policies), history (mainly pre-colonial and post-revolutionary history), human rights (military movements, abuses, refugee issues, collateral damages to civilian lives) and culture (arts, language, etc). The results indicate that for the past four years political issues dominate the Acehnese literature, far exceeding other issues.

Graph I.1.
Topics of National Newspaper on Aceh 1990-2002

Note: * Up to February 2002
Source: Research data.

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Another search on scholarly works focusing on Aceh also yielded similar result. What is most interesting for me is the preference of the research topics. The post-DOM period that followed the infamous military operations in Aceh 1989-1998 created a boom on human rights and political writings on Aceh. These works mainly rely on materials provided by NGO investigations, legal documents as well as printed media. Sources from academic works are seldom used and those which are used are mainly historical works, usually for legitimization purposes. Even propagandist GAM publications employ materials written by established historians both local (e.g. Ibrahim Alfian or Isa Sulaiman) or foreign scholars (e.g. Eric Morris or Anthony Reid) whose major works on Aceh predate the 1990s. It is strange, however, that graph 1.3. below indicates that no recent local scholar has been interested in historical research.
The most common answers given when I asked local researchers during my field work about this tendency gave me the impression that Acehnese scholars are comfortable with the current form of Aceh history. Indeed, Acehnese are very proud of their history to the extent that such pride often reinforces the nostalgic sentiment of a unique and distinct ethnic-religious identity while subordinating other identities in the region. This may explain why the notion of a separate Galaksi province mentioned earlier is met with hostility by the separatist-leaning Acehnese.

In terms of inter-ethnic relations, the current condition in Aceh is similar to the macroscopic condition of inter-ethnic relations within Indonesia. There is a relationship between a dominant ethnic group – the Acehnese in the case of Aceh and the Javanese in the case of Indonesia –
with other minority ethnic groups. In both cases there is a strong nationalist sentiment among the dominant ethnic group overriding any breakaway movement (Galaksi in the case of Aceh and, ironically, Aceh in the case of Indonesia). Both nationalist sentiments are rhetorically justified in using sentiments of "historical unity" (the pre-colonial kingdom of Aceh and in the case of Indonesia, though more reluctantly admitted by Javanese politicians, the ancient kingdom of Majapahit).

What I find most disturbing is that these "convenient" historical accounts have become so commonly used that it is often taken as a constant. Researches in local development, economy and law – the top three research topics as seen in graph I.3. – have been largely viewed by writers with suspicion and were constantly ignored in the increasingly popular politically provocative literary format. The most common excuse given to me in the field is that the data can be ignored because "they are the government's numbers." This is quite unacceptable academically because no matter how suspicious these research results are, they are nevertheless official data which often determine official policymaking. Dismissal of these researches will lead to an overreliance on analytical extrapolations based on a distant pre-Republic history, which can drag Acehnese scholars into the role of political spokespersons. Indeed, without mentioning names, I have concluded from my readings that the current conflict has forced Acehnese scholars to be partial in their analysis.

Notes on the Thesis

In this thesis I will examine the second least researched topic on Aceh shown in graph I.3. (the first is "culture" which is too broad a topic). This
topic is gender. I would like to present the reader with an overview of the changing status and role of women in an industrialising Aceh. I want to look at how social change brought by modernisation is influencing existing social constructs, specifically gender relations. This thesis will be an exercise in feminist cultural constructionist analysis (e.g. Chodorow, 1978; Rosaldo, 1980). Reiter (1975) argued that the gender asymmetry that does exist in many societies is caused by differences in power, class and production. It is these differences that shape gender identities in a society. The thesis will attempt to find relationships between economic conditions and existing cultural values throughout the available historical data. It will present the type of identity that is attributed to Acehnese women by dominant political and religious agencies through the media, examine the cause and context for this identity, and attempt to explain how Acehnese men and women respond to such constructs.

In order to achieve this aim, the research has included textual and statistical analysis from data available from local libraries and the provincial bureau of statistics. Data from previous research – mostly local – will also be used. The research also relies on interviews with Acehnese predominantly of elite backgrounds (Ulama, academic, activists, etc). It should be noted that I have also engaged in participant observation of local public activities. This was done with the full permission of the parties involved.

The most difficult task in data processing turned out not to be transcribing interviews, but rather the processing of statistical data. The Indonesian Bureau of Statistics has developed a reputation among
Introduction
researchers – especially foreign – for its inconsistent and unreliable data, especially during the early years of the New Order. I compensated for these “at-the-moment” misleading representations by cross-checking with other independent sources (e.g. NGO surveys, investigative reports, newspaper articles, journals) as well as compiling existing data into historical sequences, thereby identifying “anomalies.” Most of the time, the data is most unreliable in Indonesian election years (where buildings have been known to appear and disappear on paper.) However, the charts and tables presented in this thesis have been prepared with an attempt to allow for such errors.

This thesis is divided into six chapters and a conclusion. The first chapter provides a socio-historical background of Aceh up to the present. In order to address the problems mentioned above, I conclude that the first part of this thesis is a reassessment of the ongoing widely accepted history of Aceh. Then I follow up with the argument that despite improvements to the condition of women’s lives, Acehnese women remain marginalised in the political sphere. The second chapter will dissect how the image of Acehnese women has been presented in public, and to what purpose. Afterwards, special attention will be given to economic factors, and leadership issues. The third chapter describes the domestic life of Acehnese women especially in regard to married life. Chapter four is an examination of Acehnese women in the work force. Chapter five will describe the positions of leadership available to Acehnese women. Chapter six will present case studies from my fieldwork: accounts of three public meetings with an analysis of the gender interaction.
Notes on the Research

Long before undertaking my field work, I had lived in Aceh for ten years during my childhood and know its people to be friendly, generous, hard working, and honest despite the negative stereotypes that seem to prevail in Indonesia today. I am an Indonesian of mixed ethnicity (so are my parents) and although I have travelled to so many places in my brief life, I wholeheartedly adopt Aceh as my place of origin.

When the current troubles in Aceh began, I was already studying abroad. While attempting to start my postgraduate study, it struck me that I might be able to contribute something back to the people of Aceh. It may not be much, but it will certainly be an effort that is feasible.

At first there were initial concerns regarding my departure to do field work in a known danger zone. However, once these technical barriers were overcome I found myself having quite an interesting time in Aceh.

I spent most of my field work in the capital, Banda Aceh. It is there that the changes in Acehnese society are most visible (not to mention it being the safest area in the province). I stayed at the home of the family of Prof Bahrein T. Sugihen, a professor of Sociology at the University of Syiahkuala, who is also a longtime family friend. During my brief three-months' research, I experienced a number of major events that occurred in Aceh. I was welcomed by the greatest flood in over 50 years that hit Aceh when I arrived. I came at a very good time, under the circumstances. It was at the time of the second human rights ceasefire (Jeda Kemanusiaan II) so the situation was less tense. It was the Muslim fasting month of Ramadhan,
which meant that in addition to public religious events I was also invited to many wedding ceremonies. After 11 weeks in Aceh, I continued my research by studying the Acehnese expatriate communities in Bogor and Yogyakarta on the island of Java. I also spent some time with Acehnese expatriates in Sydney shortly after I returned.

While I spent the last year writing up after my return, development have occurred in Aceh at a rapid pace. The most significant ones are the change of government in Indonesia (through unorthodox means) from President Abdurrahman Wahid to President Megawati, the change of approach to the problem of Aceh by the government, the increased crackdown by the military, the prolonged impasse in GAM-Indonesian government negotiations, the official implementation of Syari’ah law (Islamic law) in Aceh, and most recently, the killing of Teuku Abdullah Syafi’ie, the GAM field commander. For my purposes I treat these developments as the consequence of the long-term socio-economic dynamics in Aceh. By examining the period from the beginning to the end of the New Order regime I want to focus on the effects of development and government policies particularly in the last decade of the 20th century.
Chapter 1:
A BRIEF HISTORY OF ACEH
Chapter One:

A BRIEF HISTORY OF ACEH

Aceh is a resource-rich province of Indonesia. It is located at the northern tip of the Island of Sumatra, geographically placed in the strategic end of the Malacca Strait. As such, it has always been visited by traders mainly of Indian, Persian, Arabic and Chinese origin. Aceh was once a society with a dominant Hindu-animist beliefs. Indeed, the ancient Hindu kingdom of Indra Patra once stood on the previous site of the Muslim Pasai kingdom. Its legacy can be found in various temple ruins (the most famous is the ruins of Indra Puri temple, which at one time had been converted into a mosque by Sultan Iskandar Muda) that are scattered along Aceh's coastline and during World War II they were often transformed into bunkers for military purposes. Most Acehnese have mixed physical characteristics of various ethnic groups. In the coastal areas where the population are descendants of seafaring traders, their physical appearance indicates mainly the Malay, Indo-Chinese, and Arab influences. As a rough cultural marker, the inland Acehnese – the Gayo – bear Indian names (e.g. Asry, Bangkaru, Gade, Polim, Sawitry, Tiba, etc.) rather than the more common Arabic and Islamic names used in the coastal areas.

Not many contemporary Acehnese like to be reminded of the Hindu legacy. This is illustrated in John Bowen’s work on the Gayo where he described in detail the conflicts between non-Islamic and Islamic traditions (1993). The Acehnese prefer to underline their "more recent" historical legacy since the introduction of Islam.
Aceh culture is much influenced by Islamic civilisation. It is the region with the oldest history of Islamic impact in Indonesia, as the first Islamic kingdom founded in Aceh as early as the 9th century. Historians speculate that Islam entered Aceh with traders from Arabia or Persia who taught Islam while waiting for the seasonal winds to carry their ships back from Aceh across the Indian ocean. Islam was introduced gradually rather than through violent conquest, allowing for a slow accommodation to pre-existing cultural values.

Photo 1.1.
The ruins of the fort of Indra Patra. It is located 23 km east of Banda Aceh

However, Acehnese today romanticise Islam's arrival in Aceh. Unlike Java or Sulawesi whose Muslims commonly credit individual actors – such as the Wali Songo (nine Holy men) or Sulawesi's five Wali from Aceh – with the role of spreading Islam to the population, the most common reply I received when interviewing Muslim Acehnese respondents regarding their knowledge of Islam's origins in Aceh is that it happened at one particular moment (but they don't know when). Written sources credited "traders" and quoted "witnesses" without citing any name of an individual Islamic evangelist. Locals are depicted as accepting this spread of Islam

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immediately without resistance, which is — considering the pattern of Islamic spread in Southeast Asia — highly unlikely. Unless a local ruler embraced it or became its patron then Islam would have to spread gradually rather than being taken up in a revolutionary moment. Indeed, individual actors are credited in spreading Islam from Aceh. In the 15th century, King Parameswara of Malacca began an alliance with the Acehnese kingdom of Pasai by embracing Islam and marrying one of his daughters to the ruler (Shaw and Ali, 1970:2).

I found deliberate avoidance in discussing pre-Islamic Aceh either by declaring ignorance or by diverting the matter into comparisons of how things are much better under Islam. It is as if there is a desire for the image of the Acehnese to be that of the first instantly devout Muslims in the region. Hostile responses when contrary claims were even suggested have happened. TAS, a historian from Unsyiah, illustrates this attitude.

Once an artist painted Putroe Pang [a famous Malay princess who wed the Acehnese Sultan Iskandar Muda] with bare-breasts as was most likely the custom of the time [presumably an ancient Hindu custom much like women in Balinese villages today]. This artist was condemned by the public as a degenerate and the painting was regarded as nothing but a dirty fantasy.

This prudish attitude toward representing the past is nothing new in Aceh. It is indicative of how Acehnese want to present themselves to the outside world. The first advice I received from Acehnese or non-Acehnese alike before going to the field is that I should never question the "Muslimness" of an Acehnese or Aceh in general as they would treat it as an insult. In the field, while my respondents told me they agree with this advice, they
constantly complained about how increasingly Acehnese (usually among the youth) behaved in un-Islamic way. Jayawardena (1977) and Yeoh (1994) indicated that conflict in Aceh is usually generational. The older generation complained about the youth, usually in regard to their lack of morality and the youth complained about their elders, usually in regard to their elders' stubborn conservatism (often referred to as being kolot).

1.1. Re-Imagining an Islamic History

Although religion has always played a strong role in Southeast Asian social movements, Islam in Aceh has a history of conservatism. In various kingdoms that existed in Aceh (Pasai, Peureulak, Pedir, Aceh), Sultans relied on the approval of the Mufti (royal religious advisors) – a position institutionalised in Aceh as Khadi Malikul Adil by Sultan Iskandar Muda (1607-1636) – for religious legitimation of any cultural practices that they maintained or introduced (Rusdi, 1994:43; Syamsuddin, 1998:9). The most common proverb used by Acehnese to describe the relationship between culture and Islam is the last two lines of Hadih Maja:

\[
\begin{align*}
Hukom\ ngon\ adat, & \quad \text{[Islamic] law and customary tradition,} \\
lagee\ zat\ ngon\ sifeut. & \quad \text{is like substance and its attributes.}
\end{align*}
\]

(Hasjmy, 1996:18)

Tradition and religion are viewed as inseparable, one cannot exist without the other. Such claims are not uniquely Acehnese. Members of another Islamic society, the Minangkabau of West Sumatra, make similar statements regarding Islam and tradition (Blackwood, 1993; Whalley, 1993). However, unlike the situation in pre-colonial West Sumatra where wars were fought by Islamic reformers against traditional conservatives, in Aceh
Islamic reform is a 20th century movement. Most of the time, religious leaders have been keen to keep things as they are. Islamic identity is important to Acehnese in general (Amir, 2002). The claim "Aceh has always been Islamic, there is no need for further changes" was repeatedly mentioned during my interviews. Among non-Acehnese Muslims, such statements can seem like arrogance or fanaticism.

This oft-repeated claim can be seen as indicative of a process of building a local identity as an Islamic identity. One reason for engaging in such a process is the belief in an Islamic state as the ideal state common in most Muslim societies. While the idea was constantly contested in nationalist debates about the form of a modern Indonesian state, the public debate was about finding the proper form for its implementation rather than questioning the idea of an Islamic state itself. Acehnese politicians have always employed Islamic cultural symbolism, but Islamic practices are never legally enforced. For example, traditional practices of gambling, drinking alcohol, and prostitution all exist and are always blamed on a perceived "un-Islamic" governance. The fact that Islam has never dominated formal politics in Aceh is something that drew ire when mentioned to Ulama that I interviewed. After the kaphé (infidel) rule of the Dutch and the nationalist rule of the Indonesian Republic, there is currently a firm belief – particularly among the political and religious elite – that a "return" to Islamic rule is the best solution in Aceh.

1.2. Political Aceh

The historical dynamics of Acehnese politics has been dominated by the rise and decline of the Ulama. Siegel (1969) described at great length of
how pre-colonial Aceh was ruled by a three-way power sharing between
the Sultan, the Uleebalang, and the Ulama. The Uleebalang were leaders in
trade and politics at a district level; the Ulama were the religious leaders in
control of educational institutions, the pesantren; the Sultan was the official
patron of cultural affairs of the kingdom. His power was dependent on how
well he managed and mediated affairs among and with the other leaders.
While ascension to the Sultanate was hereditary (the prerogative of
members of particular lineages) it was essential for rulers to gain the
support of the Uleebalang and Ulama for the legitimacy of the reign. This
arrangement was because the Uleebalang and Ulama are the true co-
managers of the local population.

During and after the Acehnese colonial wars in late-19\textsuperscript{th} to early 20\textsuperscript{th}
century which lasted for more than three decades, the Dutch colonial
regime destroyed the Sultanate and recruited the Uleebalang as indirect
rulers. The Ulama became the spearhead of resistance during the 30 year
Aceh war (Hurgronje, 1906a:177; Yeoh, 1994:85-92). The war was
extremely costly for the Dutch government. While it attracted considerable
sympathy for the Acehnese from Muslims in many parts of the world at the
time, the war fostered the view – perpetuated by Orientalists of the time
(e.g. Snouck Hurgronje, H.C. Zentgraaf, H.T. Damsté, and J.A. Krujt) – that
the Acehnese were anarchic, violent, and treacherous Muslim fanatics
(Reid, 1969:288; Yeoh, 1994:x).

The passion for religious war which is so deeply rooted in
the teaching of Islam is more marked among the
Acehnese than with the majority of their fellow-believers
in other lands, who have come by experience to regard it as a relic of a bygone age (Hurgronje, 1906b: 337).

Prior to the 1945 independence of Indonesia, the Uleebalang were recruited as functionaries under Dutch rule (Siegel, 1969:14-34). Their legitimacy was gradually eroded by the Dutch and Japanese occupations. The image of Uleebalang "selling out" to the kaphé, though not entirely true, was exploited by the Ulama. After the declaration of independence in 1945, there was a series of violent conflicts between the Ulama which favoured integration into the newly proclaimed Republic of Indonesia and the "Dutch collaborator", the Uleebalang. This destroyed the Uleebalang class (Sulaiman, 1997:1). These conflicts – most notoriously the Cumbok wars (1945-1946) where pro-Dutch Uleebalang were destroyed by nationalist Ulama – destroyed the remaining public legitimacy of the Uleebalang and left the Acehnese with only one source of political power. Leadership was passed into the hands of the Ulama, creating essentially a centralised power structure (for details of the Cumbok wars, see Sulaiman, 1990). The Ulama came to wield both political and religious power.

In Aceh Islam provided a rallying point for the fight against the kaphé colonialists, but it failed to do the same for the Indonesian central government. The incorporation of Aceh into the North Sumatra province of Indonesia was a severe blow to Acehnese pride resulting in the 1950s Darul Islam (House of Islam) rebellion. This rebellion aimed to achieve the status of an Islamic State for Aceh. The rebellion led by Tengku Muhammad Daud Beureueh – a distinguished Ulama and revolutionary leader of the independence war – managed to achieve the status of Daerah Istimewa (Special Region) for the province of Aceh but failed to deliver an Islamic
State. The Ulama reached the limits of their political expansion and settled for a non-political role within the government by a nationalist (though theistic) Republic of Indonesia.

The rebellion remains the high point of unity for Acehnese Ulama. Afterwards, successive Indonesian governments – the Old Order of Sukarno, the New Order of Suharto and to some extent the current Reform government – have always maintained a close control over the Ulama either through economic enticements or coercive measures (Yeoh, 1994:185-186). Despite denials (Kompas, 1997a and 1997c), some Ulama were recruited by the New Order government to promote government policies and support the ruling party Golkar in the election campaigns. This approach was partially successful in that government social welfare programs (e.g. family planning, public education, etc) were relatively successful while most economic programs failed, creating an ongoing general discontent.¹

To be fair, during the New Order, up to the early 1980s, the Acehnese Ulama also became the focal point of resistance to the State – but were not as powerful as during the colonial war – considering the enemy was more difficult to identify as kaphé. The Muslim party PPP,² which annoyed the government-backed Golkar, dominated the 1970s and 1980s general elections in Aceh. There were few other areas in Indonesia where

¹ During fieldwork I find that any Acehnese in the street can quote the “Only 3% profits from Acehnese natural resources were returned to Aceh” argument regardless of the questionable accuracy of the estimate.

² PPP (Partai Persatuan Pembangunan or the United Development Party) was formed in 1973 as a result of merging existing Islam-based political parties.

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Golkar\(^3\) did not gain the majority of seats. Only after the New Order central government attempted to assert its authority in Aceh by using Muslim symbols in political campaigns,\(^4\) and only after NU\(^5\) withdrew its support from PPP in protest at the government implementation of the *azas tunggal* \(^6\) did Golkar manage to narrowly defeat PPP in the 1987 election.

**Table 1.1.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Election</th>
<th>PPP</th>
<th>Golkar</th>
<th>PDI</th>
<th>Other Parties</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1955</td>
<td>77.22% *(43.7%)</td>
<td>4.54%** *(22.3%)</td>
<td>18.24% *(15.4%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>48.89% *(21.26%)</td>
<td>49.71% *(62.8%)</td>
<td>4.67%** *(12.67%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>57.28% *(29.2%)</td>
<td>41.17% *(62.11%)</td>
<td>1.55% *(8.69%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>59.56% *(27.78%)</td>
<td>36.39% *(64.37%)</td>
<td>4.05% *(7.85%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>43.00% *(15.96%)</td>
<td>51.89% *(73.17%)</td>
<td>5.11% *(10.87%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>33.33% *(17.17%)</td>
<td>58.33% *(68.13%)</td>
<td>8.34% *(14.7%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>33.33% *(22.43%)</td>
<td>63.89% *(74.5%)</td>
<td>2.78% *(3.07%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>29.16% *(12.55%)</td>
<td>16.67% *(25.97%)</td>
<td>12.5%** *(0.43%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes:**

* In the 1955 and 1971 elections, the numbers refer to Islam-based parties. PPP was formed in 1973 as the result of merging these parties.

** In the 1955 and 1971 elections, the numbers refer to nationalist parties. PDI was formed in 1973 as the result of a forced merger of these parties.

† In 1996 the government forcibly removed Megawati from the PDI leadership, thus resulting in decline in support in 1997 election. It also resulted in the formation of PDI-P as a Megawati led version of PDI.

++ This is the number for PDI while the PDI-P is still grouped under Other Parties (a whopping 41.67%).

Source: DPRD Aceh

The 1999 election, though boycotted in several regions in Aceh, resulted in a return to PPP dominance in the local parliament, though not as

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\(^3\) Golkar (*Golongan Karya*) is the government-backed political party of the New Order era.

\(^4\) The practice ranged from distributing Islamic prayer-books littered with Golkar logos, instructing party campaigners to wear "Muslim clothing", renovating (even building) mosques, to paying Ulama to endorse government programs. The practice is commonly referred to by locals as *prang ayat* (battle of Quranic verses).

\(^5\) NU (*Nadhlatul Ulama*) is the largest Muslim party in Indonesia. Before the implementation of *azas tunggal*, it is a strong basis for the PPP political party. Its withdrawal from politics – known as the *khittah* – severely damaged support for the PPP. In the 1999 election, NU returned to politics by supporting the PKB (*Partai Kebangkitan Bangsa*, a political party considered to be the political arm of NU).

\(^6\) *Azas tunggal* (sole principle) is the enforcement of the embracing of state ideology of Pancasila as the ideological basis for all political organisations.
strong as before. While this can be credited to traditional loyalties, PPP pre-
eminence strengthens the already existing stereotype that Aceh is a Muslim 
fundamentalist society, not unlike Iran.

1.3. DOM

In 1977, one of the former leaders of the Darul Islam rebellion, Tengku 
Hasan di Tiro, supported by a small group of rebellious Acehnese declared 
an independent Sultanate of Aceh. Claiming a noble bloodline, he declared 
himself Sultan and the wali nanggroe (state caretaker) of an Islamic 
Sultanate of Aceh. This rebellious movement – GAM (Gerakan Aceh 
Merdeka) or the Free Aceh Movement – started out small, yet soon grew in 
intensity to the point that it began to disrupt industrial activities in North 
Aceh district, a place rich in oil and natural gas resources which is 
economically important to the central government of Indonesia.

As a result, in 1989 the central government launched a military 
operation – Operasi Jaring Merah (Operation Red Net) – aimed at the 
destruction of the movement. The operation grew into a brutal war of 
attrition which ended only when the New Order government ended in 1998 
with the resignation of President Suharto. Acehnese hatred towards the 
militaristic centralised government grew, especially among the youth. The 
period between 1989 and 1998 is known as the DOM (Daerah Operasi 
Militer or zone of military operation) period. The end of DOM as officially 
declared by Gen. Wiranto in mid-1998 witnessed rapid growth in factional 
political activities in Aceh. The major political players are the government, 
the Ulama, the military, the LSMs (Lembaga Swadaya Masyarakat or non-
government organisations) and the student movement. Memberships often 

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overlap which can create (for an outside observer) an image of political
disunity or chaotic political leadership in Aceh.

During the New Order, the Acehnese Ulama were divided between
the pro- and anti-central government factions (Yeoh, 1994:142-214). The
"government Ulama" - especially those whose pesantren received funding
from the government (Yeoh, 1994:138-141) - were accused by Acehnese
dissidents either of being collaborators or of being guilty of silence. These
accusations diminished the image of the Ulama and their role as the
spearhead of resistance. Older generations of Ulama believed that
separation from Indonesia would further destabilise Aceh while younger
ones openly supported (or at least sympathised with) separatism be it with
or without GAM. The Acehnese Ulama are now as divided as ever. There
are at least four different Ulama associations (PUSA, HUDA, PD Inshafuddin
and MUI) with political loyalties crisscrossing Islamic political parties. For
example, Ulama can be a member of both PUSA (Persatuan Ulama Seluruh
Aceh, the main Aceh-based Ulama counsel) and MUI (Majlis Ulama
Indonesia, the national Ulama assembly) as well as holding a seat at the
People's Representative Council, yet at the same time being publicly
known to be a Golkar functionary. There are some Ulama that can hold
positions in several religious and government organisations at the same
time. Consequently, clashes of interests are common and the commonly-
used identity put forward to express this difference is a specific Ulama
organisation.

It is also no coincidence that the oppositional political factions are
also sharply divided in terms of their demography. Members of the

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government, the Ulama, and the military leaders are predominantly over 40 years old while members of the LSMs and the student movements are under 40. During and after the DOM era, parts of the resistance leadership shifted to university students and LSMs. Neither legitimise their authority primarily through religion yet still maintain a claim that what they do is Islamic. In times of rapid social change, the conservatism of the Ulama is often translated into political partisanship; specifically they are accused of being “pro-status quo” (re: supporting the government). Resistance to the Ulama – especially among the younger generation – is based on the claim that they are no longer the sole purveyors of religious legitimacy. Calls for a halt to the Ulama’s monopoly on representing Acehnese in official public discourse as well as calls for a more “agreeably humanist” interpretation of religious texts are among the strongest demands made by these resistance movements.

1.4. Maintaining The Islamic Image

Aceh’s “Muslim fundamentalist” reputation – expressed in the commonly used nickname “Serambi Mekah” (the front porch of Mecca) – often employed in describing Aceh is overstated. Despite the grand promises of the Ulama since the Colonial war of creating a “purer” Islam in Aceh, the Acehnese retain most of the traditional practices inherited from pre-Islamic times. “Un-Islamic practices” like the Kanduri, Achura, or Mo’lot observed

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These are traditional ritual feasts celebrating special events like engagements, weddings, childbirth, death, etc. The introduction of Islam provided new contexts to these rituals. They are now used to celebrate Islamic events. For example, Kanduri was incorporated into Islamic events like Kanduri huroe rayeuk (Id-al-Fitr feast), while Mo’lot celebrates the Prophet’s birthday. Although Achura originally was a Zoroastrian ritual, it is now practiced solely by Shi’ites, commemorating the death of the Prophet’s son.
a century ago (Hurgronje, 1906a and 1906b) remain widely practiced today (Siapno, 1997). The forms of these practices – even the names – retain Hindu characteristics which predated the introduction of Islam to the region. The reason there is no "standard" Islam is that all of its sects, orders, or other local varieties hold the same claim of representing "authentic Islam." Membership size is the base for legitimating this claim.

For current political purposes the Ulama have an interest in maintaining the perception of an Islamic Acehnese society. However, historical and political circumstances have eroded their influence in Acehnese society. Rapid social change has impacted on all aspects of social relationships in Aceh. The Ulama rely on their schools and agriculture for income. The schools draw donations from parents who enroll their children to study religion, while the farmlands owned by the Ulama is jointly managed by local farmers. Increasingly, the Ulama must compete with a more secular system. For a start, the basis of their strength – the religious schools – have been challenged by the state education system (see chapter four) – especially through the New Order educational policies – which is always an important source of social change anywhere in Indonesia. State schools have improved their quality (see chapter four) by increasing the number of teachers. State schools also attract teachers who have graduated from both state and religious schools, due to the relatively easier entry requirements, that no formal religious educational background is required. Few religious school graduates are able to find employment in the non-religious schools as the only posts available in state schools are limited to guru agama (teacher in the subject of religion). This is a strong disincentive for studying in religious schools in an increasingly modernising society. To
make matters worse, traditional religious schools no longer have a monopoly on producing new Ulama. Modern religious institutions – like the state subsidised Institute for Islamic Studies or the IAIN (Institut Agama Islam Negeri) – offer both religious and secular tertiary education. Students aspiring to become Ulama can choose between the traditional or the more “modern” religious education. As a result, more religious schools (pesantren and madrasah) have grown dependent on government subsidies to remain operational. The Ulama who prefer Aceh to remain in Indonesia are the ones dependent on these subsidies, while those who want an independent Aceh are those who have no ties to the government (Source: interviews).

In late 2000, GAM formally declared their cause to be nationalist rather than religious: they sought nothing less than an independent Aceh and did not pursue the idea of an Islamic state. The only allies of the Ulama left in employing the images of Islam in politics is the Indonesian government, which has a vested interest in keeping the “Islamic fundamentalist Aceh” image alive. Central governments in Indonesia have a tradition of using Islam as a form of local appeasement in Aceh. This ranges from the Dutch building large mosques while restricting Ulama from politics in the early 20th century to the recent endeavour to shore up Ulama support for the central government by the imposition of Syariah law in Aceh which is seen by many Acehnese as redundant, hollow, and unnecessary. The New Order government’s fear-campaign suggesting that Indonesia (including Aceh) was a hotbed of inter-religious conflicts – which justified military presence and eventually the DOM status in Aceh – is no longer valid. Indeed, in the early days of the Megawati government in 2001, the

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President approved the imposition of *Syariah* law in Aceh while the DPR officially branded GAM as a separatist movement, thus enabling a shift in the diplomatic and military stand in Aceh. This has something to do with the recent strengthening of Islamic political parties in Indonesia. *Syariah* law in Aceh provides a prestigious project for these parties while allowing the military to resume their operations without having to worry about anyone using Islam as a separatist rallying call.

![Graph 1.1. Registered Non-Muslims in Aceh](image)

Note: The percentage of registered Muslims in Aceh have increased from approximately 97.2% (1977) to 98.8% (1999).

Source: Compiled from BPS data

As shown in Graph 1.1., Aceh is a province whose population is over 97 percent Muslim (and this proportion is increasing). Christianisation – often argued by alarmist Islamic politicians in other provinces to be a threat – is not happening in Aceh. While Protestants make up the largest group of
non-Muslims in Aceh, they represent a declining proportion of the population. This decline has been rapidly accelerated since 1995 mainly because of deteriorating security conditions in Aceh. Many non-Muslims – who are mainly wealthy ethnic Chinese – have emigrated from Aceh. The security problem is more severe than during the pre-DOM troubles. In comparison, the same Graph also shows that in 1980-1981 there was a shift of the proportion of the non-Muslim constituency. The number of Protestants surged while that of Buddhists declined sharply because in 1980 there was a major anti-Chinese riot all throughout Aceh. During this time, many Chinese converted from Buddhism to Christianity. Apparently at the time the ethnic Chinese minority felt it was "safer" to be a member of a religion that belonged to the Muslim category of "people of the book." Basically, rather than fleeing as they did in the late 1990s, non-Muslim minorities preferred to stay to address local discontent. Their behaviour is not indicative of religious tolerance. The salient political issue for the Acehnese is whether leadership – be it in government, industrial projects or other organisations – falls to a putra daerah (a local male Acehnese) or to an orang pusat (a non-Acehnese person picked by the central government). This overrides considerations of religion. There have been anti-Chinese riots in the recent past, which reflect economic jealousy expressed in racial terms. In one of the 1980-1981 riots, I have seen slogans like "Ganyang Cina" (destroy Chinese) with no anti-Christian or anti-Buddhist rhetoric expressed in public. The basis for this seeming absence of inter-religious conflict is that in a region with a Muslim majority population the rights of non-Muslims must always be protected since it was ordered by the Prophet and codified in the Medina Charter. Up until President Wahid's...
government, this argument was repeated in public discourse in Aceh every
time a social disturbance occurred. There is, however, no explicit mention
of different ethnicity in the Charter. This is one reason why the tensions in
Aceh have always taken the form of ethnic differences rather than religious
differences. This contrasts with other regions in Indonesia where Muslims
are not the dominant population. In recent conflicts — such as the 1998 May
riots in Jakarta, the violent clashes in Ambon, Kupang and Poso in Eastern
Indonesia — which seemingly appear to be inter-religious clashes,
regardless of the varying socio-economic (and political) reasons behind
them, the principal rhetoric repeated in public seems to be the defence of
Islam against non-Muslims, and some are even prepared to employ
violence to guarantee “Muslim survival.”

In another paper¹ I argue that it is the central government that
seemed intent to perpetuate the stereotype of an “Islamic fundamentalist
Aceh” (Amir, 2002). The reasons the government wanted to maintain this
image is to conduct a reverse-Othering practice by portraying the
Acehnese as “religious hardliners who won’t listen to reason,” hence anti-
modernity and anti-development. This reverse-Othering process requires a
brief explanation.

1.5. Reverse-Othering

Many genealogists of postcolonial thought credit Edward Said’s
Orientalism as the founding work for the field. By his definition, the Othering

¹ Originally presented as a paper in ASAA conference, 2000, the paper is also published in
2002, titled “The Religious Acehnese: A Factual or Imagined Community?”, in the volume
process is the creation of a fantastical, material-discursive construct that shapes the real and imagined existences of those subjected to the fantasy. The process discussed by Said underlies the creation of identities such as the West/East, man/woman, Java/outer islands and central government/regional provinces. Said argued that the strength of Othering arises from the ability to elide difference with weakness. The case of Aceh demonstrates that Orientalism is a tool of post-colonial states in relation to their citizens, as much as it was a tool of European colonialism.

As a cultural apparatus Orientalism is all aggression, activity, judgment, will-to-truth, and knowledge. (Said, 1978:204-206).

To become “interpellated” by this ideology, to use Said’s term, was to absorb these elements into oneself. In Indonesia, from Dutch rule through the modern Reformasi era, the fear of Other civilisations – both within and without the Republic – have always existed. Voiced anxieties over Dutch colonialism, American imperialism during the Old Order era, the “communist threat” bogeyman of the New Order era, the IMF during the reform era, and Muslim radicalism in the Post September 11 times were examples of the expressions of the neurotic insecurity and angst that defines the central government’s self-perception. This sense of insecurity always required externalisation. In the case of insecurities over national unity, it was answered by the demonisation of the outer provinces. These “Others” were not merely different, but inherently opposed to, and indeed inimical to, the “civilised Jakarta.” The only defence was aggressive, first-strike capacity: the destruction of the Other or their reformation and co-
option within the body of all that were "daerah" (regional) into a single national identity.

In Muslim identity politics, the irreconcilable political disputes within Muslim communities often resulted in Othering processes as well. Ideally, identity politics among Muslims are expressly forbidden. Nevertheless, identity politics has always been a part of politics in Islam. It is easy to use the process when facing leadership challenges from a non-Muslim. Simply being a non-Muslim is reason enough to be considered unsuitable to lead Muslims. Some traditional interpretations of Islamic texts decree that Muslims should never accept the authority of non-Muslims or of women. The practice is more awkward when facing a fellow Muslim. The regular Othering practice in Muslim politics is aimed to demonstrate that the opponent is "not a good Muslim," and therefore he loses the claim to leadership. In this context, the government and GAM claimed each other to be bad Muslims. Ulama accused LSMs of being bad Muslims for taking money from foreign governments. LSMs accused Ulama of being uncaring and indifferent to the sufferings of the people, thus making them bad Muslim leaders. In short, currently everybody engages in this Othering practice.

Reverse-Othering is the opposite of the Othering process described above. In reverse-Othering, it is not difference that is viewed as a source of weakness. Rather, it is the discursive construct of a particular exponent of shared values as "extremists" and therefore threatening. In Indonesia,

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9 For example, the Al-Humazah (surah or chapter 104) of the Qur'an spoke against slanderer and backbiter. There are also hadith (the Prophet's sayings) addressing the same issue.
aside from regionalism, it is religion that is often viewed as a threat to national unity and in Aceh it is specifically Islam. Thus, much like the Orientalists of the West, the government declares the Acehnese as "fundamentalists" and the therefore backward. As such, it falls upon the "more enlightened" Muslims – in this case the Indonesian central government – to take custody of resources and take care of important decision making in the modern world. Perpetuating an image of the Acehnese as fundamentalists justifies their marginalisation in any decision-making. But at the same time a unified group of Ulama as formal representatives of the Acehnese will also serve as an excellent means to carry out top-down government policies without the hassles of democratic debates.

Any problem in Aceh is equated with a religious problem, hence religious authorities like the Ulama are officially considered to be the ones to assert control. In the Reformasi (Reform) period, the government has employed the Islamic State ideal in arguing that only Islamic Syariah law can solve the complex problems of Aceh. This argument has been building since the Habibie administration and was recently finalised by the Megawati Sukarnoputri administration. This view is fully supported by the military since the concentration of authority in the hands of the Ulama makes it seem easier to handle dissent.\(^{10}\)

Aceh is distinct from other provinces in that it suffered from this reverse-Othering process conducted by the central government to

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\(^{10}\) For example, implicit propaganda employed by central government officials is that Muslims (GAM) should not have conducted acts of violence against other Muslims (the military). To do so demonstrates that they are "un-Islamic."

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disempower the population from any significant effort of self-determination.

The status of *Daerah Istimewa* (special region) bestowed on Aceh serves as an excuse for the central government to neglect the political and economic development of the province (Yeoh, 1994:118-119). There is a visible effort to paint the Acehnese as Muslim radicals, at least strong Muslims (*Islamnya kuat*). Although on a rhetorical level most Muslims admire the supposedly "different" level of piety displayed by these so-called strong Muslims, in practice they treat such a position as impractical idealism. This ambiguity is similar to how the ideals of socialism are treated in Western countries. They are admired yet at the same time avoided.

In a state like Indonesia, the separation of religion from politics imposed throughout its provinces including Aceh – combined with the Dutch colonial legacy of government policy in pitting the Uleebabelang against the Ulama (Yeoh, 1994:88) – has left the Ulama with virtually little real say in important public administration. Their mediatory role in settling disputes has been contested by state courts, and even their authority over marriage arrangements has been contested by the 1974 marriage law.\(^\text{11}\) Their role in society has been restricted to education, religious ceremonies, and campaigning during elections. A prominent Ulama complained in one of the meetings I attended in Aceh that:

> The Ulama are currently like old tractors. You take them out only when you need them. Everyday they just sit in the shed to rot.

\(^\text{11}\) The 1974 marriage law was imposed by New Order government to regulate marriages and divorces. It is aimed to standardise marriages and divorces throughout the culturally diverse Indonesia. Rather than religious or traditional leaders, it is the state official that can perform marriage ceremonies or officiate divorces.
Since DOM was lifted, the Acehnese elite have distanced themselves from further use of Islamic symbolism in politics. The proposal to implement *Syariah* law in Aceh in mid-October 2000 came under attack by various groups in Aceh. Students and NGOs were mainly concerned at its potential to be used to justify oppressive practices by the government. GAM was worried that religion is currently used to sideline their demands where – unless its members have religious leadership claims – they will end up being ignored by an Indonesian government which prefers to negotiate with non-GAM groups like the Ulama. (Amir, 2002). The Ulama are concerned that their decreasing authority will further be taken over by government bureaucracy, or worse still, overtaken by *Ulama pusat* (Ulama who are funded by the central government).

1.6. Recent Political Development

The end of the repressive regime of Suharto has allowed greater freedom throughout Indonesia. This in turn has sparked more open demands for greater autonomy or even local independence. Indonesian elites fear that successful autonomy movements within the nation will lead to the creation of more such movements in the archipelago. The change in government has allowed human rights workers to uncover evidence of the long-suspected human rights abuses committed by the military during the New Order. While current political leaders seem interested in ending this painful legacy, the military establishment has thus far continued to deny its involvement and resist changing its policies in Aceh. As long as this denial continues, the Acehnese problems will remain. Coating them with religious
rhetoric will not resolve the Acehnese demand for correcting past injustices.

Aceh today is vastly different from the one at the time of Uleebalang and Ulama rule. The population has boomed in the 20th century. Averaging at 2.65%, the annual population growth rate in Aceh has fluctuated between 1.38% to 5.67%. The highest growth rate was in 1980 during the start of the oil boom in North Aceh. At the time, a large influx of immigrant workers were brought in to build the oil and gas refineries of Arun in Lhokseumawe. This was a significant cause of resentment among Acehnese who, in addition to feeling left out of the economic development project, also felt colonised all over again by what is largely perceived as a Javanese government.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total Population Growth</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total Population Growth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1930</td>
<td>1003062</td>
<td>1982</td>
<td>2737290 2.93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>1628983</td>
<td>1983</td>
<td>2806490 2.53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>2008749</td>
<td>1984</td>
<td>2901314 3.38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>2272814</td>
<td>1985</td>
<td>2992201 3.13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>2340608 2.98%</td>
<td>1986</td>
<td>3087368 3.18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>2407955 2.88%</td>
<td>1987</td>
<td>3158003 2.29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>2475262 2.80%</td>
<td>1988</td>
<td>3245346 2.77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>2615583 5.67%</td>
<td>1989</td>
<td>3318092 2.24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>2659443 1.68%</td>
<td>1990</td>
<td>3422693 3.15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1991</td>
<td>3469770 1.38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1992</td>
<td>3519522 1.43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1993</td>
<td>3604758 2.42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1994</td>
<td>3657078 1.45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1995</td>
<td>3741205 2.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1996</td>
<td>3878753 3.68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>4016300 3.55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>4074900 1.46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>4144500 1.71%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Compiled from BPS data
The number of Acehnese born outside of Aceh is extremely small with an annual percentage well below 0.5%. Transmigration sponsored by the government is low compared to other provinces. The rate is between 1000-2000 persons per year peaking in 1975 (54512 persons). Permanent outmigration that is officially registered has recently decreased. This includes outmigration into neighbouring countries. The number decreased from around 20,000 (1970s) to 10,000 (late 1990s). However, since Acehnese have long been travelling across the border with North Sumatra, the official numbers are unreliable.
Map 1.1.
Migration Pattern in Aceh

Cities with heavy urbanisation rate.

Permanent outmigration, usually to Java, and Malaysia.

Target areas for the government transmigration program.

Cross-border movements between Aceh and North Sumatra.

Graph 1.3.
Migration in Aceh

Source: Compiled from BPS data
There are some unintended consequences of the prolonged conflict in Aceh. First, the reason that permanent outmigration of Acehnese seems to have declined is that most Acehnese who regularly crossed the border in and out of Aceh preferred to settle in other parts of Indonesia as well as other countries. Despite their history as a cosmopolitan region, Acehnese in general — with the exception of Acehnese from the small district of Pidie (described by Siegel, 1969) who travelled to Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei and Thailand — are relative newcomers (compared to the Minangkabau, the Batak or the Bugis) when it comes to the practice of merantau (seeking fortune abroad). Acehnese trade used to rely simply on its ports and geographical location. Because conducting business in Aceh has become

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less profitable as well as dangerous,\textsuperscript{12} entrepreneurial Acehnese who used to travel in and out of the area have been forced to conduct their business outside the province permanently. These Acehnese have gone as far as Java, Australia, Europe and the United States. From my brief research on Acehnese expatriates in Java and Sydney, there is a strong indication that the Acehnese community in these locations has actually doubled since the end of DOM.\textsuperscript{13} At this current rate of outward migration, younger Acehnese are further encouraged to join the global job market. Indeed, Acehnese have managed to form viable communities abroad and have provided extra economic support that no longer relies on their traditional lands.

The second consequence of the conflict is that it has led to a partial vacuum in the male dominated political scene, which has been filled by more Acehnese women. Despite their increasing contribution to the economy, Acehnese women remain underrepresented in politics. Major policy making positions have always been exclusively male despite the projected image of the Acehnese female warrior, as the following chapters will show.

The third consequence of the conflict is that it has left behind people who are already disadvantaged in the modern economy. Middle and upper-class Acehnese had been travelling out of Aceh long before DOM, mostly to Singapore, Malaysia, North Sumatra and Jakarta. Since DOM, they prefer to stay permanently abroad to avoid the violence. Because of this

\textsuperscript{12} This is mainly due to security problems and the huge amount of money required to pay off the military and GAM (discussions with Lesley McCulloch, University of Tasmania, a specialist on military business ventures in Aceh).

\textsuperscript{13} For example, in 1999 there were at least 150 Acehnese living in Sydney. In early 2001 their number was estimated at around 300 (Source: interview).
tendency, Aceh is having difficulty in maintaining economic growth due to capital flight. There are few outside investors and the heavy industry activities are constantly disrupted. This in turn hurts low-scale support trade activities surrounding the industry areas. Huge bribes are required to pay off both sides of the conflict. In short, Aceh is no longer viable in its economic activities and this is forcing people to leave the province.
Chapter 2: 
THE IMAGES OF ACEHNESSE WOMEN
Chapter Two:

THE IMAGES OF ACEHNSE WOMEN

This chapter begins with an analysis of the representation of women in Acehnese political discourse. It will examine how practices of exaggeration and underestimation are applied in presenting Acehnese women. It will also describe how Acehnese women perceive these images.

Image construction is an important element in any political struggle as it forms the context favourable to the presentation of views and policies which will garner popular support. When a portrayal or act of image construction is successful, it will evoke reactions from audiences in the form of ideas, beliefs, emotions, fears and desires. Image construction is intended to enhance or diminish the person or recipient of the image construction. The portrayals or acts of image construction in stories typically affect the opinions of audiences that in turn have the power to affect a recipient's fate. The acts of image construction play an important role in social interaction because members of society have, and share, emotionally-laden ideas that are part of their minds or personalities, about what is valued, devalued or negatively valued. Typically, these ideas are encoded as binary oppositions: moral/immoral; beautiful/ugly, competent/incompetent; important/unimportant; relevant/irrelevant; desirable/undesirable; kind/cruel, and so on.

The Italian political thinker, Norberto Bobbio, declared that binary oppositions will always be relevant in politics because the nature of politics itself is adversarial (Bobbio, 1996). These categories are binary because
the essence of politics is the struggle between oppositional views and policies. Nobody questions the two categories if the two sides appear to be of equal strength. However, once one side becomes far stronger than the other, then both sides will question those categories. The stronger side will give a final “there is no other way” argument while the weaker side will appropriate some of the opposition’s views and call them their own.

Similarly, out of Bobbio’s proposition, I perceive that there are two types of image construction that function within any political system: exaggeration or underestimation of the Other. Both serve well in any oppositional relationship. A “neutral” construction – if such a thing is possible at all – has no political function since it undermines the purpose of image presentation itself.

The foremost image of Acehnese women in Indonesia is the women rulers and warriors. History textbooks in schools all over Indonesia always describe accounts of the “heroic Acehnese women” to the point of overrepresenting the women of the region within a nationalist Indonesian context. Prominent women featured in these texts from outside of Aceh are the Javanese women’s rights activist, R.A. Kartini, and the female warrior of Maluku, Martha Christina Tiyahahu. The former died of disease, the latter died hanged by the Dutch colonials. In contrast, Acehnese women who fought against colonialism are presented as either died in battle or in exile. Few people openly comment that although the known history of Aceh is filled with stories of women fighters and activists, their history has only known six female political leaders, a relatively small number in a long line of male political rulers.

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Table 2.1.
Some historical rulers and women warriors in Aceh history

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Historical Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nur Ilah*</td>
<td>Queen</td>
<td>Died c1380</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nahrasiyah*</td>
<td>Queen</td>
<td>Died c1428</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ali Mughayat Syah</td>
<td>Sultan</td>
<td>Crowned 1496</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salahuddin ibn Ali</td>
<td>Sultan</td>
<td>Crowned 1528</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ala’ad-din al Kahar ibn Ali</td>
<td>Sultan</td>
<td>Crowned 1537</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ali Riayat Syah (Husain)</td>
<td>Sultan</td>
<td>Crowned 1568</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sultan Muda</td>
<td>Sultan</td>
<td>Crowned 1575</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sri Alam</td>
<td>Sultan</td>
<td>Crowned 1575</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zainal Abidin</td>
<td>Sultan</td>
<td>Crowned 1576</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ala’ad-din Mansyur Syah</td>
<td>Sultan</td>
<td>Crowned 1577</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ali Riayat Syah (Sultan Boyong)</td>
<td>Sultan</td>
<td>Crowned c1589</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ala’ad-din Riayat Syah</td>
<td>Sultan</td>
<td>Crowned 1596</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ali Riayat Syah</td>
<td>Sultan</td>
<td>Crowned 1604</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keumalahayati*</td>
<td>Admiral</td>
<td>mid-1500 to early 1600s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iskandar Muda</td>
<td>Sultan</td>
<td>Crowned 1607</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iskandar Thani</td>
<td>Sultan</td>
<td>Crowned 1636</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safiatuddin Syah*</td>
<td>Sultanah</td>
<td>Crowned 1641</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nurul Alam Naqiatuddin*</td>
<td>Sultanah</td>
<td>Crowned 1675</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inayat Zhangkatuddin Syah*</td>
<td>Queen</td>
<td>Crowned 1678</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kamalat Zainatuddin Syah*</td>
<td>Queen</td>
<td>Crowned 1688</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Badrul Alam Syarif Hasyim Jamaluddin</td>
<td>Sultan</td>
<td>Crowned 1699</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perkasa Alam Syarif Lamtui</td>
<td>Sultan</td>
<td>Crowned 1702</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jamal al-Alam Badr al-Munir</td>
<td>Sultan</td>
<td>Crowned 1703</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jauhar al-Alam Aminuddin</td>
<td>Sultan</td>
<td>Crowned 1726</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shams al-Alam</td>
<td>Sultan</td>
<td>Crowned 1726</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ala’ad-din Ahmad Syah</td>
<td>Sultan</td>
<td>Crowned 1727</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ala’ad-din Jehan Syah</td>
<td>Sultan</td>
<td>Crowned 1735</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mahmud Syah</td>
<td>Sultan</td>
<td>Crowned 1760 (restored 1765 and 1773)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Badr ad-Din Juhan Syah</td>
<td>Sultan</td>
<td>Crowned 1764</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sulaiman Syah (Udana Lela)</td>
<td>Sultan</td>
<td>Crowned 1773</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ala’ad-din Muhammed Syah</td>
<td>Sultan</td>
<td>Crowned 1781</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ala’ad-din Jauhar al-Alam Syah</td>
<td>Regent</td>
<td>Appointed 1795</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teungku Syed Hussein Aideed</td>
<td>Sultan</td>
<td>Crowned 1815</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syarif Saif al-Alam Syah</td>
<td>Sultan</td>
<td>Crowned 1815</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ala’ad-din Jauhar al-Alam Syah</td>
<td>Sultan</td>
<td>Crowned 1819</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ala’ad-din Muhammad Daud Syah</td>
<td>Sultan</td>
<td>Crowned 1823</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cut Nyak Dhien*</td>
<td>Aristocrat, warrior</td>
<td>1848-1908</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cut Nyak Meutia*</td>
<td>Aristocrat, warrior</td>
<td>1870-1910</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pocut Baren*</td>
<td>Aristocrat, warrior</td>
<td>Died 1933</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pocut Meurah Intan*</td>
<td>Aristocrat, warrior</td>
<td>Died 1937</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: *Women rulers or warriors
Source: Reid (1969) and Hing (1995).

The following section will describe the pattern of their ascension to power. It will also describe the pattern of their replacement (either constitutional or abrupt) by conservative and/or religious right leadership.
2.1. The Queens

For most of its history, Aceh has been ruled by men. The kingdoms of Aceh (Samudra Pasai, Peureulak, and the Aceh Sultanate) consisted of a loose coalition of port-cities and surrounding areas governed by Uleebalangs. These rudimentary federations after the introduction of Islam took the form of Islamic Sultanates, which consolidated overall leadership in the Sultan with religious authority exercised through the Ulama and the Mufti (the supreme Ulama). Siegel (1969) discussed the status and role of the three classes. Politically, the Sultan's rule depended on how he managed his relationship with his regional vassals – the nobility or the Uleebalang – who controlled the daily economic activities. However, the Sultan was the supreme guardian of culture and tradition, a status and role that the Uleebalang could never achieve. Both Sultan and Uleebalang positions are inherited through male lineages. The position of Ulama, however, was obtained through learning and travel, because the position was intended to unify the people. There were virtually no female religious leaders. The only times when women were able to assume the Sultan or Uleebalang position were when there was no direct male heir and the noble houses contending for the position were too evenly matched. Hence, women rulers in these kingdoms was the result of a compromise when there was no male option available.

The first known female ruler of Aceh was Queen Nur Ilah (died c1380) who ruled over the kingdom of Pasai and Kedah. Her ascent occurred at a period of transition. At the time, Pasai and Kedah were one of the many kingdoms that were subjugated by the ancient Javanese Hindu-
The Images Of Acehnese Women

kingdom of Majapahit (Ras, 1968). Male candidates for political leadership as a Majapahit vassal were plentiful, but none were chosen by high ranking officials of Majapahit. Queen Nur Ilah was appointed to rule as a vassal because she was considered the most trustworthy (because a woman is deemed less likely to rebel) member of the royal family of Pasai (Said, 1981:105-106). It would seem that her rule occurred in one of the transitionary periods in Aceh history when its regional political power was in decline due to the rise of Majapahit.

The second known female ruler of Aceh was Queen Nahrasiyah (died c1428). There is not much known about her except that she governed the kingdom of Pasai along with her second husband, Salahuddin. In the ancient Chinese history book, Ying-Yai Sheng-lan, it is reported that her first husband died in a battle and she vowed to wed (and later did) the person who avenged his death (Alfian, 1994:18). Since Salahuddin was not a high-ranking member of the aristocracy, he could not rule as king so she ruled, replacing her dead first husband. Her son from her first husband was too young to rule, thus there was no male in the immediate royal family who was able to rule. It is important to note that after the crown prince grew into adulthood, he conspired with the noblemen and murdered his stepfather, Salahuddin, before taking over the throne. Although it is difficult to confirm this account, the circumstance of her rule and the following return to male rule fits neatly into the scenario where no suitable male heirs were available to replace a ruler who died suddenly.
The Acehnese kingdom of Samudra Pasai is widely regarded to have reached its zenith during the rule of Sultan Iskandar Muda. The popular Hadih Maja described his rule as thus:

**Adat bak Poteu Meureuhom,** Customary traditions according to Poteu Meureuhom (the Sultan’s advisor in cultural matters),

**hukom bak Syiah Kuala.** The law according to the Syeikh Abdurrauf Syiah Kuala (the Sultan’s chief Ulama),

**Kanun bak Putrooe Phang.** Representation according to “the Pahang Princess” (the Sultan’s queen who was also his chief advisor in legal matters),

**reusam Bak Laksamana.** Protocols according to the Laksamana (the head of the military who often also undertook diplomatic duties).

**Hukom ngon adat,** [Islamic] law and customary tradition,

**lagee zat ngon sifeut.** is like substance and its attributes.

(Hasjmy, 1996:18)

Putrooe Phang was a Malay princess who became influential in Sultan Iskandar Muda’s court. Taken as a trophy during a raid in the conquest of the Kingdom of Pahang in coastal Malay, she was wed by the Sultan and became his queen. She advised him in matters of daily governance, yet remained marked as an outsider. Her influence, though important, is considered supportive and has never been repeated in Acehnese history.

Queen Nahrasiyah’s scenario was repeated with the rule of the third known female ruler of Aceh, the Sultanah Safiatuddin Syah (died 1675). She was the first in line of four Sultanahs who ruled Aceh consecutively for almost 60 years (1641-1699). Sultan Iskandar Muda died without leaving a male heir. He was replaced by his son-in-law – Sultan Iskandar Thani – who died after ruling for five years. Safiatuddin Syah’s ascent was strongly opposed by factions in the court who insisted that a woman could not be appointed as head of a kingdom since it would contravene Islamic law (as interpreted by them).
In Islamic Law, never mind being a king, to become an Imam [person who conduct prayer services] or a Wali Am [a relative legally responsible for the bride] a woman is not allowed. (Zainuddin, 1961:100)

Only after the intervention of a prominent religious leader – Syeikh Abdurrauf of Singkel who argued that political affairs should be kept separate from religious affairs – Safiatuddin Syah was crowned as Sultanah. Another reason to accept her coronation was that the previous two rulers – Sultan Iskandar Muda and Sultan Iskandar Thani – were both tyrants who ruled the elite of the time very harshly. By supporting a female ruler, the elite expected the role of the Sultanah to be that of a mediator or referee, which is a valuable asset for a kingdom whose economy at the time depended heavily on international trade and diplomacy (Reid, 1988: 641). It also turned out that Safiatuddin Syah’s reign was a part of the decline of Samudra Pasai after Iskandar Muda. She witnessed a failed coup d’etat attempt, separatism in the regions of Pahang, Johor and Patani, as well as the rising influence of Dutch colonialism (Sofyan, 1994:43-58).

When Sultanah Safiatuddin Syah died, she was replaced again with another woman, Sultanah Nurul Alam Naqiatuddin (died 1678), daughter of a high ranking nobleman with a strong link (see figure 2.1.) to Sultanah Safiatuddin. She did not rule for long since she died two years after her coronation. She was replaced by Queen Inayat Zakiatuddin Syah (died 1688). This fifth female ruler of Aceh was already in her mid-30s when she was crowned. Her origins are unclear. Historical sources debated whether she was Sultanah Safiatuddin’s stepdaughter or her sister. Still there was no strong consensus on a male ruler. The court was still unable to find a
suitable male royal to become king. These circumstances suggested that Zakiatuddin was "a spare" to her predecessor.

The debate over whether a woman should be allowed to rule remained. Factions against the queen – despite being held in check by the Queen's supporters – maintained their positions and contributed to the lack of political unity required to govern during troubled times. The ascent of women to the throne was made possible due to the influence of a very moderate Mufti named Syeh Nurudin ar-Raniry as well as Sufi Ulama like Syeikh Abdurrauf of Singkel (also known as Teungku Syiah Kuala) who oversaw the reign of the three Sultanahs. The Sultanahs' rule was strengthened by the support of the Sufi Ulama, but came at a price. The rival Islamic orders (led by the Ulama Hamzah Fansuri and Syamsuddin as-Samatrani) were banished by royal decree.

The debate over female rule finally culminated at the time of the sixth and last female ruler of Aceh, Queen Kamalat Syah (died 1700). She ruled for a decade and was the first female ruler who abdicated from her throne due to political pressure. By this time Syeh Nurudin ar-Raniry and Syaikh Abdurrauf were already dead, weakening the Ulama who supported the throne. Rival royalties grew stronger and they too had Ulama support. Her weak political position was evident early in her reign when she conceded to both the French Trading Company and the East India Company the right to open offices in Aceh in 1695. At the same time, her opponents strengthened their claim over the throne by bringing in the outside opinion of a religious authority from Mecca.
[The] group of religious leaders did not stay passive, instead they strengthened their position by showing a letter from a Qadhi Malikal Adil in Mecca notifying all chiefs and people of Aceh that the appointment of a woman as a supreme authority was against Islamic rules. This strategy was effective. Kamalat Syah abdicated and the government was handed over to Badrul Alam Syarif Hasyim Jamaluddin. Following this, the control of the Aceh government never again fell into the hands of a woman. (Veth in Sufi and Ismail, 1994:72-73)

Her death – mere months after her abdication – allowed for the consolidation of power for her successor, the Sultan Badrul Alam Syarif Hasyim Jamaluddin, a man of Arab descent. Although women kept a prominent place in Aceh’s history, never again did they hold another position of supreme political leadership.

2.2. The Warriors

Contemporary Indonesian historians have always praised the role of Acehnese women in the armed struggle against European colonialism. They were represented as fierce warriors who went into the thick of battle. Numerically, however, they were outnumbered by men. Leadership during wartime in Aceh remains (or is presented in the history books to be) dominated by “devout Muslim men.”

The first known Acehnese female warrior was Admiral Keumalahayati. Little was known about her aside from her background. She was the great-grand daughter of Sultan Salahuddin Syah (1530-1539). Both her father Mahmud Syah and grandfather were Admirals as well. Her husband died fighting the Portuguese. At her request, she became head of
the women's navy – the *Inong Balee* armada – which consisted of widows whose husbands had died in struggles against the Portuguese. The ruler of the time – Sultan Al Mukkamil – was impressed and appointed her as Admiral of the navy. During her career, she conducted raids on Portuguese and Dutch ships, and helped establish Aceh’s dominance of the Malacca Straits. One important thing to point out is that the main political reason the Sultan appointed her is that he did not trust men and she was seen to be trustworthy.\(^{14}\) It is also worth noting that at the time, the Sultan also appointed another woman to a top military position: Cut Limpah was the head of the royal secret service during his reign (Van Zeggelen in Sufi, 1994:31). The rise of these women was exceptional rather than common practice.\(^{15}\)

The most famous Acehnese female warrior was Cut Nyak Dhien (1848-1908) who was immortalised in Eros Djarot's 1984 film of her struggle. As with the fate of most nationalist icons, very few representations are critical enough about the background and circumstances of her role. She was a member of the Acehnese privileged elite, at the time the aristocratic Uleebalang (district chief). Her father was an Uleebalang, her mother was of noble descent, she enjoyed religious education (education was a rarity for women at the time\(^{16}\)), and her first husband – Teuku Ibrahim of Tungkop – was also an Uleebalang. When he died in the war against the

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\(^{14}\) This was described by British and Dutch Orientalists at the time, such as J. Davis and Julius Jacobs (see works by historian Rusdi Sufi, 1994:30-31).

\(^{15}\) Of course this assessment is also provisional considering the fact that the historical sources available cited in this section are all written by men (e.g. Alfian, Sufi, Van Zeggelen, Zentgraaf, Iskandar, Said, etc). This selection serves to demonstrate the dominance of male voice in drawing generalisations for the representation of past Acehnese women.

\(^{16}\) For changes of male-female clientele in the Acehnese education system through history, see Leigh (1992:216).

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Dutch in 1878, Cut Nyak Dhien was already a displaced person who was forced to flee her home. Her second marriage to another Uleebalang – the famous colonial fighter Teuku Umar – in 1878 occurred mere months after her widowhood. Though some historians have praised (e.g. Zainuddin, 1966; Sufi, 1994b), even romanticised (e.g. Hazil, 1951; Szkely, 1951) the circumstances of her second marriage, it was also considered widely by Acehnese historians (e.g. Hazil, 1951; Said, 1981; Alfián, 1994; Sufi, 1994b) as a politically convenient marriage in the struggle against the Dutch since the two people belonged to two influential houses in Aceh. Despite the heroic and religious undertone of the circumstances of the marriage, being widowed at the relatively early age of 30 was considered a bad omen in a society that stigmatised widows.\(^\text{17}\) Her heroism initially did not extend to challenging the traditional gender role. She remained at home to maintain her husband’s household. Only after his death in 1899 Cut Nyak Dhien took up arms to continue the fight. A twice-widowed woman in Aceh at the time can only have one option: to die as a martyr in combat against the kaphé (infidel) Dutch, or to live in social exclusion. Much to her dismay, her eventual fate was exile. Betrayed by her male right-hand lieutenant – Pang Laot Ali – she was captured in 1905 and was exiled to Sumedang, West Java. She died there in 1908.

Pocut Meurah Intan (died 1937) was another Acehnese female fighter who came from a privileged background. Her father was a descendant of one of the Sultans of Aceh. Her husband was also of noble

\(^\text{17}\) This belief is still held true in most rural areas of Aceh (see Hurgronje, 1906b; and Siapno, 1997).
background. Together, they fought against the Dutch. When he was captured, she continued the fight with her three sons. She was captured in 1904 and was exiled to Blora, Java, where she died in 1937.

Another Acehnese female warrior and an aristocrat, was Cut Nyak Meutia (1870-1910). Her father was an Uleebalang. She enjoyed formal religious education, which is a privilege reserved for some elite women. The majority of women in Aceh at that time were illiterate. She was married to an Uleebalang. Her family held strong anti-Dutch views and when her husband sided with the Dutch, she divorced him (Zentgraaf, 1982:147). She then married another Uleebalang; this time he was an anti-Dutch fighter (Iskandar, 1965:18-37). Together, they fought battles against the Dutch until their surrender in 1903. Her second husband was executed by the Dutch in 1905 on charges of treason and Cut Nyak Meutia married her third husband (one of her second husband’s lieutenants) and resumed the fight. When he also died in 1910, she continued to fight against the Dutch until she was killed a month later. Her marriage to the third husband was one of the last wishes of her second husband prior to his execution (the first being to continue the fight, the second was to raise their son as a fighter). It is also worth mentioning that all historical accounts of this woman warrior always mention her beautiful appearance (Sulaiman, 1994a:106; Zentgraaf, 1982:144-147). These writers are of the opinion that she had many suitors in her teens with no need for the conventional arranged marriage.

By far the most interesting Acehnese female warrior is Pocut Baren (died 1933). Her early life followed a similar pattern to the three women already discussed. She was related to men of noble lineage (her father was
an Uleebalang) and was married to an Uleebalang. She was born and
brought up in times of war. Like other female fighters, she took up the
mantle of leadership when her husband died in battle. She suffered grave
injury to her leg (later amputated by Dutch doctors) and was captured in
1910 (Zentgraaf, 1982:138). In accordance with the policy regarding
dangerous war leaders at the time, the Military Governor of Aceh, Van
Daalen, was about to send her into exile to Java. However, a Dutch liaison
officer, T.J. Veltman, suggested that she should be returned to her native
country instead to continue her career as a district chief. Van Daalen
accepted the request and after she recovered, Pocut Baren was sent back
to Tungkop and became its Uleebalang. Grateful for this decision, she
successfully rebuilt the villages ravaged by war and succeeded in
maintaining reasonable stability in the area. She was admired by her
subjects and the Dutch alike. After she died, historians (Zentgraaf, 1982:142;
Sulaiman, 1994) assessed her as a beloved — rather than an unpatriotic
collaborator or traitor — leader of her people.  

The historical sources on these women were all written by men including Acehnese writers. There have been women scholars who
focused on Aceh but none have focused on female leadership. The closest

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18 Note that historical accounts of Teuku Umar — husband of Cut Nyak Dhien — who was a collaborator before turning against the Dutch also fail to paint his life with such negative assessment. It would seem that nationalist sentiments may have served to tone down depictions of such “embarrassing episodes.”

19 Scholars such as Alfian, Hasjmy, Iskandar, Said, Siegel, Sofyan, Sufi, Van Zeggelen, Zentgraaf, etc. have never specifically focused on women politicians or warriors, but rather as an auxiliary addition to their major works. When they do focus on Aceh women in minor articles — such as Alfian (1994), Morris (1983), Sufi (1994a-c) or Hasjmy (1996) — they tend to present these “exceptional cases” with nationalist language.

20 Major work on Aceh by Morris (1986) focused on economy and employment, while Leigh’s (1992) focused on education.

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is Siapno (1997) who addressed the issue of male dominance in representing past images of Acehnese women. However, the focus of her work is on forms of political resistance rather than mainstream politics. If anything, her study reinforced the conclusion that historically the political mainstream in Aceh has always been male.

2.3. The Constructs

The pattern we have seen so far is that Acehnese women must fulfill several requirements in order to attain leadership roles. First, they must have an elite, socio-economic, and religious background. Second, they must follow the lead of a male figure (be it husband or father). But what of the women who lack either of these characteristics? Under "normal" conditions they would have less political power and in the case of Aceh every single decision-making institution is male-dominated. The case of the queens and Sultanahs are all exceptional and not the norm. Male rule – where ruling authority is transferred through the male line of descent – applied in the majority of the cases. For women the rule remains – as the cases of the female fighters have indicated – that kinship and marriage are important in establishing authority for a woman as well as to gain political alliances. Being related or married to a male leader is always important for a woman in staking a claim for leadership.

The post-DOM conflict in Aceh is proof that this practice still pertains. GAM, for example, cites its female wing – the Inong Balee division which took its name from Admiral Malahayati’s all-widow fleet – as evidence that its struggle involves both of the sexes. However, not a single political or military leader within GAM is female. Despite the marching on parade of

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these women (mainly for the foreign journalist's view) the role of this division is not combat but auxiliary support such as providing logistics and intelligence. In short, these women's roles are extensions of the female domestic roles much like the roles taken by women in the Indonesian revolution. These female military personnel must also project a certain image for their work. First, they must project a devout Muslim appearance and demeanor. Second, they must submit to the male dominated chain of command. Third, despite their true role, they must put on the appearance that they are well trained for combat. Despite its members' training in frontline combat, they never saw battle and have so far only been assigned to logistics (smuggling, bomb making, etc) and intelligence gathering by fraternising with Indonesian military personnel (*Kontras*, 2000b:5), for which they also receive public reprobation.
The photos above are the ones taken by journalists approved by GAM. These images have similar associations with those employed by the

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government to portray the Acehnese female rulers and fighters of the past.

The main difference is the portrayal of the weapon: the rencong blade instead of AK-47s. Compare the preceding images with the following official portrayals of the female fighters.

Photo 2.2.
Paintings of Three Woman Fighters

Sources:
Top left: “Pocut Meurah Intan” (Rooseno, 1994)
Top right: “Cut Nyak Meutia” (Rooseno, 1994)
Right: “Laksamana Keumalahayati” (Supria, 1994)

Notice how the hair was tightly knotted into a bun. Combined with the display of weapons and confronting gaze, they look rather androgynous, even masculine. Were it not for the titles, it would be difficult
to distinguish the first two images from men, which is possibly the idea in the first place. Most of the representations were commissioned paintings and as such open to how the artists view (re: glorify) the subject. The following pictures are the rendering of the four Sultanahs.

Photo 2.3.
Paintings of the Four Queens

Sources:
Top left: “Sultanah Safiatuddin Syah” (Supria, 1994)
Top right: “Sultanah Nurul Alam Naziatuddin Syah” (Supria, 1994)
Bottom left: “Sultanah Zakiatuddin Inayat Syah” (Supria, 1994)
Bottom right: “Ratu Kamalat Syah” (Supria, 1994)

These paintings were commissioned by an Acehnese yayasan or foundation headquartered in Jakarta for publication in 1994.

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In these paintings, the extra cloth coverings have replaced the *rencong* (Acehnese dagger). These paintings were commissioned for a book on prominent women in Aceh by expatriate Acehnese in Java. The painter apparently took great care to suppress any hint of sexuality. All women were portrayed in their 40s (compare photos 2.3. with the youths in photo 2.1.), despite the extreme likelihood that they all ascended to the throne in their late 20s (even the oldest, Zakiatuddin Inayat Syah, came to the throne in her mid-30s). Their bodies were covered in clothing carefully painted to hide body lines. Jewellery is also kept to a minimum. These paintings promote images of idealised femininity. They are in contrast with the “manly” female warriors, which promote masculine warriorhood by appearing to resemble men. Also note that despite their “Islamic” modest demeanour, they are not presented in prayer position (unlike in photo 2.1).

Ten years ago such images were seen by most Acehnese women as a source of pride. Today, with the dissemination of feminist education among women combined with the prolonged armed conflict which alienated the people from the government in Aceh, approval of these images are confined to expatriate Acehnese (as a part of overseas identity building process) and political elites (specifically those who benefited from Indonesian government rule). Local women – especially activists who received higher education – believe that these images are used to trick Acehnese women into forgetting the real systemic oppression of women by exaggerating achievements of past individuals. SRY, one of my informants, believes a “liberation project” which includes opposing images such as these must be undertaken to enlighten Acehnese women about gender discrimination in Aceh.
Most Acehnese women must be made to understand that circumstances forced the hands of these so-called heroines [of the colonial wars]. Were it not for the absence of a male figure in the leadership, they would never have had a chance to lead. ... Women in Aceh are still voiceless in any decision making.

The "guns and/or jilbab" portrayal of Acehnese women is in stark contrast with another type of representation of Aceh. It is the image of the victim specifically, refugees and rape victims.

Photo 2.4.
Female Refugees

Sources:
Left: "A woman refugee" (South, 2000)
Right: "A fleeing villager" (Kompas, 1999)

These images have only been used quite recently since DOM was lifted in 1998. Both the government and GAM use them to portray each other as brutal and sadistic. They are also the preferred choice of representation used by the Ulama and LSM in presenting their case to the world, and to justify student activism. Interestingly, pro-GAM representations have the only portrayal of women soldiers as "rape victims" (e.g. see photo 2.1.) thus presenting women as victims who fight back.
2.4. The Politics of Sexual Symbolism

Without belittling the various gender specific atrocities committed throughout the armed conflict, I conclude from my interviews that the use of the "rape issue" by pro-independence respondents is more effective in garnering public sympathy than presenting an informed plea to improve women's socio-economic conditions. Tempers rose every time we discussed military sexual crimes. On the other hand, unless the interview subjects are activists, other human rights problems such as the "issue of refugee" is often greeted with indifference or downplayed using dismissals such as "everybody suffers not just them." Such gender politics is common in areas of armed conflict. In Aceh, at least, reported victims of such sexual crimes committed in military operations have always been women. While rape of men is also known to be used in armed conflict, no cases have ever been reported in Aceh.

Despite accepting all sorts of women into its rank, the Inong Balee (the female division GAM mentioned earlier) retained its "widowed mother" image. Indeed, Acehnese reporters tend to present interviews with these women that emphasise their "maternal aspirations." For example, one of the interviews reported by Kontras (an Acehnese tabloid) described two Inong Balee members' aspirations:

Does being tied to military training extinguish their womanly instinct? No. Yan and Nur admitted that they are normal women. Therefore, the urge to be married is still strong in their hearts. (Kontras, 200a: 7)
The equation of “normal women” with “being married” is strictly the (male) reporter’s. Women remain an object to be protected by men. In an interview with an Inong Balee commander by a Kontras journalist, out of the fourteen questions posed, half of them questioned the woman’s independence mostly through her marital status and history.

Did you join GAM specifically because the military have killed your husband?... You vowed revenge because the military murdered your husband. Would you fulfil that vow if the perpetrators are caught?... Is there any member of your troop who have romantic relationship with the military? ... Must the Inong Balee members necessarily be widows?... Have you become an Inong Balee leader with the permission of your family? ... Why haven’t you remarried since your husband is long gone? ... With whom would you consent to marry? (Kontras, 2000c:6)

Hence, the status of the women fighters as represented in the media is still attached to an ideal (re: proper) relationship with men. Curiously, the women I encountered seem to dismiss this “women fighter” image since they consider these women are an exceptional few, while the men either voiced doubts or ridicule.

The conflict between traditional expectations to “safeguard our women” and the push to acknowledge the increasing women’s role in a changing Aceh create frustration among elite women. Little surprise that when talking about refugees, female LSM activists were critical of men.

This conflict is full of cowardly men. It’s bad enough that the Indonesian military rape women, but GAM actually hides under women’s skirts. Every time there was news of an upcoming sweeping by the military in the refugee camps,
the women were told to sleep outside while the men slept inside the tents.

Interestingly, only university-educated women activists complained about institutionalised male dominance, such as discrimination in the political parties, discrimination in the workplace, female representation in the justice system, etc. Other women activists emphasise the "women and children as victims" plea. The representation of male victims is kept to a minimum when voicing such complaints. Men appear in the narratives usually as "head of family who can no longer provide for the family" or as "victims of torture and/or murder." There is no mention – even as a possibility – that men too can become rape victims. I suggested the possibility and all I received were shrugs of dismissal. The point is that when obtaining compassion is the objective, women and children are automatically the main ingredient in forming a presentation. When the demand for political independence is the main theme, it is the men that dominate the debate.

There is no mention of sexual crimes committed by GAM though most interview subjects, public GAM statements – even the media – admit that some GAM personnel are people of ill repute who have taken advantage of their positive reputation to facilitate them coercing the people. Sexual crimes are represented as "always committed by the Indonesian military". This representation – combined with the extensive use of gendered violence in the local debate on the armed conflict – may signify the racial hysteria of "their men" violating "our women" commonly propagated in armed struggles (Turshen, 1998:10-13).
Another form of the use of women in symbolic struggles is the presentation of the nation as a woman. The following is an article written by an Ulama who is a regular columnist in Aceh’s leading newspaper, Serambi.

KEPADAMU ACEH

Duh Aceh, namamu bak nama seorang gadis cantik yang memabuk kepayangan lelaki asing. Antrian mereka merebut perhatianmu agar kamu, Aceh, simpati kepadanya.


Kemudian pria pendek bermata sipit dari negeri Sakura merebutmu dari tangan pria Belanda. Kamu tak pernah dijadikan ratu yang pantas mendapat kehormatan, malah dijadikan budak yang hinadina.


Tubuhmu dikuras berdarah, raut wajahmu terbayang luka, hatimu pedih bagai teriris, rencong saktimu menjadi tumpul, baju adat kebesaranmu tinggal dalam museum, dan kopiah meukutop-mu diinjak-injak oleh arogansi sentral kekuasaan.


Duh, nasibmu Aceh! Apakah engkau kurang diperhatikan karena jauh dengan pusat kekuasaan? Atau karena engkau terkenal fanatik berpegang teguh kepada ajaran Islam?

FOR YOU, ACEH

Oh Aceh, your name is that of a beautiful girl that intoxicates strange men. They lined up to catch your attention, Aceh, for your sympathies

In the 18th century a Dutch man raped you viciously. They burned your crown (the Baiturrahman Mosque) and trashed the Sultan’s palace. But you did not submit. Your father Aceh, the Sultan Alaidin Muhammad Daudsyah was willing to be exiled for the sake of your honor.

Then a short slanty eyed man from the country of the Sakura took you from the Dutch man. You have never been treated as an honorable queen, rather as a poor slave.

After the sun-worshipping man fled, you were proposed to by an Indonesian man with a silver tongue. You were given various flattering titles, my sweet beloved Aceh. This man called you the gateway to Mecca, the land of Iskandar Muda, the land of the Rencong, the land of assets, and finally the Special Region. Then your father and your guardians were so proud, drunk with flattery, and drowned in hypocritical brotherhood. He praised you to the skies, but his heart was rotten as a stinking corpse.

Your body bled dry, your face scarred, your heart in pain, your powerful rencong blunted, your adat clothes put in a museum, and your meukutop hat trampled by the arrogance of centralised power.

Now, my beloved Aceh, you are a sad woman. Your sad face barely shows the loveliness inherited from the beautiful Putroh Phang. In your long suffering, it is normal that you demand to divorce your current husband. Your husband who has many wives is unable to give you the justice that you hoped for.

Dear, unfortunate Aceh! Were you neglected because of your distance from the centre of power? Or was it because you are famed for your fanatical commitment to Islam?

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Oh, my poor Aceh! When others are having fun listening to dangdut and wayang wong, you cried shedding blood and tears. Your cry this time is louder. The world heard it. But, does the world sympathise or not? Nobody knows my beloved Aceh, my poor Aceh. Let history record, that a noble beautiful princess, has become the victim of the savagery of irresponsible men.

Note: Original article is in Indonesian rather than Acehnese.
Source: Ameer Hamzah (1999)

Aceh is presented as a woman who is a passive victim and the military (or the Indonesian government) as the active male agressor. There is no mention of the armed resistance, merely mention of Aceh "demanding" and "crying." The point is that gendered representation of the conflict exists with women symbolising the victim rather than fighter. The architect of this construct – exemplified by the painter of the historical portraits, the media photo journalists, and the writer of the Serambi article – seem to be predominantly men.
Chapter 3:

ACEHNES WOmen IN
THE DOMESTIC SPHERE
Chapter Three:

ACEHNES WOMEN IN

THE DOMESTIC SPHERE

In what way have gendered political constructions in Aceh changed in the past century? Rosaldo (1980) argued that power is gained through culturally valued and legitimated authority, and the public domain is culturally valued more than the private domain. Therefore, those who have influence in the public sphere (i.e. men) are valued more than those who influence the domestic sphere (i.e. women). One example – as described in the previous chapter – is how GAM assigns its female divisions auxiliary and supportive roles rather than political or leadership roles. Gendered political arrangements in the public sphere are but extensions of the gendered arrangements in the domestic or the private sphere. It is therefore important to start with the domestic sphere before one studies a gendered nature of the social and political system.

In the case of Aceh, there seems to be a difference of scholarly opinion regarding the issue. In the domestic sphere, ethnographic studies on Aceh have declared that Acehnese women are independent of their husbands. Siegel (1969) described how a woman is independent in terms of ownership of house, rice fields, and treats the husband as a guest. Jayawardena (1977) explained how – in a reversal of the traditional assumption of the exchange of women in marriage – Acehnese men are viewed by women as valuable assets. He, as well as Siapno (1997), went
further in arguing that women’s subordinate position in Aceh are but a recent perception and that women in Aceh have always been the traditionally dominant gender, who constantly suffer from misrepresentations, often expressed in religious terms.

However, ethnographers have failed satisfactorily to explain the gross underrepresentation of Acehnese women in the formal politics of the public sphere. They are divided between the unapologetically Aceh-as-patriarchal premise based on their Islamic faith (e.g. Hurgronje, 1906) and the rather radical-yet-unproven concept of the independent Acehnese women (e.g. Jayawardena, 1977; Siapno, 1997).

Hurgronje failed to appreciate the extent to which the male dominance of the religious judicial system would effect domestic life. He focused mainly on the public sphere, specifically the effects of political Islam. As a result, in his description of Acehnese women’s dominance in the household he made erroneous comparisons with Minangkabau women, who are also members of a Muslim society (Hurgronje, 1906a:44). As such, if an analysis focuses only on the Acehnese public sphere, it is easy to conclude that Acehnese men are valued more than women.

Siegel emphasised the different socialisation of Islam among boys and girls yet failed to determine whether such selectivity is prescribed by Islam in general or just by the local traditions (1969: 150-154). He argued about female domination on the domestic front. However, he failed to anticipate the economic and political consequence of a modernising Aceh on gendered arrangements where men dominate a mobile workforce in the modern economic sector. His discussion of men’s absence from the
household concluded that such an arrangement was beneficial for women at the time. His argument – based on population movements of merantau (sojourning) – cannot be uncritically applied for situation in which male labour migration occurs in an increasingly mobile and globalised world.

Jayawardena (1977) did not take into account the effects of changing demographic patterns — especially migration — in his analysis. The male-exchange arrangements on marriage partially for economic purposes that he described was doomed due to the practice of sojourning and marrying out of Aceh. There is an increasing incidence of successful Acehnese men opting to marry non-Acehnese women. Many Acehnese DPRD (regional people’s representative) male members are married to non-Acehnese wives.22 Even the current governor is married to a Javanese.23 In the context laid out by Jayawardena and taking into account the consequences of an outmigrating male population (the demands of the modern labour market for a mobile workforce), one might say that there is a growing shortage of sought-after men who are marriagable in Aceh. From this perspective Acehnese women are left with men who are burdens rather than assets.

Siapno (1997) failed to explain whether the separate-but-equal working arrangements for women that she identifies has been beneficial or makes things worse for women. She did not address the gender composition of leadership positions nor the paid workforce in Aceh. Her

22 Data obtained from informants and local print media. Though official lists are non-existent, most DPRD family members are quite well known especially among Banda Aceh citizens. The Acehnese political elite lead quite public lives and are constantly subject to public scrutiny.

23 The wife of Governor T. Abdullah Puteh – Dra. Hj. Marlinda Irwanti – is his second wife. She is a former television presenter working for TVRI, the state-owned television station.
study focused mainly on representations of gender, which – as we have seen in the previous chapter – may be used for propagandic purposes of the powerful. To be fair, she did acknowledge this possibility. However, she failed to assess how successful these types of representation are in Aceh (whether these representations translate into social practice).

Despite their thorough descriptions, none of these ethnographers analytically link the gender relations of domestic life with the gendered power of political and public life.

### 3.1. Marriages

Great care must be taken in the analysis of Acehnese domestic life. First of all, it would be a mistake to assume that the same set of gender relationships exist everywhere in Aceh. At first glance, it is easy to mistakenly conclude that the Acehnese kinship system is matrilineal like the Minangkabau (e.g. Hurgronje, 1906). Anthropological works on Aceh have concluded that bilateral kinship is common in coastal Aceh – mainly Greater Aceh, Pidie, West Aceh, North Aceh and East Aceh – while the Gayo and the Alas who lived in the highlands are more lineally structured societies (Siegel, 1969; Bowen, 1983; Azra, 1992). There is also the discussion that Aceh is a society with patrilineal features coming from the influence of Syafi’i’ie Islam and matrilineal features originating from the old customs or adat (Jayawardena, 1977b; Mansur, 1982; Nyak Pah, 1985). It would also be a mistake to assume that these distinctions are strictly exclusive. For example, there are cases of families with bilineal relationships in the highlands as well as cases of families with patrilineal relationships in coastal areas, which may be caused by social mobility and
translocal marriages. In Leigh's research of the Acehnese education system (1992), her survey results indicated that – excluding arranged marriages – young Acehnese preference for a spouse is predominantly determined by religion.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3.1. Spouse Preference*</th>
<th>Female (%)</th>
<th>Male (%)</th>
<th>Total Average(%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It doesn’t matter as long as Muslim</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>55.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acehnese</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>20.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It doesn’t matter as long as I love him/her</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It doesn’t matter as long as the spouse has a good job</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other reason</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Javanese</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: * Answer to the question “Who is your preferred husband or wife?”
Source: Data is sorted by total average which was calculated from Leigh (1992: 338).

This data shows that ethnicity is not a primary determinant for spouse preference. Aceh is a geographical crossroad of the Malacca region. Interactions between communities with outsiders – especially in the coastal areas – are historically constant to the extent that in some parts of Aceh, people have dual cultural identities. This account is from an informant:

If you go by land in a bus from Padang (West Sumatra) to Meulaboh (West Aceh) you might sometimes notice some passenger who chat in bahasa Padang (the language used by the Minangkabau) but once the bus passed Tapak Tuan (South Aceh) they suddenly switch to Acehnese. This means that the person’s family has strong ties with another family who lives in West Sumatra, which is common for West Acehnese.

Relative isolationism has only been experienced recently due to the armed conflict of the 1990s especially because of the Indonesian
government's closure of the free port of Sabang (in early 1980s, which was reopened in 2000). During this era, there was substantial outward migration, especially among the wealthy elite (who become expatriates) and the landless poor (who become refugees).

The fact is, Aceh is not an isolated, static, and immobile society. The private and public spheres in Aceh are strongly linked with each other. Kinship systems are relevant in the discussion of the public sphere as long as they matter in shaping economic and political alliances. In the feudal times of the Sultan and Uleebalang, local social relations and social status played an important role in maintaining political legitimacy. It is no coincidence that all of the women warriors previously cited needed to marry an important elite male before they could command an effective force against the Dutch. Marriage is important for men and women alike for status as well as for other socio-economic reasons. This was as true in the past as it is at present. Only the purpose and reasoning behind marriages have changed. Today, finding a job is a problem faced not just by an adult individual but is an issue for the entire family. In a modernising Aceh, an unemployed person – especially a man – brings shame to his/her family. Such a view persists even in the rural regions, where economic pressures to find extra income is increasing. Family and kin are important sources of information for finding work, and marriages can be seen as an effort to expand the job network. Consequently, there is a strong emphasis on the type of work and work status of a potential spouse. An Acehnese proverb stated that "'meunyo tameukawen nyang siwadan, meunyo tameurakan nyang top meunalee.'" ("If you want to marry find an equal, if you want friendship find someone who can keep secrets.") The word siwadan (Indonesian form:
(sepadan) means of equal rank, in status as well as wealth. It is easy to judge from this proverb that marriages in practical terms are economic partnerships. Indeed the most common marital complaint is that the spouse – mostly husbands – does not bring enough income to the household. Jayawardena (1977) went so far as to conclude that marriages are a system for the exchange of men whose merits are appraised on their ability to bring in income. When it comes to domestic decision making, there is no doubt who is in charge, according to Jayawardena.

In contrast with Siegel’s observation that husbands are powerless “houseguests” in their own home (1969:179-180), in contemporary Aceh this was not reflected in interviews I conducted. Every women I interviewed complained about “women’s oppression by men” while the men I interviewed constantly repeated that they were the “captain of the boat” in accordance with Islamic teachings. Interestingly, none of the men said anything about the influence of sexist Indonesian state policies and practices while the women (especially the activists) did. The status of the husband is jonjongan (the head or leader) and the wife is jeunulang (the manager).\(^{24}\) All Acehnese that I interviewed did argue that the wife is referred to as po rumoh (owner of the house) indicating her superior position to the husband in domestic matters. However, they also indicated that in social matters – including marriage arrangements of children – the husband has the final say. Of this I can only say that the title of po rumoh rang hollow since it basically glorifies what is essentially a process of the

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\(^{24}\) It is important to point out that there is little evidence that this is solely caused by the New Order Indonesian law regarding marriages. Other forms of ideology or norms are also at play. For a start, patriarchal Islam is a major influence and its leaders in Aceh are men.
domestication of women.\textsuperscript{25} These responses indicated that the public/private dichotomy is very much gendered in Aceh. Either women have never perceived themselves as having authority over the household, or that gender relationships in Aceh have changed since Siegel’s study.

Post-revolutionary Ulama-dominated Acehnese politics as well as the modern patriarchal Indonesian state significantly influence the changes in gender relationships. Indeed, Siegel himself acknowledged these things as a potential rival to a less patriarchal society in Aceh. He was rather optimistic in his assessment and declared that:

\begin{quote}
... so long as kinship and locality were the bases of social organisation, reform movements could not succeed in making Islamic law as the Ulama conceived it the basis of social life in any permanent way. (1969:67)
\end{quote}

Unfortunately time has proven him wrong. In the capital of Banda Aceh itself the number of mosques is arguably the largest in Indonesia, with one every 500 metres or so. It is an entire industry which employs religious school graduates who reportedly have more difficulty in finding employment in the workforce than state school graduates. The profession of juru dakwah (preacher) in Aceh at the moment is still a male-dominated profession with the number of women beginning to rise (Qurnati, 1994). As Aceh slowly has modernised it turns out that everyone in Aceh has wanted

\textsuperscript{25} A term coined by Susan Barbara to describe sex discrimination process against women in developing countries. For further discussion on the topic, see Rogers (1980).
to or has had no choice but to be seen as a member of a Muslim community, whose dominant values are still the patriarchal form of Islam.26

This “Islamic modernisation” legitimised the business of arranging weddings and marriages as strictly a male affair. First, weddings have always been officiated by a male, a Teungku Meunasah or Teungku Sagoe, who since the implementation of the 1974 Indonesian marriage law must also be supplemented by the services of a state official representing the Kantor Urusan Agama (office of religious affairs), the keuchik or penghulu.

Second, preparation for the marriage ritual has always been a communal activity, especially among the women. Table 3.2. indicated the dominance of the bride’s family in arranging marriage rituals. Families who arrange marriages and weddings without involving the neighborhood might end up with a “boycotted” wedding ceremony, which would be a huge embarrassment. In Banda Aceh, this is no longer the case. For the sake of convenience, more people relegate the wedding ceremonies and rituals to paid professionals. Thus, the women of the family no longer dominate the rituals of weddings.

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26 This tendency began in the aftermath of the 1959 Darul Islam rebellion. Throughout the 1960s, the all-male Ulama dominated policy making in Aceh resulted in a rather theocratic governance with relatively hardline approach to Islamic practices. This is discussed in great detail by B.J. Boland (1982:174-185) as well as Mansur (1982).
Table 3.2.
List of Major Events in an Acehnese Marriage

1. **Meulakeé**
   - Period of courtship, proposal and engagement
2. **Tanda konghaba narit**
   - Gift exchange during the engagement period
3. **Mewnikah**
   - Wedding ceremony
4. **Mat dijooe malém**
   - Exchange of wedding vows
5. **Tueng darabaro**
   - Delivery of the bride by her family to the groom’s house
6. **Antai linto**
   - Delivery of the groom by his family to the bride’s house
7. **Teurimong bésan**
   - The bride’s family receive the groom’s family
8. **Meuturi**
   - Introducing the groom to the bride’s neighborhood
9. **Masa goh peumeukleh**
   - Period before separation when the wife is still economically supported by her family
10. **Peumeukleh**
    - Time of separation. After the firstborn child, the couple now must economically support themselves

Source: Syah (1974) and Mustadjib (1977)

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**Photo 3.1.**
*An Antat Linto Ceremony*

- The groom’s family and entourage
- The bride’s family wait for the guests
- The feast (the women are indoors, the men are outside)
- The peusijuk (blessing) of the pair

Source: Fieldwork.

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Third, in the case of arranging marriages, women also lose control over the decision making process. Table 3.3. show that forced marriages still exist in Aceh (these are reported cases, the true number remain unknown).

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Table 3.3.
Number of Forced Marriage Cases Filed in the Acehnese Religious Court

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Forced Marriage</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Forced Marriage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1992</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1993</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1994</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1995</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1996</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Compiled from BPS data.

It is a widespread expectation in various societies in Indonesia – including Aceh – that a woman should marry a man of higher standing (in terms of age, wealth, and social position). To marry a man who is deemed “beneath her” is undesirable as it is viewed to be a source of future discord.

In one of my interviews with SRY, a university graduate woman activist in her 30s with a rural background, she described marriage arrangements in her village a few months back as follows:

The parents [of the two families] first talk in the front room. When things are about to get serious, all of the women move to the back of the house. The connecting door or curtains are closed and the women can’t even listen to the conversation. There are only two occasions when they can re-enter the front room and that is either to provide coffee to the guests or when the whole marriage arrangement is settled.

She described that only because she enjoyed higher education, which boosted her status in her family significantly, she was able to resist her family regarding her marital arrangements. She resisted similar arrangements made for her sister but failed. She believed strongly that

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Acehnese women should be liberated from such arrangements. Another of my women respondents, RHN, a middle aged academic of middle class background, went further in saying that:

In the village of youth if you were an unmarried daughter, you couldn’t even see house guests unless it was to provide coffee. This happened not just during marriage arrangements but every time a guest visited.

Differences in the treatment of sons and daughters extend to matters other than marriage arrangements. Sons are considered to carry on the family name. Daughters are not. Great disappointment is expressed should a son fail to live up to expectations such as finding a good job, finding a spouse, and siring children. Disappointment in daughters is usually in regard to their ability to manage the house as well as their social behavior. Failure to help out with household chores would lead to severe criticism, especially by the mother. The reasoning given is that such incompetence could very well continue after she is married, and there is nothing more shameful than a wife who mismanages the household to such extent that her husband has to interfere in her affairs. Such a woman is considered "inong peugada lakoe" ("a wife who mistreated her husband"). RHN described the times in her village when she was young that,

If a husband cooks in the kitchen, at least three villages will talk about it. There is nothing more embarrassing for a woman than to have her husband help out in the kitchen. It shows her incompetence.

Indeed, in the field I find that these practices of gendered division of household labour so ingrained that the one thing that marked me out as a foreigner – despite my best effort to "be male" – during visits to a

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household is that everytime the lady of the house served us (the talking men) drinks or any other services I bothered to voice my gratitude. I was told that it marked me out as a Javanese (which I am not).

3.2. The Family

Siegel described the Acehnese kinship system as Hawaiian (1969:138). Mansur, however, argued that only the terms of address follow the Hawaiian system while the terms of reference can be classified as Eskimo\(^{27}\) (1982:19).

This analytical confusion is because Acehnese use the term cêdara (kin) and kawm (family) in daily life to describe siblings as well as cousins (close or distant) from both sides of the family.

\[\text{Diagram 3.1. Positions in an Acehnese Family}\]^{28}

\[\text{Diagram 3.1. Positions in an Acehnese Family}\]

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\(^{27}\) In a Hawaiian kinship system all cousins are equated with siblings. In the Eskimo kinship system all cousins are equated with each other but differentiated from siblings (Schusky, 1965:22).

\(^{28}\) This is an brief outline of aspects of the Acehnese kinship system. For a more detailed list of Acehnese kinship terms, see Mansur (1982).
In an Acehnese family, a person's father's brother (FB), father's father brother (FFB) and brother's son (Bs) are called *wali*. The word is originally Arabic meaning guardian or steward. In Acehnese it refers to the male line. In the Islamic practices of the Acehnese, a *wali* can be the deceased person's heir. The *wali* is also the guardian of the children of the deceased, especially the daughters. A *wali* is obliged to seek recompense in court should the death occur from unnatural causes. This is why the *wali* is also referred to as *wali hukum* (legal guardian). The relationship with the mother's brother (MB), mother's father's brother (MFB), mother's mother brother (MMFB) and sister's son (ZS) is called *karong* or as Chandra Jayawardena (1977) reported it, *wali adat*. The *karong* is in the female line, it is the same position as *wali hukum* but without the legal rights and obligation. The relationship between the *wali hukum* and *karong* is a respect relationship (Eggan, 1955:79) and the nature of the relationship depends on factors such as residential proximity, visiting intensity, socio-economic status, knowledge of tradition, and moral reputation. Today – especially in the urban areas – the importance of this relationship reflects on socio-economic conditions. Wealthy family members do not have to do much to maintain the *karong* relationship except at important family occasions like births, weddings or deaths. Such wealthy family members often fulfill the obligations of *wali hukum* even though they are technically *karong*. Other family members still have to maintain good relationships especially with the *wali hukum* who is obligated to aid family members who need aid (usually in forms of money or jobs).

The relationship with a mother's brother (a *karong*) is usually less formal and more amiable than with a father's brother (a *wali hukum*). This is
understandable considering the different economic and power relations that exist in relation to a *wali hukum*. The relationship between a person and their parents in-law (*meulintée ngon matuwan* relationship) as well as with the siblings in-law (*parui*) is usually an *avoidance relationship* (Eggan, 1955:79). In the case of *matuwan*, the ego – especially the men – is both in the subordinate position as well as a perceived outsider. In the case of *parui* – especially of the opposite sex – the avoidance may have something to do with sexual taboo.\(^{29}\) A man is *malu* (lit. embarrassed, timid, shy) with all his married male consanguines and affines, while a woman is free and close with all her female consanguines and affines (Jayawardena, 1977b:25).

\(^{29}\) The exception is the relationship with very young (children under 5 years old) in-laws, which are usually spoilt by both families. This sort of relationship applies to both male or female.
As the kinship diagrams shows (diagram 3.2. and 3.3.), despite the existence of a bilateral system, legally and economically the women of the family are significantly disadvantaged because the men formally hold the title of both wali hukum as well as karong. The men in the family must economically provide for the women. Women, on the other hand, are expected to manage and take care of the family, a task that doubles once they marry. Once married, a woman’s obligations extend to her matuwan (parents-in-law) even if they live in a different household. She might end up having to care for two households. Her success in building (at least the appearance of) a formally amiable relationship – which is usually made difficult by the requirements for avoidance behavior – is deemed an important test case for the relationship between the two families. A good wife is called “inong nyang carong tueng ate tuah” (“a wife who can win the hearts of parents-in-law”). One of the most commonly expressed views supporting this stance is the following popular proverb.

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Breuh puteh ie bangoe, ureueng binoe peuet peukara.
Bangsawan, budiman, rupaan ngon aturan, rupa got, peurangoe jroh,
bangsa leubeh seureuta neh.

White rice of good scent, womenfolk have four requirements. Nobility, kindness, appearance and orderliness, good looks, good behaviour, good manners as well as speech.

This existing set of relationships seem to have relaxed during my observation in the field. Emphasis is placed far more on direct offspring and immediate family. Distant kin are held in formal esteem only. More often a functional extended family relationship depends on the strength of the economic relationship. A decade ago I can remember how a family member who came to the city from a distant village was received with enthusiasm and quickly helped to stand on his/her feet. Today, they are seen more as a burden on family assets. In-laws still receive their due respect, especially parents-in-law. However, the role of wali hukum is rapidly becoming just as ceremonial as the karong, at least in the city. One can see this as partly beneficial for women’s standing in the family because they have better recognition and control over family status and economic prosperity.

3.3. The Children

The relationship between husbands and wives have been partially explored by Siegel (1969). In his description husbands bring in income, they come, eat, and go. Wives manage the household, serve husbands when they visit (Siegel refers to them as “house guests”), and raise children. Little has been written about the relationship between parents and children. An interesting relationship in the family is between father and daughter. Up until the time she is married, a father is distant from his
daughter, even strict to the point of him being referred to as "bui kabom rantre" ("a pig chewing on the chain")\textsuperscript{30}, which means he seldom talks to her even though they are sitting together at home. After she is married, however, the relationship changes. He speaks with her more often and maintains a warm relationship to the point that she is consulted in solving family problems. The same closeness does not apply to mother-son relationship. The proverb "hukom aneuk wali bak eumbah, bah that payah maji tron ek" ("children belong to the father, in spite of the fact that it is the mother who raised them") is strictly applied to the sons. Levels of intimacy and warmth between mother and son are restricted from an early age. When the son is six years old his mother introduces taboos on things that boys should not be doing, such as being in the kitchen with mother or sister. In this regard, the mother is a primary agent of reproducing masculine values since father’s involvement in child raising is minimal.

Mothers and daughters enjoy a much more intimate and close relationship which lasts for life. Although the view expressed in the proverb "tapeugot aweuek bek tutong jaroe, tameuaneuk bek payah droe" ("spoons are made so the hands won’t burn, children are raised to relieve burdens") applies to sons and daughters, it is the daughters that are raised specifically with the expectation to care for her parents when they grow up. Sons are expected to travel to find work. Daughters stay at home and even if they are married, they are still expected to visit the parents often to care for them. These are parental expectations which sometimes differ from reality.

\textsuperscript{30} This metaphor is used derogatively. A pig (the father) who is too busy chewing on its chains (finding a living) is so intent on the task that it neglects to care for its litter. While Acehnese are predominantly Muslim who are forbidden to eat pork, some Acehnese own pig farms and the meat produce is exported to North Sumatra and Singapore.

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Mothers also maintain a strict disciplinary control over the daughters, especially in teaching housework as well as the proper conduct of relationships with young men. Acehnese parents in general are overtly anxious about their teenage daughters' sexuality. Extramarital sex is an extremely shameful affair should it happen, and it is often stated that "mangat tajaga keubeue saboh weue, nibak tageugeue sidroe aineuk dara" ("it is easier to watch over two buffaloes in one shed that watching over a daughter"). Both adult male and female respondents have complained about the "lack of morality" among today's generations indicating an anxiety over changes in values. RHN, a middle-aged lecturer, described her students at IAIN:

Young people – especially the women – no longer respect their elders. The way they talk, how they address you, how they pose questions, none of them indicate respect. We constantly rebuke women for dressing improperly, but they ignore us. People used to respect teachers, nowadays we're just employees.

It is interesting to note that she singled out young women as "worse" than the young men. Another complaint was voiced by AD, an "old guard" conservative Baghdad University graduate Ulama. Like RHN, AD also complained to me about Acehnese youth, singling out female behaviour and appearance.

Nowadays young people simply have no respect. Never mind to their elders, but not even to themselves. We have young women wearing jilbab (head cover) yet they wear tight clothing and tight pants. What's the point? Even IAIN students copied the Unsyiah (the state university) students rather than setting an example.
At this point it is important to note that wearing jilbab (head cover) and selendang (head scarf) is a relatively recent practice imposed on women. Until the mid-1990s, it was a non-compulsory piece of public clothing. In 1997 when the DOM officially ended, the local government decided that Aceh must become “more Islamic” and made wearing jilbab in public compulsory. During my research in Aceh, I saw plenty of young women who wore the jilbab/selendang-jeans or jilbab/selendang-t-shirt combination.

Photos 3.2.

Left: An Acehnese teenage couple with the girl wearing a headscarf and jeans. Right: A more “rebellious” Acehnese teenage couple, neither wearing Islamic headgear. Source: field photos

The jilbab issue is regarded by most Islam-based elite as an important test case of Acehnese moral standards, so much so that the issue was always brought up in many seminars on Acehnese women. The context of the discussion is usually in how to “improve moral behavior.” The debates explicitly centered on self-improvement (whether improving one’s physical appearance to be “more Islamic” would automatically improve the

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person's behaviour) and modesty (how not to incite the *nafsu* or lust among men which might provoke "immoral behavior"). These are debates over whether or not people should conform to a more modest and Islamic identity. They are debates which often employ strategies of blaming the victim (i.e. it is the women's fault for encouraging the men to behave badly).

3.4. Divorces

The number of divorces have risen (see graph 3.1. below). Until 1977, following the introduction of the 1974 marriage law, the number of divorce cases were not listed in any of the official regional statistical records. Divorce remained a shameful and private affair. Marital problems almost always are expected to be reconciliated through family efforts. In his study of Aceh in the 1960s, Siegel argued that most conflicts in marriage concern money (1969:174). He reported that there was a perception among men that they always lived up to their financial obligations while among women the men were seen to never do this. Maintaining a marriage was seen as preferable to divorce especially if children were involved. Today, however, there are changes in this perception. Divorce is seen as better than maintaining a bad marriage. This change in attitude coincided with improving economic conditions for women in Aceh. The divorce rate peaked in the late 1970s as an effect of the introduction of 1974 marriage law as it allow women to file for divorce through government institution, bypassing traditional and religious institution which are often biased against women. After this period of "divorce boom" the rate declined and

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31 The most powerful one is family pressure. Since divorce is seen as shameful – not just to the couple – then efforts are always made to reconcile.
stabilised for a decade. There was a significant drop between 1990 and 1994 during the DOM years but it began to rise again in 1995. One possible explanation is that during the first years of DOM people were reluctant, too afraid or unable to file for divorce in the religious courts.

Graph 3.1. Divorce Rate in Aceh

Source: Compiled from BPS data.

Another possible explanation is that the main reasons for divorce have changed. Islamic laws allow divorce if circumstances warrant or necessitate it. Islam has permitted divorce reluctantly, neither liking nor recommending it. Indeed, Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam is reported to have stated that "Among lawful things, divorce is most disliked by Allah" (hadith according to Abu Daud). Islam has not made it necessary that the grounds of divorce should be publicized. This, however, does not mean that Islam views divorce lightly. In fact, publicity of grounds may not be of any positive consequence. Although the grounds may not be pronounced, they are supposed to be genuine. On the other hand, the grounds may be

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stated and may in reality be false. It is for this reason that court comes in as a last resort in the Islamic scheme of separation of husband and wife. The Qur'an states as regards grounds of divorce in very general terms:

\[
\text{الْطَلَّبُ مُرْتَنِينَ فَإِنَّكَ بِمَغْرِبِهِ أَوْ تَسْرِيحَ بِإِخْتِضَادِهِ وَلَا يُحِبُّنَّكُمُ الْمَلَكُ أَنَّهُ تَأْخُذُوهُمَّ بَيْنَ النَّاسِ إِنْ أَنْ تُحَافَا أَلَّا يَمِيِّضُهُمُ الْحُدُودُ أَلَّا يَمِيِّضُهُمُ الْحُدُودُ أَلَّا يَمِيِّضُهُمُ الْحُدُودُ أَلَّا يَمِيِّضُهُمُ الْحُدُودُ أَلَّا يَمِيِّضُهُمُ الْحُدُودُ أَلَّا يَمِيِّضُهُمُ الْحُدُودُ أَلَّا يَمِيِّضُهُمُ الْحُدُودُ أَلَّا يَمِيِّضُهُمُ الْحُدُودُ أَلَّا يَمِيِّضُهُمُ الْحُدُودُ أَلَّا يَمِيِّضُهُمُ الْحُدُودُ أَلَّا يَمِيِّضُهُمُ الْحُدُودُ أَلَّا يَمِيِّضُهُمُ الْحُدُودُ أَلَّا يَمِيِّضُهُمُ الْحُدُودُ أَلَّا يَمِيِّضُهُمُ الْحُدُودُ أَلَّا يَمِيِّضُهُمُ الْحُدُودُ أَلَّا يَمِيِّضُهُمُ الْحُدُودُ أَلَّا يَمِيِّضُهُمُ الْحُدُودُ أَلَّا يَمِيِّضُهُمُ الْحُدُودُ أَلَّا يَمِيِّضُهُمُ الْحُدُودُ أَلَّا يَمِيِّضُهُمُ الْحُدُودُ أَلَّا يَمِيِّضُهُمُ الْحُدُودُ أَلَّا يَمِيِّضُهُمُ الْحُدُودُ أَلَّا يَمِيِّضُهُمُ الْحُدُودُ أَلَّا يَمِيِّضُهُمُ الْحُدُودُ أَلَّا يَمِيِّضُهُمُ الْحُدُودُ أَلَّا يَمِيِّضُهُمُ الْحُدُودُ أَلَّا يَمِيِّضُهُمُ الْحُدُودُ أَلَّا يَمِيِّضُهُمُ الْحُدُودُ أَلَّا يَمِيِّضُهُمُ الْحُدُودُ أَلَّا يَمِيِّضُهُمُ الْحُدُودُ أَلَّا يَمِيِّضُهُمُ الْحُدُودُ أَلَّا يَمِيِّضُهُمُ الْحُدُودُ أَلَّا يَمِيِّضُهُمُ الْحُدُودُ أَلَّا يَمِيِّضُهُمُ الْحُدُودُ أَلَّا يَمِيِّضُهُمُ الْحُدُودُ أَلَّا يَمِيِّضُهُمُ الْحُدُودُ أَلَّا يَمِيِّضُهُمُ الْحُدُودُ أَلَّا يَمِيِّضُهُمُ الْحُدُودُ أَلَّا يَمِيِّضُهُمُ الْحُدُودُ أَلَّا يَمِيِّضُهُمُ الْحُدُودُ أَلَّا يَمِيِّضُهُمُ الْحُدُودُ أَلَّا يَمِيِّضُهُمُ الْحُدُودُ أَلَّا يَمِيِّضُهُمُ الْحُدُودُ أَلَّا يَمِيِّضُهُمُ الْحُدُودُ أَلَّا يَمِيِّضُهُمُ الْحُدُودُ أَلَّا يَمِيِّضُهُمُ الْحُدُودُ أَلَّا يَمِيِّضُهُمُ الْحُدُودُ أَلَّا يَمِيِّضُهُمُ الْحُدُودُ أَلَّا يَمِيِّضُهُمُ الْحُدُودُ أَلَّا يَمِيِّضُهُمُ الْحُدُودُ أَلَّا يَمِيِّضُهُمُ الْحُدُودُ أَلَّا يَمِيِّضُهُمُ الْحُدُودُ أَلَّا يَمِيِّضُهُمُ الْحُدُودُ أَلَّا يَمِيِّضُهُمُ الْحُدُودُ أَلَّا يَمِيِّضُهُمُ الْحُدُودُ أَلَّا يَمِيِّضُهُمُ الْحُدُودُ أَلَّا يَمِيِّضُهُمُ الْحُدُودُ أَلَّا يَمِيِّضُهُمُ الْحُدُودُ أَلَّا يَمِيِّضُهُمُ الْحُدُودُ أَلَّا يَمِيِّضُهُمُ الْحُدُودُ أَلَّا يَمِيِّضُهُمُ الْحُدُودُ أَلَّا يَمِيِّضُهُمُ الْحُدُودُ أَلَّا يَمِيِّضُهُمُ الْحُدُودُ أَلَّا يَمِيِّضُهُمُ الْحُدُودُ أَلَّا يَمِيِّضُهُمُ الْحُدُودُ أَلَّا يَمِيِّضُهُمُ الْحُدُودُ أَلَّا يَمِيِّضُهُمُ الْحُدُودُ أَلَّا يَمِيِّضُهُمُ الْحُدُودُ أَلَّا يَمِيِّضُهُمُ الْحُدُودُ أَلَّا يَمِيِّضُهُمُ الْحُدُودُ أَلَّا يَمِيِّضُهُمُ الْحُدُودُ أَلَّا يَمِيِّضُهُمُ الْحُدُودُ أَلَّا يَمِيِّضُهُمُ الْحُدُودُ أَلَّا يَمِيِّضُهُمُ الْحُدُودُ أَلَّa

The divorce is twice, after that, either you retain her on reasonable terms or release her with kindness. And it is not lawful for you (men) to take back (from your wives) any of your mahr (bridal money given by the husband to his wife at the time of marriage) which you have given them, except when both parties fear that they would be unable to keep the limits ordained by Allah (e.g. to deal with each other on a fair basis). Then if you fear that they would not be able to keep the limits ordained by Allah, then there is no sin on either of them if she gives back (the mahr or a part of it) for her al-khul' (divorce). These are the limits ordained by Allah, so do not transgress them. And whoever transgresses the limits ordained by Allah, then such are the zālimūn (wrong-doers, etc.). (The Qur'an, 2:229).

The general ground of divorce in the Qur'an, therefore, is hopeless failure of one or both parties to discharge their marital duties and to consort with each other. Islamic jurists have developed some indices which may be accepted as grounds of divorce in case the divorce matter goes to the court. Long absence of husband without any information, long imprisonment, refusal to provide for a wife, and impotence etc. are some of the grounds on which a wife can ask for divorce. Either party may take
steps to divorce in case of chronic disease, insanity, deceptive misrepresentation during marriage contract, or desertion.

A Muslim male is allowed three opportunities to make a pronouncement or act of divorce provided that each divorce is pronounced during the time when the wife is in a period of purity (that is not in her menstrual time). A husband may divorce his wife once and let the iddat (the period of waiting after divorce) pass. During the waiting period, the two have the option of being reconciled. If however the waiting period passes without reconciliation, they stand fully divorced. If after the first divorce the husband is reconciled with his wife but the hostility and conflict begins all over again, he may divorce her a second time in the same manner as stated above. In this case also he can return to her during the iddat. If however, after second reconciliation, he divorces the wife the third time, he can not take back the wife during the iddat. She is totally prohibited for him. The wife, thereafter can marry any person she likes according to her choice. The wife can divorce her husband if this condition is stipulated in the marriage contract. This kind of divorce is called 'delegated divorce' (thalak taffiz).

Marriage can also be dissolved through mutual consent. This is called khula in the technical language of Islamic law. Marriage can also be dissolved by judicial process through the court on complaint of the wife on the grounds explained before. One of the consequences of the divorce is the commencement of a waiting period for the wife. This usually lasts three months. If there is a pregnancy, it lasts as long as pregnancy lasts. The waiting period is basically a term of probation during which reconciliation
can be attempted. It is also required to establish whether the wife has conceived. It also allows time for planning the future. Maintenance of a wife during the waiting period is an obligation on the husband. The wife can not be expelled from her place of residence and he can not in any way harass her. Such harassment would constitute a moral as well as a criminal offence. In case of divorce, the young children remain in the custody of their divorced mother. However, the father has to provide the cost of the maintenance of young children though they remain under the custody of mother.

The Islamic law of divorce is based on practical considerations. The process of separation is basically a matter between a husband and wife. However, when conflict arises, attempts are made for reconciliation. Judicial process is not obligatory in divorce for reasons explained earlier. The intervention of court has nowhere reduced the number of divorce. Judicial process in Islam is the last resort in so far as divorce is concerned.

Disharmony and irresponsibility are the main reasons for divorce filed in the Acehnese religious courts. As graphs 3.2. aqnd 3.3. below indicate, the only significant change throughout the years is a steady decline in family disharmony as the reason. Economic reasons for divorce remained the same and therefore can be considered a minor determinant for initiating divorce.

Acehnese are more vocal in filing a legal complaint if their spouse has misbehaved compared to if they are not contributing to family income. The trends shown in graphs 3.2. and 3.3. supported the growing perception that marriage is “more than just about money.” The most obvious change in
the top three reasons is the decline in *akhlak* as grounds for divorce. *Akhlak* – derived from the Arabic word for "behaviour" – is basically a complaint that the spouse is engaging in improper publicly-known behaviour, usually vices such as prostitution, alcoholism, and gambling. This downward trend may also mean that these "immoral activities" may simply underreported. In a growing conservatively organised society, to confess that a divorce is being filed for improper behaviour would imply that the marriage was the result of bad choice or bad matchmaking, thus blaming entire families for failing to "screen" good spouses in the past. To make things more complicated, the 1974 marriage law is aimed to make divorces difficult, which is in line with its principle of promoting stable and long-lasting families (Mustadjab, 1977:47).

The following graphs categorise the reasons given for filing for divorce into two parts: pragmatic and moral reasons. The pragmatic reasons are filed if one of the married couple violate *explicitly prescribed* or *forbidden* marital behavior as demanded of their religion; in Aceh this is generally Islamic marriage law. Of course, in practice, people often confuse one reason with the other. In some cases, people prefer the "less vulgar" reasons. For example, while some people may file for divorce using economic reasons, most people prefer to use the "irresponsibility" reasons. The last thing any ex-spouse wants is to be branded as the materialistic partner in the marriage. Similarly, people are far more reluctant to describe physical abuse outright and prefer the more ambiguous irresponsibility reasoning. It is for these grounds that the pattern for the three reasons used for filing a divorce are similar.
Graph 3.2.
Pragmatic Reasons Filed for Divorce in Aceh

- Irresponsibility  - Physical Abuse  - Economic Reasons  - Other Obstacles*

* Include spouse imprisoned or having biological handicap, and divorce for political purposes.
Source: Compiled from BPS data.
Graph 3.3.
Moral Reasons Filed for Divorce in Aceh

Source: Compiled from BPS data.

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The moral reasons category includes reasons for divorce based on behavior that – despite not being prescribed clearly by religious texts – is frowned upon by the public in general and may cause significant embarrassment. It is a category far more ambiguous than the pragmatic ones and often open to strategic interpretations. For example, a wife cannot file for divorce on the basis of irresponsibility if her husband never failed to fulfill all his economic obligations and never physically abused her. However, she can file for divorce on reasons of adultery (if he did), jealousy (still open for the reconciliation option) or disharmony.

The graphs above showed that the major reasons used in filing an official divorce (irresponsibility, disharmony and akhlak) are all open to interpretations, meaning that they are reasons that can easily be debated, negotiated and open the possibility of reconciliation. As explained earlier, in Islamic law there are several stages before a married couple can truly be divorced. In Indonesian Islamic court the process of filing for divorce is called thalak, which must be undergo three times before the divorce is considered final. Every time a thalak is filed, the married couple is urged to resolve their differences with the hopes that they will reconcile. But if the third thalak is filed, then the divorce is final and the couple is no longer married.
Graph 3.4.
Marital Cases Filed In The Acehnese Religious Courts 1966-1999

Graph 3.4.a.
Marriages

Graph 3.4.b.
Thalak (Include First, Second, and Third Thalak Filed)

Graph 3.4.c.
Reconciliation (After First and/or Second Thalak)

Graph 3.4.d.
Divorce Granted (After Final or Third Thalak)

Note: ○ Circled point (steep slopes and peaks) indicates that the number is in doubt (see Introduction).

Source: Compiled from BPS data.

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The high number of *thalak* is mainly due to domestic troubles, especially first *thalak*. Couples are far more reluctant to file for a second *thalak* as it usually leads to a third and final *thalak*, which is the actual divorce. Families of the quarreling couples usually work hard to reconcile them. The number of reconciliations filed for in the religious courts are mostly cases where the second *thalak* has already been issued (this is also the reason why the official reconciliation numbers are low compared to *thalak* numbers).

These charts show that while each year the number of marriages has increased (peaking around 1995) and the number of divorces filed has slowly risen in the last decade, there is a significant drop in the number of *thalak* efforts as well as reconciliations of marriages. Marriage and divorce have become a clear cut either/or affair. This is quite an improvement for women as men can no longer practice what is called *kawin gantung* (suspended marriage) where the husband neglects the wife yet she is unable to initiate a divorce and thus the possibility to remarry. Women can now bypass the *thalak* procedure – which generally sympathetic towards the husband as well as favouring reconciliation (often by any means) – and simply file for a final divorce through the government courts. The marriage law of 1974 further discourages people – though not drastically – from initiating *thalak* due to complicated (and expensive) bureaucratic procedures (Mustadjib, 1977).

The reasons for these trends remain unknown. Several possible explanations range from people’s increasing distrust in state control of the marriage institution, the growing inadequacy of the necessary bureaucracy
and infrastructure regulating marriages, to the possibility that marriage has lost its appeal. After all, divorce still remains a shameful status especially among rural women. They would rather be separated from their spouse than have to endure an “official divorce” which would involve other family members, friends and kin. In Aceh, one does not marry just a person but an entire family or even a village. These trends can also be explained by the fact that women are far more economically independent than before, they see little point in prolonging an economically draining marriage but do not want to end it by divorce.

As seen in graph 3.2, irresponsibility is the usual legal ground to initiate a divorce – usually by women – and up until 1993, the Department of Religious Affairs, which handled marriages and divorces, separated negligence causes for divorce into two categories: *menerlantarkan* (the wife neglects her duty) and *nakah istri* (the husband fails to provide for his wife). The rights of wives to file for divorce is guaranteed by both religious and state courts in the form of *fasakh* divorces.

**Graph 3.5.**

Fasakh (Wife-Initiated Divorce) Granted in Aceh

![Graph showing the number of fasakh divorces granted in Aceh from 1975 to 2000.](image)

**Note:** -- Projected trend.

**Source:** Compiled from BPS data.

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If we only consider the number of increase in the chart above then the level of *fasakh* has only gradually increased over past 25 years. It indicates that women are less likely to initiate divorce, probably because the status of divorced women is (still) low. A widowed woman is showered with sympathy because her situation is a consequence of "God's will" or fate, but a divorced woman is generally deemed to be incapable of maintaining a happy household. This does not mean that men are not publicly blamed, but their faults are to be expected whereas a woman is expected to be flawlessly better than a man. Women are seen as the civilising agents of the private sphere.

However, when the *fasakh* cases are put in the context of the total divorce rate in Aceh (see chart 3.1.), the trend is striking. When the drop in divorce cases in recent years (1991-1999) are also taken into account the trend is as follows:

![Graph 3.6. Percentage of Fasakh Out of Total Divorces in Aceh](image)

Source: Compiled from BPS data.
Since the number of fasakh is relatively the same, the sudden drop of percentage shown above in the mid-90s can only mean one thing: divorces initiated by men have increased proportionally.

In a more positive light for women, the rate of polygamy has significantly decreased to virtually nil (see the following chart). Both the state regulations implemented in 1975 – which require the permission of the first wife before marrying a second one – and improving women's economic status and education have led to polygamous men being seen as backward and unsophisticated, thus discouraging polygamous marriages.

Graph 3.7.
Polygamy License Issued in Aceh

Source: Compiled from BPS data.

Unfortunately this does not mean that the practice itself has been abandoned. While civil servants do not engage in legal polygamy (a major block for career advancement), others still practice it openly or quietly. Polygamy has always been as much about the display of economic prowess and an economic arrangement for poor women. It is not surprising that wealthy Acehnese men have shifted to the practice of keeping

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mistresses – and even marrying more wives – as long as they are kept far away from the first wife’s household (usually in a different province like North Sumatra or the national capital of Jakarta). While I only encountered one such polygamous unions,\textsuperscript{32} I often heard such accusations from women I encountered in fieldwork. The main contention against polygamy practices voiced by these women varied from perceiving it as demeaning to women, to depriving women of better economic provisions, encouraging unjust treatment of wives, and other moral reasoning. When I point out the advantage of pooling economic resources and sharing domestic chores, they responded that these are inconsequential advantages which did not prevail over the “immorality” of the practice. Of course, all of these women whom I interviewed were married (monogamous), enjoyed university education, most had jobs and lived in the city. I have yet to hear a second wife’s point of view.

3.5. Reproductive Health

The family planning program in Indonesia – for better or worse – has been successful in stemming population growth in Aceh. The last census in the year 2000 surprised the regional government since the Acehnese population had increased by less than was projected.

\textsuperscript{32} The polygamous respondent in question is a travelling artist who has three acknowledged and is rumored to have more wives. They all live in separate houses, two of them in Aceh. Each wife raised her children in her own household.
Graph 3.8.
Growth of Contraceptive Use in Aceh

Note: - - - - Projected trend
Percentage in a year is the change compared to previous year
Source: Compiled from BPS data

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Graph 3.9.
Use of Contraceptives in Aceh

Source: Compiled from BPS data
Looking at the graphs above gives a quick insight into the prevailing attitude among men and women regarding birth control. Male participation in family planning remained low mainly because of government policy that target women and not men. Graph 3.8. shows that the rate of growth for all contraceptives is slowing down. However, at the same time graph 3.9. shows that the increase in female contraceptive use – particularly through the use of the pill and injections – is not matched by the male contraceptive use. Acehnese women are taking matters of family reproduction and family size more seriously. The result of the year 2000 census was not therefore totally unexpected. While still far away from the prescribed level encouraged by the UN, women in Aceh are engaged in tackling the issue of reproductive health and population control. Recent changes in government policy on family planning have aimed to involve men more than before. Whether this will be successful remains to be seen.
Chapter 4:

THE WORKING WOMEN OF ACEH
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Recent resistance by women to female-specific sections of the newly introduced *syariah* law seems to indicate that Acehnese women are uncomfortable with their position as the focal point of moral contestation by male religious authorities. This discomfort has been channelled through women's activism, which bloomed in the late 1980s, mainly spearheaded by university students. The DOM status provided a focus for the movement as it provided a practical function in social life allowing women to care for victims of violence, refugees, and to lobby for peace. The genesis of the movement was related to the socio-economic changes in the role and status of women in Aceh. There is a widespread belief among women activists in Aceh that feminism would not have found acceptance among women if women's conditions and their social and political awareness had not improved in the first place.

This chapter will provide evidence that the economic condition of women has improved significantly in Aceh during the post-Indonesian independence era and that women are more economically independent than before. They have a higher level of literacy and have benefited from the increased flow of information in the form of the printed and electronic media. However, women still have little public acknowledgment of their accomplishments (see chapter five). They are demanding more control in decision making about their lives. Already this is reflected in the changing attitude toward marriage and divorce in Aceh. A married couple used to be
socially obliged to settle marital problems before divorce was even considered. Now they do not always bother with efforts to reconcile (see chapter three). The traditional perception regarding the low status of women who are not in a marriage – unmarried, whether widowed or divorced – in Acehnese society is no longer as important as before the effects of development in Indonesia started. Women’s control over their personal lives is increasing.

4.1. Male Obstacles

While the socio-economic condition of women is improving, their role in the family (at least formally) remains subordinate to men. Their workload and responsibilities in the household has remained the same. Men seem unwilling to change the status quo. The women activists whom I interviewed were optimistic in that they placed faith in educating men about gender relations in order to change this condition. As chapter six will show, some Acehnese men resist “efforts by women to dominate” citing “negative Western influence” and even the “Madonna factor” (referring to the perceived influence among women towards sexual promiscuity and “immorality” symbolised by the Western pop icon, Madonna).

The most powerful response to attempts to nullify female demands for change, however, is to label them “un-Islamic.” In Aceh, it seems, the use of Islamic symbolism in public discourse has always ended with the further disenfranchising of women. Since the Ulama have acquired political power, political use of Islamic symbolism has become part of mainstream
The profession of Ulama is still a predominantly male occupation, and they dictate the acceptable values for public and private lives in Aceh. With a more patriarchal political Islam in Aceh, not only has women's access to formal political leadership been further restricted compared to more moderate Islamic leadership. Women must also give up a significant degree of control over domestic life. Unless a woman has the credentials of being a good mother, a good Muslim (displaying the requisite dress and demeanour) and has access to economic resources, a woman's access to politics is far more restricted than in the pre-independence era. Membership by marriage into powerful lineages no longer guarantees legitimacy for leadership. In a growing capitalist world – of which Aceh is increasingly becoming a part – legitimacy for leadership is becoming strongly tied to economic resources.

4.2. Women and Education

Barbara Rogers (1980) argued that in developing societies, women are being domesticated – meaning they become increasingly barred from public life – including through restricted access to economic resources. Since the modern economy relies heavily on an educated and skilled workforce, the domestication of women also involves a restriction on

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33 Under New Order rule, the use of Islamic symbolism in politics was discouraged – even repressed – due to the government’s rigid pursuit of national unity. For further discussion of this issue, see Amir, 2001.

34 Single women are deemed immature as well as politically insignificant while childless married women are deemed inexperienced. Indeed, the peumeungkleh (separation ceremony) declaring a couple’s separation and independence from their parents is conducted after the birth of the first child.
women wanting to access education facilities especially those in vocational education (i.e. education deemed to be strongly relevant to the job market).

In Aceh — as in all of Indonesia — women, in theory, have equal access to education. Recent studies in Aceh (Qurnati, 1994; Yeoh, 1994; Boender, 1997) indicate an increased participation by women in both state and religious education. Social norms, however, dictate the preferred choice of type of education. Interest among women to study in religious schools is especially growing since it is deemed valuable for future childcare. There are other reasons for this preference; however, most of them are economic. Religious schools are less expensive than state schools. On the other hand, Rama (1986) and Boender (1997) also indicated that there is a strong perception among Acehnese parents that state school graduates are more prepared for the job market than those from religious schools.

A survey conducted in 1994 revealed the major reasons for parents sending their girls to study in religious schools:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons given by girls who choose to study at religious schools:</th>
<th>Reasons given by parents who send their girls to study at religious schools:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>* to study religion</td>
<td>* socio-economic factors (location, cheap cost, maintaining household labour)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* feel that parents’ economic resources are limited</td>
<td>* feel that religious education is necessary to girls to improve their morality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* no other educational alternative (due to isolation, lack of resources, etc)</td>
<td>* feel that religious school environment is better than other schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* health limitations prohibit them from attending other schools</td>
<td>* feel that girls do not need high education since they will end up becoming housewives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* bad performance in previous schools</td>
<td>* influenced by religious leaders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* influenced by friends</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Qurnati (1994:64-65)

Parents are more willing to provide financial support for boys' education than girls'.

Iwan Dzulvan Amir
In the pre-New Order past, especially at the height of Ulama leadership of the 1950s, religious schools were prestigious institutions. Everyone aspired to become their graduates. Today, this view is ambivalent. While religious school graduates still have high status in society, the need to obtain a job with a good salary – something which often requires state school credentials during the discriminative selection process\textsuperscript{35} – is something that both parents and students are anxious about (Rama, 1986). Some Acehnese even go to extremes in order to address the problem. An academic and Ulama that I interviewed, FW, recalled his education:

I went to both state school and madrasah (religious school). In the morning I went to the state school then after school, I went to study at the madrasah afternoon classes. ... I used to get teased a lot by fellow students at the state school for being an alim (pious) student. I know it is partly a compliment, but it can also make you feel apart from the others.

Interestingly, it is this combination of education that gave him tenure at the IAIN Ar Raniry (Banda Aceh's Islamic university). Religious schools have been challenged by the state education system for decades. Nevertheless, his choice of a combination of state and religious education is indicative of the high degree of interest in obtaining religious education.

This interest is not accommodated by the Indonesian government. The Indonesian government even set up a powerful competition in the form

\textsuperscript{35} My research indicates that this job discrimination is still widely practiced among employers despite the regional government law in the mid-80s which allow religious school graduates to be employed as public servants as well as teachers in state schools.
of IAIN (the Institute of Islamic Studies) tertiary education schools. The traditional religious schools no longer have a monopoly on producing Ulama since any high-school graduate (state or religious) can obtain an advanced religious education through the IAIN. Most religious schools are not as extensively subsidised as state schools or the IAIN (Hudori, 1986). The following charts demonstrate that despite the high interest in religious education (similar student-school ratio) compared to state schools, the number of religious schools remained at the same level in the last three decades while the number of state schools has grown.

Graph 4.1.
Schools in Aceh from Primary to High School

Source: Compiled from BPS data.
Graph 4.2.
Religious Schools in Aceh

Source: Compiled from BPS data.

This numerical disadvantage of the religious school is compounded with the quality of schooling in relation to student demands. The following charts describe the student-teacher, student-school and teacher-school ratios of the two types of school.

Graph 4.3.
Details of Schools in Aceh: Student-Teacher Ratio

Source: Compiled from BPS data.
Graph 4.4.
Details of Schools in Aceh: Students-School Ratio

Source: Compiled from BPS data.

Graph 4.5.
Details of Schools in Aceh: Teacher-School Ratio

Note: \( \bigcirc \) Circled point (steep slopes and peaks indicate that the number is in doubt (see Introduction).
Source: Compiled from BPS data.

State schools are improving the student-teacher ratio by increasing the number of teachers and achieved a higher student-teacher ratio. State schools attract teachers who graduated from either state and religious schools, due to the relatively easier teaching qualifications (no formal religious educational background required). At the same time, few
The Working Women of Aceh

religious school graduates want to find employment in the religious schools. In the past decade, there has been a surge of interest for women to study in religious schools (Qurnati, 1994). Their numbers are close to two-thirds of religious school students mainly because most men prefer (and are encouraged) to go to state schools. Should the trend continue, education in Aceh will become a gendered domain with women concentrated into the underprivileged religious schools while men dominate the better-funded state schools.

Fortunately for women, due to the wajib belajar program launched by the Indonesian government throughout the state, women have equal opportunity to study in primary, junior and high school levels. Parents are obliged to send their children – male or female – to school. Hence, women's participation rate in these levels is high, close to 50%. Gaining an education is not difficult for a young Acehnese woman also because the family will see it as a major reason to postpone marriage. Since going to school while being married is frowned upon (for a wife going to school is seen as neglecting family duties) only single women go to school. Men can go to school freely whether they are married or single. The higher the education obtained, the less likely women marry young. Indeed, there is a strong relationship between marital age and economic conditions. If parents cannot afford higher education for their daughter, usually they try to find her a job or marry her off (source: interviews).

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36 This is the government program that oblige all underage children to go to school. Originally children were obliged to go to school for six years but since late 1980s it was extended to nine years.

37 During the six-years wajib belajar (ended in the early 1990s) female participation in high school education dropped because the young women were of marital age and some dropped off to get married. The nine-years wajib belajar reduced this trend.
The gender difference in education, however, is more obvious in higher education. In New Order Indonesia, universities – especially state universities – were training grounds for leadership positions in society. On paper, women’s involvement in higher education is quite promising. Enrolment in universities by women has increased in the past 25 years.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>University of Syiah Kuala</th>
<th>Islamic Institute Ar-Ranir (IAIN)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1974</td>
<td>2087</td>
<td>462</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>2033</td>
<td>496</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>2679</td>
<td>677</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>3057</td>
<td>886</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>3863</td>
<td>1200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>4453</td>
<td>1578</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>4713</td>
<td>1750</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>4973</td>
<td>1922</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>5528</td>
<td>2168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>10617</td>
<td>4576</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>6443</td>
<td>2971</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>7164</td>
<td>3454</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>9327</td>
<td>5750</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>9415</td>
<td>5677</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>8978</td>
<td>6325</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>8686</td>
<td>7516</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>8836</td>
<td>6681</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>8249</td>
<td>6549</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>7662</td>
<td>6416</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>7248</td>
<td>6494</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>6928</td>
<td>6402</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>6306</td>
<td>6903</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>6496</td>
<td>6625</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>6800</td>
<td>7119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>7104</td>
<td>7613</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>8594</td>
<td>7887</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Blanks are unavailable data
Source: Compiled from BPS data.

However, the following sections will demonstrate that the choice of faculties among men and women is directly linked to the demand of a gendered labour market, and consequently reflect the values placed by Acehnese society on women.

Iwan Dzulvan Amir
4.3. Women’s Labour

Another aspect of the limitation of access for women – even those who gained education – to economic resources is directly visible in the market and labour force. In most parts of Aceh, for example, the marketplace is the domain of men (Das Gupta 1962; Siegel, 1969). They shop and barter while the women stay at home to manage the household and raise the children. It has not always been like this. Women used to dominate the marketplace in pre-colonial Aceh (Reid, 1988). When asked about this, my male respondents replied that today’s arrangement is in accordance with Islam. This is justified in terms of control over women’s sexual promiscuity rather than control over domestic economy. Women complained that the limitations on activities outside is about control of money. SRY said that:

Men love to go outdoors not only to avoid domestic chores, but also to control the purse. Women must obey – or at least pretend to – in order to gain men’s money.

Her own experience seemed to exemplify the way in which urban women fare better in regard to mobility and economic access than rural women in Aceh. The city provides more economic opportunities than rural areas, and urban residents are less constrained by social obligations (for historical comparisons see Inkiriwang, 1975 and BPS, 1999). According to a study of migrant women workers conducted in 1993, two thirds of women workers in Banda Aceh claimed that working in the city is better than working in rural areas (Ismail, et.al., 1993:18-21). Few of these women appeared to have migrated to achieve individual aspirations (20.69% respondents) compared to those who migrated following their spouse (44.83%) or family (34.48%). Another survey compared working hours and
income of women in Banda Aceh and its surrounding area (the rural district of Greater Aceh).

Table 4.3.
Women’s Workforce Productivity in Banda Aceh and the Greater Aceh Regency

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Type of Work</th>
<th>Working Hours (Hours/month)</th>
<th>Income (Rp/month)</th>
<th>Hourly Income* (Rp/ Hour)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Banda Aceh</td>
<td>Civil Servant</td>
<td>154.60</td>
<td>466,884.00</td>
<td>3,019.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(city)</td>
<td>Private Sector</td>
<td>154.90</td>
<td>307,333.00</td>
<td>1,984.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Labourer</td>
<td>60.30</td>
<td>37,500.00</td>
<td>621.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average</strong></td>
<td><strong>123.27</strong></td>
<td><strong>270,572.33</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>1,875.30</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greater Aceh</td>
<td>Civil Servant</td>
<td>129.40</td>
<td>332,143.00</td>
<td>2,566.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(rural)</td>
<td>Farmer</td>
<td>97.10</td>
<td>125,059.00</td>
<td>1,287.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Private Sector</td>
<td>129.10</td>
<td>72,857.00</td>
<td>564.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Labourer</td>
<td>35.00</td>
<td>26,835.00</td>
<td>766.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average</strong></td>
<td><strong>97.65</strong></td>
<td><strong>139,223.50</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>1,296.45</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: * Productivity is roughly calculated as income per working hours.
Source: Survey Primary Data (Kasimin, Makmur & Fuaidah: 1998)

Not only are women’s wages higher in Banda Aceh, but also their working hours. Average productivity in the city is 44.64% higher than the rural areas. The most significant increase is that of the working hours and income of women public servants and those in the private sector. The productivity of female civil servants in the city is 17.65% higher than their rural counterparts. The income per hour of women in the private sector in the city is an enormous 251.56% greater than those in the rural areas. This provides a major incentive for entrepreneurial female villagers to move to the city. Interestingly, although the wages of female labourers in the city is higher than in the rural areas, the returns of labour for female labourers in the city is actually 18.88% lower than in the rural areas because their wage increase (39.74% increase) is not proportionate to the increase in their working hours (72.28% increase). Women labourers in the city are being underpaid, it seems. Despite this, one might say that overall the urban environment offered an economic “upgrade” of the same occupation in rural areas. Rural women who want to improve their lot, especially if they
want to work in better paying jobs, must move into the city. This is generally indicated in another 1998 survey of urbanisation to Banda Aceh that showed occupations of migrants moving in from the rural areas to the provincial capital of Banda Aceh.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Job</th>
<th>In Rural Place of Origin</th>
<th>In Banda Aceh (city)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Farmer</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trader</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private sector employee</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civil servant &amp; military</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industry &amp; crafts</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Survey Primary Data (Aliasuddin, Zulham & Ben Hasan: 1998)

Rural Acehnese women are predominantly farmers (see Siegel, 1969; Jayawardena, 1977b; Nurfadhilah, et.al., 1995; Yahya and Kurnaeni, 1997; and Purnomowati, et.al., 1998). Since there are no farmers in the city, those women who want to earn income must take up other occupations. Non-farmer men, however, usually never change occupations. Civil servants and military employees are usually promoted to city assignments. Traders – men and women – merely change their base of operation from rural to city. Only new entrants to the urban job market usually go into the private sector, industry and services as they provide relatively higher occupational status than becoming a farmer (returning to rural areas) or being unemployed. Education has a strong influence on the type of occupation these migrants have in the city. The same survey indicated that a majority of these migrants have a high level of education. Those with little or no formal education stayed in the rural areas.
Table 4.5.
Education of Rural-Urban Migrants in Aceh
(Male and female)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary School (SD)</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior High School (SMP)</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School (SMA) Dropout</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School (SMA) Graduate</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University/Academy</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Survey Primary Data (Aliasuddin, Zulham & Ben Hasan: 1998)

How do women fare in the increasingly urbanised Aceh? If one uses the general pattern of the survey above, in order to have better access to economic resources, women must have access to higher education and if they live in rural areas they must also move to the urban areas. There are other surveys of women working (not just migrants) in Banda Aceh that seem to confirm this pattern.

Table 4.6.
Education of Women Workers in Banda Aceh

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary School (SD)</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
<td>21.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior High School (SMP)</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
<td>42.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School (SMA) Graduate</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>34.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University/Academy</td>
<td>37.9%</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Survey Primary Data (Nurfadhilah, et.al.: 1995; Purnomowati, Abdullah & Shodiq: 1998)

In the bureaucratic-minded New Order Indonesia, the more lucrative formal sector demanded higher qualifications, which explained the drastic low-level of primary and junior high graduate workers in the formal sector. A 1998 survey on the women in the city of Banda Aceh and the region of Greater Aceh indicated that women do not perceive their domestic responsibilities as an obstacle to a career, rather it is a lack of education and vocational skills that hold them back.

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Table 4.7.  
Women’s Perception of Major Obstacles in Obtaining Work in Aceh*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Housework</th>
<th>Lack of Skills</th>
<th>Both</th>
<th>Don’t Know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Banda Aceh (city)</td>
<td>8.75%</td>
<td>18.75%</td>
<td>6.25%</td>
<td>16.25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greater Aceh (rural)</td>
<td>6.25%</td>
<td>30.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>13.75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15.00%</td>
<td>48.75%</td>
<td>6.25%</td>
<td>30.00%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Answers to the question “What is the main obstacle to finding work?”
Source: Survey Primary Data (Kasimin, Marmur & Fuaidah: 1998)

In order to be a part of the formal economic sector, women need to work harder to gain post-primary education. Women I interviewed did not perceive systemic discrimination against them. They expressed belief in equal opportunity in the workplace. RHN, a middle-aged female academic, described women’s leadership prospects as such:

Women are just as capable as men in any line of work. ....
The reason there are few women leaders is that very few women would step forward to compete for the position.

This self-blame is considered by feminist theorists as part and parcel of the discriminative system itself as a means to keep women away from political positions.

The horizontal and vertical segregation of both men and women in the workforce affects women’s access to political power. Horizontally, women are concentrated in fewer occupations than men and in jobs where women are the majority of workers; most are not occupations from which political candidates are traditionally recruited. ... Vertically, women are concentrated in part-time, temporary, non-organised, lower-status, lower-paying, and less powerful positions. (Peterson & Runyan, 1999:90-91).
Women's structural disadvantage in the labour market translates into their having fewer resources, less status, and less experience in "wielding" power when competing with men for political office.\textsuperscript{38}

Higher education grew in importance in increasing the number of women looking for a job, and improving women's chances of gaining employment, as well as the ability to migrate in order to work. Women who have university degree are more likely to seek a job (graph 4.6.a.) and more likely to be placed in a job (graph 4.6.b.) than those who do not have a degree.

\textbf{Graph 4.6.a.}
\textit{Sex Ratio of Job Seekers in Aceh (>1.00 More Women, <1.00 More Men)}

- Non-University Graduate Job Seeker
- University Graduate Job Seeker

Note: \textcircled{●} Circed point (steep slopes and peaks indicate that the number is in doubt (see Introduction).

Source: Compiled from BPS data.

\textsuperscript{38} In Indonesia nothing reflected this more than the ascent of President Megawati Sukarnoputri. Her main asset in becoming the leader of the largest Indonesian political party, the PDIP, is her family tie to a man, her father Sukarno, who was the founding father of Indonesia. Her first candidacy failed because of opposition among the Indonesian political elite, presented in the media as due to her gender. Her critics also cite reasons like lack of political experience, intellectual inferiority, and religious credential. Only after a political crisis during the rule of her predecessor, President Abdurrahman Wahid, did she become president through unconventional means.

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Graph 4.6.b. Sex Ratio of Job Seekers Who Are Placed in Jobs in Aceh (>1.00 More Women, <1.00 More Men)

Source: Compiled from BPS data.

Graph 4.6.c. Sex Ratio of Job Seekers Who Are Placed in Jobs But Have to Move to A Different Region in Aceh (>1.00 More Women, <1.00 More Men)

Source: Compiled from BPS data.

INONG ACEH
In recent years – as shown in graphs 4.6.a., 4.6.b. and 4.6.c. – the number of women seeking jobs even surpassed that of men (sex ratio greater than 1.00). However, these numbers do not reveal the traditional gender arrangements that remain a powerful constraint for women in entering the paid workforce. First, access to jobs outside the home does not immediately mean women will have reduced responsibility for housework. There is also an indication that men would not give up existing public-domestic division of labour. A survey of women's daily activities in Banda Aceh and its surrounding area revealed that women continue to contribute the largest amount of unpaid housework despite their dual role as co-breadwinners (Kasimin, Makmur & Fuaidah: 1998). Men spend almost all of their time outside the home while women's activities are spent predominantly at home:

Table 4.8.
Women's Daily Activities in Banda Aceh and the Greater Aceh Area

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Work</th>
<th>Domestic Work (Hours)</th>
<th>Paid Work (Hours)</th>
<th>Social Activities (Hours)</th>
<th>Other Activities* (Hours)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Banda Aceh (city)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civil Servant</td>
<td>4.60</td>
<td>7.40</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>11.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private Sector</td>
<td>3.90</td>
<td>7.20</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>12.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labourer</td>
<td>4.60</td>
<td>6.20</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>12.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average</strong></td>
<td><strong>4.37</strong></td>
<td><strong>6.93</strong></td>
<td><strong>0.53</strong></td>
<td><strong>12.20</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greater Aceh (rural)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmer</td>
<td>4.60</td>
<td>8.00</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>10.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civil Servant</td>
<td>6.10</td>
<td>7.30</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>9.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private Sector</td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>8.70</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>9.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labourer</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>6.30</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>12.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average</strong></td>
<td><strong>5.43</strong></td>
<td><strong>7.58</strong></td>
<td><strong>0.68</strong></td>
<td><strong>10.35</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Include sleeping, praying, bathing, resting, etc.
Source: Survey Primary Data (Kasimin, Makmur & Fuaidah: 1998)

Note that the survey above shows that there is no significant difference between the average hours spent working (domestic or paid) by women in the city and the villages of the Greater Aceh district. Significant differences (almost two hours on average) exist in how they spent their free time.
time (other activities). What the survey does not reveal is the breakdown of how the women of the city spend this extra time. The wage differences shown earlier in table 4.3. indicate that rural women earn less (lower productivity average) than urban women. In addition, some urban women spend their extra time to earn additional income through informal, non-wage activities or entrepreneurship such as door-to-door sales, arisan (rotating credit) and money-lending. I have not been able to find similar studies conducted on men, therefore I cannot make a comparative analysis about the relative situation of men and women. However, my encounters with male respondents indicated they feel threatened by women’s economic independence. In a limited job market like Aceh, adding extra competition is threatening. The arguments they used are moralising (e.g. the sexual promiscuity issue) as well as religious (e.g. men and women are destined to be biologically different hence suited to different jobs).

4.4. Higher Education and the Gendered Labour Market

The second constraint on women in entering the paid workforce is that the official numbers hide the fact that the job market remains sex-segmented. As a general rule, unemployment rates are especially high for women (Karl, 1995:47-48). Women in their primary role of family manager confront a variety of pressures both inside and outside of the domestic sphere. Maintaining a household remains their primary identity and profession (Seager, 1997:70).
Graph 4.7.
Number of Job Seekers in Aceh as Registered in the Department of Manpower

Source: Compiled from BPS data.

Although the specific jobs assigned to women and men vary cross-culturally, "women's work" worldwide is associated not only with lower status and pay but also with less power than "men's work."

Traditional stereotypes work against gender equality in the workplace because they help to promote the idea that women and men are suited for different kinds of work—and that the jobs for which women are best suited are the least powerful, lowest-paying ones. (Lips, 1991:159)

Aceh is no exception as some jobs are considered as male jobs and others female. For example, professions like construction work, public transportation, and other physically demanding jobs are considered male jobs, while jobs like shop keeping, book keeping, and secretarial work are considered female.

Despite claims—especially from women activists—that men and women are equally capable in any kind of work, the tendency remains for Acehnese women to prepare themselves for "nurturing roles" hence their

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preference for the teaching and medical faculties as shown in the graph 4.8.

It is also interesting that the relatively new faculty of science also attracts a significant number of women, in contrast with the more vocational male-dominated engineering faculty. This may have to do with the demands of a gendered labour market that puts engineering graduates into perceived "male jobs" like machinery or construction work, while research in science is considered as "soft works", hence socially acceptable work for women.

Graph 4.8.
Female Students in the University of Syiah Kuala

Note: ○ Circled point (steep slopes and peaks indicate that the number is in doubt (see Introduction).
Source: Compiled from BPS data.
During the New Order development era, there was a great emphasis on higher education that focused on technological skills specifically targeted at the heavy industry job market. In the early days of the New Order, this demand marginalised people of certain types of educational background – specifically religious education – in the job market. For example, only in the mid-80s did the regional government declare that religious school graduates were were qualified to take teaching positions in government schools.

The government university of Syiah Kuala (Unsyiah) gained more female students in recent years – some faculties more than others – while the Islamic university maintained its numbers. The main reason is that many young men abandoned religious education in favour of state education. There are several things that needed to be explained regarding the relationship between university education and the job market in Aceh. Unsyiah graduates – male or female – are favoured in the job market especially in the formal sector while IAIN graduates' job prospects are limited to teaching (or preaching) positions as well as entrepreneurship. Only in recent years has the local government declared equal employment opportunity for both types of university graduates. In addition, most female IAIN graduates seemed to enter the university not with the goal of a career in mind but rather to raise better children (for details see Boender, 1997) hence their interest in the perceived "nurture" oriented faculties.
The most popular faculties among women are the tarbiyah (education) and adab (culture) faculties. The dakwa (preaching), sariyah (law) and usuluddin (epistemology) faculties have traditionally been viewed as the domain of men with the female participation rate usually below 50%. When the diploma programs in tarbiyah (education) and adab (culture) were opened in the 1990s, over 70% of the students were women mainly because these programs will supposedly aid students in raising children (see Boender, 1997). Furthermore, as the following graphs show, the importance of having a university education in finding a job was at its peak.
in the early 1980s during the oil boom in Aceh. Today, however, there is apparently only a small advantage for university graduates when finding employment in Aceh.

Graph 4.10.
Job Seekers That Receive Jobs (Total Male and Female)

Source: Compiled from BPS data.

Graph 4.11.
Job Seekers Who Obtain Jobs (Female)

Source: Compiled from BPS data.

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In many countries, women are gaining formal-sector employment due to their low wage as well as their reliable (often unprotected by workers' union) and vulnerable positions (United Nations, 1995:xxii). The graphs above show that although throughout the years the proportion of job seekers who obtain work is in decline, the proportion of female job seekers who obtain work is increasing. It is difficult to assess whether or not this is a gain for women or not because the data above reflect job seekers only in the formal sector. The trend also shows little difference between those with or without university education. More women are contributing to the economy, especially married women. The dual income family has become quite common in the city. During my stay in Aceh, I did not find a married woman in Banda Aceh who was not earning an income, either by employment or entrepreneurship. The ideology of women's place is at home remained strong both among men and women (e.g. see Leigh, 1992: 339). Activities that earn income would strongly accommodate this ideology. Although there are no detailed statistics on female employment and the unemployment rate in Aceh, available figures tell part of the story as long as household-related work is not counted. Indeed, most economic activities among housewives in Banda Aceh revolve around informal communal activities (e.g. arisan,\textsuperscript{39} house-to-house sales, catering).

The independence of a family in urban areas from its non-immediate kin is mainly due to the increasing economic independence of married couples. A survey of working women in Banda Aceh (Purnomowati,

\textsuperscript{39} Rotating lottery usually conducted within housing communities, office and department groups, etc.)
Abdullah & Shodiq, 1998) attributed that trend to the dual income family
grew out of the rising costs of raising children. There is no doubt that there
are some women who have self-aspirations to work, however, the dominant
motivator remain the social drive for women to marry and build a family.
Education and work are still geared to support this goal. Formal education
is seen by most parents as a way to postpone marriage, especially for
daughters. Once married, women are no longer expected to continue
formal education. This is further emphasised by family and society once
women have children. Married women with dependent children have no
choice but to work to support the children. With new expenses like
schooling and mortgages, married couples can no longer depend on the
generosity of the wali hukum. Married women whose children have grown
up (are no longer dependent) can relax a bit and they are polarised either
into spending less working hours (retiring), or use more time to work. The
survey showed that most wives (see graphs below) contributed between
25%-50% of total family income. This shows a significant difference from the
workload of women in the rural areas, which – as the next section will show
– involves predominantly agricultural activities bringing in the lion’s share
of family income. The same survey (Purnomowati, Abdullah & Shodiq,
1998) also showed choices of spouse were still tied to the economic
conditions of the husband, and the income of husbands and wives were
corresponding to each other. Seldom is there the case of a wealthy
husband married to a wife of low income or vice versa.
Graph 4.12.
Wife’s Contribution to Household Income in Relation to Working Hours

- □ Wife Working <4 hours per day
- □ Wife Working 4-8 hours per day
- □ Wife Working >8 hours per day

Source: Survey Primary Data (Purnomowati, Abdullah & Shodiq: 1998)
Graph 4.13.
Wife's Contribution to Household Income in Relation to Husband's Income

Source: Survey Primary Data (Purnomowati, Abdullah & Shodiq: 1998)
This survey as well as other data presented in this chapter are but profile snapshots of the economic condition of women in Aceh, especially in the cities. It shows that women in Aceh are relative latecomers to the modern wage economy due to their ties to the land and its agricultural tradition. Nevertheless, for the past decade their role in the urban scene has increased and as such it demands more representation in the political sphere. The next chapter will expand on these snapshots by profiling women's representation in political leadership and decision making positions in Aceh.
Chapter 5:

LEADING
ACEHNESSE
WOMEN
Chapter Five:

LEADING ACEHNESE WOMEN

The political system of the New Order era systematically marginalised women’s roles in politics, including Acehnese women. This system has been critically examined by various authors (e.g. Indijah, 1983; Nurhadi, 1983; Blackwood, 1995; Feillard, 1997; Siapno, 1997, etc) all of whom concluded that women’s roles were under-represented and unacknowledged in the political arena due to the militaristic and patriarchal political system. Indonesian women in general seemed to suffer the systematic “domestication of women”, while these studies documented the various “resistance movements” to such institutionalised marginalisation. The following section will show how such a system operated in Aceh.

5.1. The Islamic and Nationalist Obstacles

Masculinities and femininities vary along the dimensions of race/ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, ability, and age. The resulting variations of the expectations of gendered political participation matter significantly in terms of who actually enters/succeeds in politics. We are better able to explain gendered political participation if we look at the interaction of stereotypes and gender-differentiated living situations. This section will explore the stereotypes, concerning leadership positions in Aceh as well as examining the related gendered political participation that goes with it.

Although the post-New Order witnessed a boom in high-profile women’s activism, women’s roles in Indonesia have still changed little.
During my fieldwork in Aceh, I found that while there were plenty of women NGO figures talking bravely about the need for equal access to formal decision making, but resistance to the concept was still strongly held among both men and women.

In my observation of three high-profile public meetings which involved women’s organisations, the issue of gender equality was discussed with reluctance and great care. On one hand there was a certain degree of suspicion and uncertainty in embracing activism perceived to carry a "Western agenda." On the other hand, the women’s organisations tried hard to appear non-oppositional – but rather reformist – in regard to hardline religious leadership, because to appear as "anti-Islam" in any degree is the worst “public relations” blunder for any organisation in Aceh. There is a general apologetic attitude (at least in public) among women regarding conservative and hardline patriarchal-Islamic behaviour. Not a single women activist would ponder facing this attitude head-on. One may argue that they are being strategic, however, most of the statements I heard indicated genuine reluctance to question mainstream attitudes toward gender relations. This perception is partially confirmed by a recent survey on Acehnese women’s entrepreneurship, where despite the track record of most Acehnese clerics’ reluctance to support working women, nearly 85% of its respondents still claimed that religion and culture actually encouraged women’s entrepreneurship while only 15% respondents declined to comment (Halimatussakdiah, Yurnalis & Hasan, 2000:25).

A major reason for the relatively patriarchal condition of Aceh is tied to the New Order rule of Indonesia as well as increasingly dominant

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patriarchal Islam. One of the specific local causes of such a condition is that decades of Ulama-dominated politics left Aceh with a male-dominated political system. Traditional religious belief systems and institutions play an important role in perpetuating images of women that deny them leadership positions. All too frequently women are portrayed as either the source of evil (e.g. biduen pacah or the uncontrollable sexual whore) or the model of saintliness (e.g. dara meukureubeuen or the self-sacrificing virgin). Neither is there an appropriate identity for political leadership. It is these images that the women activists in Aceh strive to overturn. They succumb to overt display of “Muslim-ness” (e.g. wearing the jilbab). Their use of Islamic symbolism is an attempt to gain political legitimation without confronting outright the existing male-dominated Islamic establishment. For example, most Muslim women activists in Aceh whom I encountered have employed “textual re-interpretation” tactics pioneered by Muslim feminists such as Fatima Mernissi (1987) and Rifat Hassan (1987). They questioned traditional interpretations of the Islamic holy texts which they considered heavily male-biased, and offered more female-friendly interpretations (often introduced as a more historically contextual interpretation) of the holy texts. Interestingly, the demands of these women were focused solely on the domestic sphere, such as an end to violence against women, an end to poverty, increased education, etc. Save for a minority of the activists, in general there were no demands for increased political representation. There were widespread dismissal of the idea of affirmative action plans. There seemed to be a consensual confidence in equal opportunity to leadership positions.
The "textual re-interpretation" tactic has shown limited success. First, as long as the holy texts contain literal meanings that favour men over women, contextual reinterpretations will always be vulnerable to challenges on authority (e.g. human reasoning vs the actual word of God). At best such efforts will be relegated into an "hypothetical" status or as another supplementary religious reinvigoration project. At its worst, the reinterpretation might offend or cause discomfort among the majority of the community, thus alienating its proponents. It also provides an opening for another reverse-Othering process\(^{40}\) which would discourage future moderate reformist voices for fear of being accused as a "bad Muslim."\(^{41}\)

Second, without significant support by the male religious authorities, any effort at religious reform will always be stunted and never become an actual movement. The authorities' support is therefore vital especially at the early stages of any reform effort when fair gender representation in leadership is the primary aim. Without cultural prestige female power is not fully legitimate and can only be exercised in hidden/distorted/manipulative ways (Ortner, 1996:142). At this time, legitimate power – which is based on the monopoly over textual interpretation – is dominated by male Acehnese Ulama. Re-interpretation of holy texts may be seen as a challenge to their authority and would antagonise them rather than recruit them to the cause. In chapter six, I will describe how women activists recognised this. They

\(^{40}\) This was discussed in earlier chapters regarding the construction of the Acehnese Islamic image, as well as in a separate article of mine (see Amir, 2002).

\(^{41}\) Indeed, during my participation in a seminar on gender (see chapter 6), a conservative Ulama panelist blatantly accused other Ulama panelists who endorse feminism of "not knowing what they were talking about because of lack of understanding of the texts." All of these Ulama panelists were men.
recruited feminist Ulama to help spread their cause, but created new problems.

Third, social scientists ranging from Spencer, Marx, and Durkheim have always acknowledged that religion both influences and is influenced by the socio-economic conditions of a community. Re-interpretation efforts often forget that religion is also an indicator of the socio-economic conditions of society. Militancy and radicalism in religion – two religious tendencies that are often hostile to textual re-interpretation efforts – always occur in times of rapid social change. Over-reliance on symbolic resistance can actually have the opposite effect as in the case of GAM and the government using imagery of women as a propagandist battleground (see chapter two).

These criticisms merely serve to demonstrate the complex relationship between religious symbolism and political structure (see King, 1995). With minimal political representation, any gender reform movement of religion through symbolic contestation will have a limited if not minimal result (see articles in Bodman and Tohidi, 1998; as well as Jeffery and Basu, 1998). Indeed, the vast majority of religious institutions exclude women from top leadership roles. No matter how this exclusionary practice is legitimised, it sends a clear message that reinforces the gender stereotype that women are not equal to men and that they either cannot be trusted with, or lack the qualifications for positions of authority and power. Gender discourse that remains within such a framework run the risk of reinforcing the misogynist aspect of the religion it sought to criticise (Roald, 1998). Only an outright demand for more women in political leadership would have a
chance to change such a system. While women activists still refuse to do this, gender equality in Aceh will remain a contentious – if not threatening – issue.

Religious beliefs also interact with and may reinforce other cultural sources of gender stereotyping. The structural separation of the public and private has gendered consequences. Religious, educational and judicial institutions tend to reproduce the ideological and gendered division of public and private. The role of religion and education in this process has been shown earlier. The role of judicial institutions in maintaining this division is quite simply, a matter of numerical representation. Throughout Aceh history, the closest Aceh leadership came to meaningful female judicial representation was during the rule of Sultanah Safiatuddin Syah (died 1675) who tried to include women in the legislative branch of her government. Of the 73 members of Balai Majelis Mahkamah Rakyat (House of the People’s Court) there were 17 women (23.28%). This arrangement ended swiftly even before the fall of the last queen of Aceh, Kamalat Zainatuddin Syah (1699). The following section will show how this trend – that the gains in women’s political power that were secured at great cost in one period of history are often abandoned, renounced, or traded away in other periods (Peterson & Runyan, 1999:79) – is still happening today in Aceh.

5.2. Women’s Involvement in State Governance

We have seen earlier how the universities have “prepared” women for the workforce. Just as the university preferences are gendered, women are consequently underrepresented in certain professions that historically have
been associated with achieving or maintaining political power (law, military, career civil service, big business). Globally, women are notoriously absent at the top levels of these professions (also a recruiting ground for political leadership). In international organisations, women’s roles have increased (though not significantly). In 1994 only 24% of the UN delegates were women, a gradual improvement from 4% in 1949.\textsuperscript{42} Comparatively, women’s leadership in Indonesia is no exception to this improvement. Women elected to national legislatures shape relations through policy issues and their participation on legislative committees (Peterson & Runyan, 1999:76).

Not only are there very few women “at the top” but even those who succeed in achieving positions of power remain largely gender-invisible in conventional accounts of how power works in the world (Peterson & Runyan, 1999:78). This invisibility is partly because so few women appear in the most powerful decision-making positions. But it is also because women’s underrepresentation in political office and leadership positions is linked to globally pervasive gender-differentiated patterns where gender socialisation, situational constraints and structural obstacles work together to favor men (Randall, 1987:83-94). These patterns discriminate against women as candidates for and effective holders of political office. In short,

\textsuperscript{42} The highest percentage of women delegates is from the Caribbean (29%) and Latin America (24%). The lowest is from Eastern Europe (5%) and Southern and Western Asia as well as Oceania (9%). Although such low numbers in the diplomatic circle has influenced the dynamics of international politics, it is less problematic than the fact that no women had been appointed head of any of the 89 autonomous or specialised UN agencies as of 1995. Bodies like the World Bank, the IMF, the WTO or the ICJ continue to be male dominated (Peterson & Runyan, 1999).
the politics in most parts of the world are systemically discriminatory. Indonesia – and by current extension Aceh – is no exception.

The Indonesian political system uses a party representation system in the legislative bodies. As a result, women's representation in the legislature depends heavily on party nominations, which are already male-dominated. The parties usually have some sort of tokenistic “women's division” to cater for the women voters, a pool for women candidates of the urutan sepatu position (the bottom of the party candidate's preferential list). In Aceh, past elections of members for the people's representative assembly (DPR) have resulted in insignificant levels of women's representation. In the latest election of 1999, of the 14 parties that gained a seat in the regional people's representative assembly (DPRD) of Aceh there were only four parties which include women representatives. These were two major Islamic parties (PPP and PAN) and two major secular parties (PDIP and GOLKAR). Each elected only one female member. Proportionally, these parties' female representation is well below the goal established in the 1992 study by the UN Division for the Advancement of Women (UNDAW). The study determined that a critical mass of about 30-35% women in political representation is necessary for women to advocate with certainty their needs and priorities (Karl, 1995:64). With women's representation in the parties of PPP (6.66%) PDIP (14.29%) PAN (10%) and GOLKAR (11.11%) there is relatively little opportunity for women. In Aceh it is obvious that the critical mass is still unreachable.

43 These numerical improvements are mainly due to the quota resulting from the lobbying by the Koalisi Perempuan (Women’s Coalition) before the post-Suharto era 1999 election. It is Iwan Dzulvan Amir
The graphs below show that during the past three elections women’s representation actually decreased, which also reflected a global political trend. Around the world the percentage of women in legislative bodies steadily increased from 1975 into the early 1990s but has been declining in recent years. Women’s representation dropped from 29% in the mid 1980s to 7% in 1994 (Sivard, 1995:37-38). There seems to be a narrowing of the window of opportunity for female politicians. The graphs below also show that while in Aceh the percentage of female representatives is in decline, their quality in terms of level of education is actually improving in the last three elections. The men’s education level remained relatively the same.

![Graph 5.1. Female Representation in the People's Representative Assembly in Aceh](image)

Source: DPRD Aceh

also worth noting that the first female presidential candidate Megawati Sukarnoputri – whose party PDIP won the majority – was outmaneuvered and blocked from the position at the time by the predominantly male politicians. The male Muslim party leaders at the time expressed concerns over her gender. She gained the vice presidency but in July 2001 was finally appointed president when the “acceptable” male alternative – President Abdurrahman Wahid – was impeached by the parliament.
Graph 5.2.
Male Representation in the People's Representative Assembly in Aceh

Educational Background

- High School Graduate
- Undergraduate
- Postgraduate
- PhD

Source: DPRD Aceh

It is important to note at this point that all the representations in these elections were appointed by the political parties, which means that they did not necessarily "representative" of the electorates. Voters voted for parties. The parties chose their representations and in most cases, women are placed at the bottom of the candidate list (nicknamed urutan sepatu or number in preference list that resemble shoe size) thus least likely to be appointed if the seat allocation received by her party was few.

Women do not lack interest in or motivation for political action. Numerous feminist studies have concluded that:

women are as likely (if not more likely) to work for political causes or candidates as are men. (Lips, 1991:191)
The daily socialisation into appropriate feminine behaviour that makes women less likely than men to pursue traditionally defined political activities. Socialisation into appropriate masculine behaviour makes men more likely than women to identify with political activities. Acehnese studies as early as Siegel (1969) have determined that Acehnese men belong to the public sphere embodied in religious institutions (e.g. the meunasah and mosques) while women are domestic creatures. The influence of the more male-oriented values of Islam – which came into dominance since the 1950s – reinforced this division (Bakti, 1993; Yeoh, 1994). The New Order government encouraged this division, mainly because it fit well with the militaristic concept of family structure (Suryakusuma, 1996; Robinson, 2000). Most importantly, history hides this sort of systemic imbalance by glorifying the individual. Heroines such as described in earlier sections have been counterproductive for the gender equality movement. These arguments are well known among the women activists whom I met in Aceh, such as SRY, who complained that:

People – especially women – do not seem to realise that the heroism of characters like Cut Nya Dhien or Cut Meutia grew out of necessity and only after their dominant males such as husband or father failed to continue the struggle. They fail to see that Aceh has been a sexist society even back then, let alone today.

These heroic images are repeated by the government (especially through the history schoolbooks) as well as advocated by other Acehnese elite. By elevating female icons, Acehnese women are expected to adopt a dismissive attitude to trivialise the women’s movement by naturalising existing gender relationship. These individual achievements hide the fact
that in formal political decision making institutions, women remain grossly underrepresented.

The pattern of male dominance by numerical preponderance in political institutions is ever-present in small local organisations all the way to powerful international economic institutions.\textsuperscript{44} Whereas women are fairly equally represented in entry-level grades – where competitive examinations determine hiring – their low representation at higher levels is due in part to recruitment practices that favour men (Peterson & Runyan, 1999:81).

Such practices also exist in Aceh. The following graphs show the demography of civil servants employed in the city of Banda Aceh (Source: Nurfadhilah, et.al., 1995) in which male civil servants outnumber female civil servants by more than three to one. Few women make it to the higher ranking and better paid positions (ranks III and IV) and most of them are stuck in the middle rank (II). This situation may be compared with that of male civil servants who are reasonably dispersed between upper-middle and middle ranks (II and III). Further breakdown of the figures reveals that more lucrative departments\textsuperscript{45} – such as regional income and regional planning departments – are heavily dominated by men. The previously discussed labour market segmentation is also evident. Women civil servants are concentrated in “nurturing” positions (e.g. health and

\textsuperscript{44} For example, in the UN, women have always constituted the majority of clerical (general services) workers but the minority of professional staff (Timothy, 1995).

\textsuperscript{45} Also known as departemen basah (wet department), these are departments where chances for employees of obtaining extra income is substantially higher than others. Lobbyists are far more willing to provide “soft money” for its officials to obtain government projects.

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agriculture departments) as well as auxiliary positions (e.g. secretaries in the mayor's office).

Graph 5.3.a.
Civil Servants in Banda Aceh by Sex and Rank

Source: DPRD Aceh

Graph 5.3.b.
Civil Servants in Indonesia by Sex and Rank

Source: Compiled from BPS data
Reaffirming earlier conclusions, the following graphs show the importance of formal education in obtaining a civil service job. University graduates dominate the higher ranking positions. This is a practice that exists throughout Indonesia. Women have to strive harder to obtain these high positions because there are still too few of them in the workforce. Earlier sections demonstrate how female university graduates in Aceh have increased – even surpassed male graduates in some faculties – in the past decades. However, this does not translate into an equal rate of acceptance in the civil servant corps. The number of female university graduates compared with female civil servants in general is proportionally less than the male counterpart. They comprise one-fifth of the total female civil servants while male university graduates comprise a quarter of the total male civil servants. Such a discrepancy indicates some sort of discrimination in the recruitment of civil servants in Banda Aceh.

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Considering these are people who run the government of Aceh, women's representation is kept to a relative minimum.

**Graph 5.5.a.**
Civil Servants in Banda Aceh by Sex and Education

Source: Compiled from BPS data.

**Graph 5.5.b.**
Civil Servants in Indonesia by Sex and Education

Source: Compiled from BPS data.
Unlike graphs 5.3.a and 5.3.b, which show significant difference between local and national patterns of organisational ranks, graphs 5.5.a. and 5.5.b. show little difference in the distribution of educational background of the civil servants in Aceh and at the national level. However, they do show that Acehnese female civil servants lag behind the national standard in terms of education.

Graph 5.6.a.
Civil Servants in Banda Aceh by Rank and Education: Male

Graph 5.6.b.
Civil Servants in Banda Aceh by Rank and Education: Female

Source: Compiled from BPS data.

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Graphs 5.6.a. and 5.6.b. also indicate a potential discriminative recruitment practice. On a level playing field (i.e. no working experience, low educational background) – where inequality is supposedly at its lowest – the primary school educated male entrants still outnumber the female entrants by about 10 to 1.

5.3. Women’s Leadership in the Private Sector

But what of the private sector? The industrial boom\textsuperscript{46} initiated in the 1980s should have had a positive impact on the women of the region. Unfortunately this was not the case. The following graphs provide the characteristics of the people employed in five key large-scale industrial companies that operate in Aceh.

Graph 5.7.
Private Sector Employees in Five Aceh Key Industries by Sex

![Graph showing private sector employees by sex]

Source: Compiled from BPS data.

\textsuperscript{46} The discovery of oil and natural gas in Aceh in the 1980s started a major industrialization of Aceh. Today Aceh has five major industrial complexes (oil, natural gas, timber, paper, cement, and minerals) and numerous smaller supporting industries.
Each company has proportionally fewer female employees – who may not necessarily be Acehnese women – than civil servants of any branch of the civil service in Banda Aceh. Heavy industry is a male dominated venture.

Graph 5.8.
Private Sector Employees in Five Aceh Key Industries by Rank

Female
Total % of data: 7.897%
Standard Deviation = 0.86
N=435
Pearson Chi-Sq. = 108.233

Male
Total % of data: 92.103%
Standard Deviation = 1.01
N = 5073
Pearson Chi-Sq. = 1520.161

Positions (left=lowest, right=highest)

■ PT AAF □ PT PIM □ PT ARUN □ MOBIL OIL □ PT KKA

Note: Positions are sorted by rank. Leadership positions are Direktur Utama (CEO), Direktur (Director), Ko. Kamp (Co-ordinator), Kadep/Karo (Head of Department), and Kabag/Kabid. (Head of Section). Secretarial and Support staff are Kasie (Chief of Secretaries), Karu (Chief of Chambers), Lakma (Executive Manager), Laktu (Executive of Chambers), Lakda (Daily Executor), and Pemla (Junior Executor).

Source: Compiled from BPS data.

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The breakdown of the ranks (graph 5.8.) indicates that in addition to vast numerical inequality in employment (7.897% female and 92.103% male), the distribution of these industries' employees are quite different. The male employees distribution leans further toward the lower end of the ranks (SD=1.01) than the female employees distribution which are concentrated on the middle and lower ranks (SD=0.86). This means that while men have a relatively "normal" promotion process,\textsuperscript{47} women are stuck in the middle ranks. Women are far less likely to reach the high-paying and more powerful positions. One might say that women in these industrial companies are blocked by an Acehnese version of the "glass ceiling."

5.4. The Practice of Discouragement

Systemic discrimination is not limited to the companies themselves but also to the traditionalist values that exist in Aceh. The division of male and female work at home and in the workforce is detrimental to women's ability to choose economically lucrative jobs. Social sanctions such as shaming women who work in male dominated jobs\textsuperscript{48} also discourages women from pursuing a career, or even education. Aside from sanctions, practices of rationalisation also exist, which was illustrated quite bluntly by RHN who mimicked someone from her village:

\textsuperscript{47} Bear in mind that they are far more numerous than female civil servants one to eleven with a sex ratio of 0.085748.

\textsuperscript{48} The most widely used practice is accusations of sexual promiscuity (e.g. loose woman imagery) or irresponsibility (e.g. neglecting the family).
[Addressing a young female student] Why bother to study so high? In the end you’ll just end up in the kitchen anyway. Best you learn how to manage a household.

These attitudes are part of the feminine identity formation. It is inextricable from cultural expectations that motherhood is the primary role of women. Women’s domestic role is seen as antithetical to public sphere activities. Traits associated with political efficacy – ambition, aggression, competitiveness, authority – are distinctively masculine (and/or un-feminine). Thus, feminine traits – passive, dependent, domestic, engaged in meeting private and familial needs – are by definition inappropriate for any political actors who are expected to be active, autonomous, public oriented, and engaged in meeting collective needs. The only licence that Acehnese women have to engage in politics in such an environment is if their activities are an extension of household and/or other “nurturing” endeavours. Hence, their dominance in their roles as guardians of Acehnese identity and culture (teaching professions), “healing” roles (activism in humanitarian “non-profit” organisations), and mediatory roles (activism in lobby groups).
Chapter 6: INTERACTIONS: THREE SAMPLES
Chapter Six:

INTERACTIONS: THREE SAMPLES

This chapter will specifically provide an analysis of three public meetings in which I participated during my fieldwork. The previous five chapters provide the context for the interactions described in these three meetings.

6.1. Setting Common Grounds

The first meeting I wish to analyse is a one-day workshop in which I participated on 16 December 2000. Its theme was "Demokrasi dan Keadilan Gender Dalam Syariat Islam" (Democracy and Gender Justice in Islamic Law). The workshop was funded by KOMNAS-Perempuan (National Commission on Women), a national women's rights organisation, in collaboration with PUSHAM Unsyiah (Pusat Studi Hak Azasi Manusia Universitas Syiahkuala or the Centre of Human Rights Study at the University of Syiahkuala). It was set up in response to the upcoming implementation of Syariah law (Islamic law) in Aceh by the local government. I was fortunate enough to be a part of the organising committee and as such was able to capture the members' expectations before the event as well as their assessment of the event afterwards.

KOMNAS-Perempuan collaborated with PUSHAM to set up this seminar was because they wanted academic credentials to counter the negative images of "LSMs" (Lembaga Swadaya Masyarakat, Indonesian for
NGOs) currently established in Aceh⁴⁹ while PUSHAM needed an activity concerned with the improvement of society to add to its list of accomplishments (no activity, no funding).

Photo 6.1.
Photos of the workshop speakers.

Top left: representatives of the workshop organiser.
Top right: Acehnese Ulama panellists.
Bottom right: non-Acehnese Ulama panellists.
Source: field photos

The committee consisted of at least a dozen volunteers. Most were graduates of the faculty of law, and women aged between 25 and 40 years old. They all had previous experience in gender-related activism. All were Muslim. There were four presenters invited to speak (see photos). They were all distinguished male Ulama. Two were local Acehnese, the other two from South Sulawesi. One was a traditionalist and the others were moderate

⁴⁹ To the detriment of the honest, genuinely hard-working NGOs there is a boom of humanitarian organisations in Aceh (since 1998). At the time of fieldwork, the estimates range between 150 to 300 NGOs. Most of these organisations, according to PUSHAM (and other social commentators I met) as bogus NGOs, which took aid money from foreign donors but do not carry out projects for humanitarian causes in Aceh.
"feminist Ulama." I asked the chief organiser the reason why they invited a panel of only male speakers to address women’s issues and she replied.

This is part of our strategy. Our aim here is to educate people about gender equality within Islam. If we have a woman speaker, most of the audience would have tuned out simply because she would be seen as biased. If we have a male authority on the subject, they would think the issue must be important and therefore they would listen.

I doubted the effectiveness of this strategy for several reasons, but mainly because presenting men to voice women’s concerns may be seen as a symbolic gesture that women truly do not belong in the political sphere. The strategy may actually backfire by perpetuating the image of male dominance rather than promoting gender equality.

Throughout the presentations Islam was presented as non-sexist and very pro-women and it was argued that problems arise only because of misogynist interpretations of the texts. The participants responded cautiously to this argument during question time, focusing rather on the credentials of the speakers as well as questioning the urgency of any project of holy text reinterpretation. The traditionalist panellist invoked the usual alarmist line, preaching about the danger of morally corrupt Western influence on “our women.” It was he who actually drew out the delegates – both male and female – in the audience who feared feminism as a “Westoxification” project.

These Ulama were also feminist scholars. They were educated abroad in universities in Egypt and the USA. They wrote heavily about women in Islam and sought to give the holy texts more female-friendly interpretations.
The delegates were representatives of various NGOs from all over Aceh. Half of them were women. Not all of them were concerned with gender inequality in general, but were more concerned about issues such as child education and morality among youths. The moderator – a seasoned veteran of several gender seminars – had warned the organisers before the workshop began that discussion time could easily degenerate into another “jilbab and headscarf debate.” It certainly appears that she was right. Almost two thirds of discussion time that followed the presentation was devoted to the issue of women’s clothing (including the jilbab issue). At the time this was a main concern because the upcoming Syariah law actually contains passages that suggest Muslims – especially women – could be fined for violating appropriate Muslim dress codes. When the delegates finally discussed the issue of women’s representation in the public sphere, a male delegate summed up the opinion of most conservatives in the workshop:

Politics is a dirty business. Women should not sully themselves in such activities for it would be detrimental to their cause.

Some female delegates actually stood up to support this stand. Only one of the speakers voiced his opposition to this argument. The rest of the discussion diverged from the topic and changed into a networking session where delegates presented their organisations’ causes.

Afterwards, the organisers admitted that the debate could have been handled better. Although they believed that a majority of their objectives – an open discussion on justice in gender relations – had been achieved, the one important topic that was not covered during the discussion was
democracy, which was the first theme mentioned in the title of the seminar. Also, the delegates failed to agree that there was a problem of gender inequality in Aceh. Overall, the one common issue that the delegates agreed upon was that gender relations in Aceh is an issue best left alone.

6.2. Setting Priorities

The second meeting I attended was on 15 January 2001. It was a meeting of various NGOs under Koalisi NGO (NGO Coalition) titled "Dialog Masyarakat Sipil untuk Kondisi Aktual Aceh" (Civilian Dialogue on the Actual Condition of Aceh). Only one-sixth of the audience were women. I met some women activists whom I had interviewed days earlier. They sat together at the back. Not one woman sat in the front near the microphone. Despite its non-provocative title (at least for the government), the meeting actually was a forum to respond to the police chief’s declaration made a few days earlier, which allowed official house searches post-jeda Kemanusiaan II (the second cease fire that expired on 15 January 2001). The meeting started out with the moderator declaring that:

all women’s issues must be put aside since this meeting is about more important matters.

It would appear that the moderator was determined that the inclusion of "women's issues" would risk derailing the discussion, hence it was preemptively denied. The discussion was very much restrained. Speakers were concerned about sharing experiences in the field related to police brutality and the government bureaucratic hostility to NGOs. From the way the discussion went, it was clear to me that this was not a government-friendly meeting.

INONG ACEH
The priorities of the meeting were interesting. The moderator drew up a list of “important points” for the official response from the group to be presented to the chief of police as the person officially responsible for public safety in Aceh. The list included a call for unity under strong leadership among the various NGOs and a call to the international community to pressure the TNI to be more humane in its approach.

At my urging, my women activist friend raised the issue of women to the moderator. The word *perempuan* (the currently appropriate form of “women”) finally made it to number 11 on the list (after two hours of being neglected). The response of one of the male delegates — who, I presume, merely wanted to be polite — was that the military was threatening to step up their campaign of rape within their region of operation. This left no doubt

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as to what was the priority when it came to "women's issues" in that meeting: female delegates were concerned about women's issues in general (including rape) while the male delegates were concerned specifically about the protection of "our women" from rape by the military with no mention of rape committed by Acehnese or GAM. There was no mention of other gender-related issues, such as women as refugee, the extortion of households by the military, domestic violence, or even the imposition of strict Muslim dress code (especially for women) by the government. This certainly mirror the tendency that violence against women were used either as an instrument used in political conflicts, or as a tool to sideline women's aspirations to change their general conditions. Although violence against women is an important issue in gender relations, the male-dominated meeting confined it specifically only within the context of state-sponsored violence. In the meeting the issue of violence against women became a "token issue" thrown in (almost as an afterthought) to satisfy the women activists that their cause was being addressed.

Overall, the meeting was an example of how Acehnese activists view women's problems in Aceh. It was very much gendered. NGOs with male leadership view gender relationship differently from those with female leadership. Nationalism, violence and human rights are the important issues currently tackled by NGOs. Women and gender relations are – much as in the New Order era organisational format – considered to be an add-on to other issues. These are considered specialised issues only handled by "specialists" (women's organisations or organisations led by women). The lack of women's participation is the one important factor contributing to the
lack of recognition of women's issues as an important issue. Women's problems are simply not given high priority.

6.3. Setting the Law

The third meeting I attended was on 29 January 2001. The seminar was titled "Sosialisasi dan Implementasi Syariah Islam di Aceh" (the Socialisation and Implementation of Islamic law in Aceh). The seminar was organised by the Governor thus making it a government event. Out of the dozen presenters and 60-70 delegates, there was only one woman speaker and a dozen women delegates. There were many male Ulama, but very few NGO representatives and only two student activists.

The presenters argued that Syariah Law is a good idea. The delegates, however, argued that Syariah Law was inapplicable because it is impractical and ambiguous. For example, the delegates questioned the enforcement of the Syariah Law. Should punishments be carried out under the qisas (punishment system according to Syariah Law) or the national penal code? The Ulama in the audience seemed to be suspicious of the government motives for wanting to implement this law: was the government trying to make an impression on the Ulama or attempting to take over the role of the Ulama?

Photo 6.3.
Photo of the seminar

Source: field photos
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The interaction between the various mainstream factions in Aceh was rather ambiguous. Ideological differences which were expressed did not correspond with actual interpersonal interactions. For example, Ulama who criticised the feminist academic speaker were actually talking, chatting, and laughing with the lady during breaks. When I asked her about this, she said:

Oh, everybody knows everybody around here. We’ve done this sort of talk many times before so we already know what the other person is going to present anyway.

Although the official intent of the government in conducting this seminar is to gather support from community leaders for the implementation of Syariah law, the method was not intended to change other people’s minds. In spite of the government setting up a forum to discuss the issue of Syariah law, it seemed that the people who participated already had a fixed idea on the issue and did not intend to change it. Women’s issues only appeared once, in a presentation by the only female speaker. The response was one of token resistance voiced by a male Ulama. The whole thing was a performance. This seminar itself was nothing but a formality with a seemingly predetermined outcome. The purpose of the government to bother conducting the seminar seemed to be ritualistic. Indeed, there was something that resembled rituals of wealth redistribution. During the last hour of the seminar a list was distributed for the delegates to sign. It was a confirmation of where to send the delegates’ “attendance fee”. In the past, public approval was usually solicited using other rituals such as buffalo sacrifice, which is still practiced in the villages. In a “modern”
setting the cash-filled amplop ("envelope") is the substitute, which may simply be a practice left over from the New Order era. The fee is supposedly an incentive for support of the policy or new law; so to all intents and purposes, this was still a New Order event. Considering it to be a New Order style exercise, there is little wonder the participants, both speakers and audience, were predominantly male.

6.4. Comparisons

These three meetings provide an insight into how women's issues are viewed among the political elites in Aceh. The sentiments ranged from a cautious and suspicious stand on the motivation and agenda of academics and NGOs promoting gender equality and justice to outright dismissal by the government. Unless a perceived moral threat by the construct of "non-Acehnese" (e.g. the threat of sexual violation by outsiders rather than "one of us") is involved, a woman's position in Acehnese society in general is viewed as good enough just the way it is. It is a view seemed to be shared by both men and women alike. Although some women complained about gender inequality, they appeared to distrust the idea of gender equality. They talked about the need to improve women's condition in Aceh (e.g. better education, better health, equal opportunity in workplace, an end to violence against women), acknowledged the need for increased female representation in leadership positions, yet shun discussions of structural des crimination that limit women's access to these positions. Affirmative action were viewed with suspicion. There was general optimisim among women activists that "gender justice" (they disapprove of the term "gender equality") is achievable through women's hard work.
The three meetings were organised by the Acehnese political elite, including the NGOs organisers, who had above average middle to upper class incomes, with access to higher education. Most of the participants – with the possible exception of the governor's seminar – did not belong to this group. All of the organisers had access to financial resources, mainly foreign aid. Some of the delegates had experienced first hand the suffering caused by the armed conflict; all of the organisers had heard of it second hand. Some of the delegates had heard of feminism as "a Western product" while most of the organisers (of the first and second seminars) – again, with the possible exception of the government organisers – were armed with the works of Fatima Mernissi. These differences explain why there were differences in establishing a common platform for discussion. Organisers and participants had different ideas on what was important and what was urgent. The organisers seemed to focus on long term plans, religion, ideology, and the provincial economy. Participants seemed to focus on immediate problems such as strategies to handle military violence, strategies to survive shortages, and strategies to attract aid.
Conclusion
CONCLUSION

A female colleague who read the first draft of this thesis has complained to me of my tendency to "shoot down" all the accomplishments of women in Aceh. I would have to say that this is neither my intention nor the case. What I do point out early on in this thesis (chapters one and two) is that although Acehnese women have been constructed in a flattering manner in so many ways — almost all due to the achievements of individuals — such depiction may be harmful for them should it hide the real condition of Acehnese women in general. Certainly not everything about Acehnese women is tied to depictions and representations.

The last chapter has so far supported the view that insofar as political participation requires time, resources, and control over women, capitalist and masculinist conditions make their participation exceedingly difficult (Peterson & Runyan, 1999:87). Aceh is a historically patriarchal society. It is also a society undergoing rapid change and modernisation. Its socio-economic conditions are vastly different from two decades ago when the oil boom began.

Are all the changes that have happened in Aceh necessarily bad for its women? Not necessarily. Female literacy in Indonesia, including Aceh, is among the highest in developing countries. The state schooling system guarantees equal access to primary schools for both boys and girls. Recent school burnings aside, the state of schools in Aceh — state owned or religious — is generally improving. Data in chapter four showed that classrooms are not as overcrowded as they used to be. Better access to health and sanitation facilities also has improved women's life expectancy in
Aceh. Maternal mortality have declined.\textsuperscript{51} Women literacy increased as they enjoy better education than two decades ago. Women also have more control over their reproductive functions as chapter three has shown.

These are all issues regarding domestic life. In the public life, surprisingly despite the dismal assessment we saw earlier, women’s political representation in Aceh has fared relatively well in comparison with other countries. Women in the Acehnese parliament still outnumber (proportionally) those in Western Asia and South Asia as well as North Africa. This is a significant leap considering a mere decade ago female leadership in Aceh was still something people talked about in a historical (and heroic nationalist) context.

\begin{table}
\centering
\begin{tabular}{|l|c|c|}
\hline
Region & 1987 & 1994  \\
\hline
Western Europe & 13% & 18%  \\
& & \\
Other Developed Countries & &  \\
\hline
\textit{Indonesia*} & & \\
Eastern Asia & 17% & 11%  \\
Southeastern Asia & 9% & 9%  \\
Latin America & 8% & 9%  \\
& & \\
& &  \\
& &  \\
\textit{Aceh**} & & \\
Sub-Saharan Africa & 7% & 8%  \\
Central Asia & 0% & 7%  \\
Western Asia & 7% & 4%  \\
Southern Asia & 6% & 4%  \\
Northern Africa & 3% & 4%  \\
Oceania & 2% & 3%  \\
\hline
Average & 8.90% & 7.72% \\
\end{tabular}
\caption{Women Parliamentary Representation by Region}
\end{table}

* Calculated from 1992-1997 DPRD membership

** Calculated from 1992-1999 regional election results

Source: Statistics (United Nations, 1995:154)

Acehnese women actually fare quite well in participating in decision-making process of the government. Despite their small number, their

\textsuperscript{51} The MMR (Maternal Mortality Rate, measured by deaths per 100,000 successful births) in Aceh is estimated at 580 in 1986 and declined to around 480 in 1998. Although the figure is still higher than the Indonesia as a whole (MMR of 450 in 1984, it declined to 373 in 1998) the decline in Aceh MMR is still a huge improvement. (Compiled from Zahr and Royston, 1991:465-476; BPS, 1994:220; Depkes RI, 1998:155).
proportion in parliament is higher than the world average, and well above African and some Asian countries (though well below the national average). However, this is quite deceptive considering their numbers have swelled significantly in departments that are "concerned with women issues" or they are confined to supportive or secretarial posts, as chapter five has shown in more detail.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Caribbean</td>
<td>15.76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Developed Regions</td>
<td>15.24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central America</td>
<td>10.60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Europe</td>
<td>10.38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Aceh</strong></td>
<td><strong>7.14%</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oceania</td>
<td>6.86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub-Saharan Africa</td>
<td>6.22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South America</td>
<td>6.08%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indonesia</strong></td>
<td><strong>6.06%</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Africa</td>
<td>4.82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Asia</td>
<td>4.52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Europe</td>
<td>4.16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Asia</td>
<td>2.58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southeast Asia</td>
<td>1.90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Asia</td>
<td>1.58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Asia</td>
<td>1.20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average</strong></td>
<td><strong>6.56%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Calculated from civil servants in the capital Banda Aceh of rank IV.
** Calculated from cabinet members in 1999.

Source: Statistics (United Nations, 1995:154)

This is no guarantee that these women are able to make a significant difference in formal politics. There are, however, several types of cases when women actually ascend to a position of leadership:
1. Through family connections, usually after the death of a father or husband who is a leader. The cases of the female warriors described earlier are examples of this point.

2. When stereotypes of women can work to benefit the position, usually during crises or transitions that require a caring, compromising, conciliatory, and ameliorative figure. Indeed, during the conflict in Aceh, women activists have usually relied upon the image of the "caring mother" who take care of the needy. They take a dangerous role by becoming mediators in the middle of a male dominated armed conflict.

3. By playing down feminine qualities and playing up ultra-masculine qualities. This is the only point that seems to be unpopular among women leaders in Aceh. The only known women who played this image are the Inong Balee women, the armed female branch of the Free Aceh Movement (GAM). The gender patterns of military service also influence who reaches political office. Women who remain a small percentage of the military are largely excluded from combat, thus barring them from another path to political power. Most of the Inong Balee duties are usually non-combatant (espionage, logistics, etc). Only when they pose for the media do they project their "masculine" qualities (e.g. carrying arms, wearing combat fatigues, etc). They practice the only way women can demonstrate the required militancy, which is by adopting an excessively tough image and rendering invisible their "feminine" qualities.

As long as female political actors are perceived either as traditional women or women-who-act-like-men, then gender expectations are not
really disrupted. Women political leaders in such an arrangement actually reinforce and reproduce traditional gender stereotypes.

This last point is something that I frustratingly failed to point out to the women activists whom I met in the field. Ever optimistic that political participation for women is only a matter of willpower among Acehnese women, their constant belief in a fair system can easily blind them to the fact that women’s political participation is always barred by direct and indirect legal barriers. How can any woman participate if she is always institutionally handicapped from the start? Randall identified three institutional barriers in her discussion of political recruitment and promotion (1987:92-94), all of which has been demonstrated in chapter five.

1. Discrimination in criteria for career advancement: certain positions require people with “certain qualities” and/or “certain resources”, both often lacking in women candidates. The most commonly used excuse for this form of discrimination in Aceh is that women are deemed second class Muslims. The most “liberal” argument commonly cited is that although women can do anything as well as men, they must be subordinate to male leadership. This view stems from a literal interpretation of the Qur’an, which has recently been contested by women activists.

2. Discrimination in aim and objectives of positions and institutions: the institution itself aims at addressing “men’s issues”, thus “women’s issues” are deemed peripheral in daily operation. Not only are there “men’s jobs” and “women’s work” in Aceh the political parties themselves have compartmentalised women’s political participation into
tokenistic "special female-only sections within the party." These political appendages serve their purpose in that political representation within the Acehnese parliament remains minimal.

3. Discrimination in workplace behaviour: institutional environment and atmosphere are created to be less favourable to women. Acehnese have various ways to "neutralise" and trivialise such behaviour. I find it amusing that despite my occasional mimicking of misogynist behaviour during my time in the field, the one thing that singled me out as an outsider was that when a woman served drinks to me and my male informant hosts, I bothered to say thank you. Apparently what I considered as polite behaviour can often be seen as "un-manly" behaviour. Men take female servitude for granted in Aceh.

All of these forms of discrimination serve to maintain what is essentially male domination over women in both the domestic and public life. The activists I met denied this by saying that women perceive political power differently from men. They said that men tend to see power as a tool of domination while women tend to see it as a tool of cooperation. Chowdhury (1994) correctly declared that political discrimination against women is both the means and the ends to male domination in every aspect of daily life.

[The] culture and processes of formal political institutions – especially parties, their affiliated labor or employer groups, their youth wings, and even their women's auxiliaries – are major barriers to women's equal participation in institutional politics. The barriers include the concrete expressions of patriarchal and fraternal privilege found in men's expressive and problem-solving

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styles, their networks, their workday, their domestic and child-care obligations, and even their traditions of making sexual access to women one of the prerequisites of power. (Chowdhury et al., 1994:16).

In this regard, women’s participation requires a transformation not only in gendered divisions of labor and power but also in gendered identities.

**Last Words on The Conflict in Aceh**

The women of Aceh have become more outspoken in their demands to improve their lives. For too long their voices have been drowned in outside praises of a glorious and distant past. The previous chapters have shown that the exaggerated rhetoric of “the independent Acehnese women” often serves to hide the fact that Acehnese women have been confined into the domestic sphere and outside of the public sphere. This misleading image has been so successful that few Acehnese women would question such a construct and consequently failed to question the male dominance in almost every aspect of decision-making social mechanisms. This gender imbalance has been very structural and thoroughly internalised by Acehnese men and women that the current contestation is focused in representation (who gets to say what) and not political (who gets to do what).

Until Acehnese men and women in general achieve a level of gender awareness which transcends the obsession over form, any effort to improve gender relations will only scratch the surface. Worse, it may even serve to reinforce and reproduce the existing dominance of one gender over the
other. The use of women imagery in the propaganda war between the
Indonesian military and the separatist GAM – both in more than one
occasion claimed to champion women's rights – is an example of the
subversion of gender representation. It is no coincidence that both sides
are basically male-dominated organisations.

Not everything in Aceh is hopeless. Fortunately for women the
current conflict in Aceh presents a window of opportunity to demand for a
change in the composition of political leadership. With so many Acehnese
men is reluctant to be openly involved in politics (due to the military
oppression), the field is open for women to become more involved in
public leadership. Whether Acehnese women is able to seize this
opportunity only history can tell.

Insya Allah ...\(^{52}\)

\(^{52}\) Arabic for “God willing.”

Iwan Dzulvan Amir
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INONG ACEH


