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**GRADUATE SCHOOL OF DEVELOPMENT STUDIES**

**WOMEN'S STRUGGLE FOR PEACE IN NANGGROE ACEH  
DARUSSALAM, INDONESIA:  
A CASE STUDY OF WOMEN'S CONFERENCE (DUEK PAKAT INONG ACEH)  
IN BANDA ACEH IN 2000**

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## Abstract

*This research paper takes a critical descriptive and exploratory on emerging women's initiative in peace activities, in this regard is a women's conference which has been conducted in Banda Aceh in Banda Aceh 20-22 February 2000. To analyze the emergence, the formulation, the objectives of the conference, I will situate it in the context of armed conflict situation and struggle for independence movement. The problem of gender and power also trace in this research. Finally, the study reveal that through this conference women has challenged gender relation and patriarchal culture that place women in private and men in public sphere.*



# Table of Content

Acknowledgements.....	i
Abstract.....	ii
Table of Content .....	iii
Chapter 1 .....	1
Introduction.....	1
1.1. Contextual Background .....	1
1.2. Analytical Framework .....	6
1.3 Research Objective .....	6
1.4. Research Question .....	7
1.5. Research Methodology .....	7
Chapter 2.....	9
Global Discourse on Conflict, Peace, Gender and Women's Organizing .....	9
2.1 Gender and Conflict.....	9
2.1 Theorizing On Gender and Peace .....	15
2.2 Women's Organizing .....	16
Chapter 3 .....	18
Gender, Religion and Nation in Aceh: Women's Past and Present.....	18
3.1. Gender Relation, Nation and religion .....	18
3.2. Gender and Power in Past and Present .....	21
3.2. Women's Organizing in Aceh .....	24
Chapter 4 .....	31
Women's Involvement in Peace: All Women's Conference (Duek Pakat Inong Aceh) ..	31
4.1 The Emergence Of The Conference .....	31
4.2. Motivation And Objectives.....	34
4.3 Preparations.....	36
4.4. Process of Selection of Participant .....	37
4.5. The Results and Recommendations .....	40
Chapter V .....	44
Some Reflections On The Conference.....	44
Reference	

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

### 1.1. Contextual Background

This study will examine the formation, functioning and program of the All Aceh Women's Conference (Duek Pakat Inong Aceh) held in Banda Aceh, in 2000 as a significant expression of women's struggle for peace in the region which has witnessed armed conflict since 1989.

Banda Aceh is the one of the oldest cities with majority population Muslims in South East Asia. This city is 798 years old, and is the capital of Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam (NAD) Province. NAD is located in North West part of Indonesia. Most of Aceh people are Muslims. That is why Aceh is called by people out of the province "Serambi Mekkah" or "the Veranda of Mekkah".

NAD is one of area in Indonesia with serious and intense armed conflict. The armed conflict in Aceh started in 1989 between Indonesian Army and Free Aceh Movement, (GAM). This movement is led by Hasan Tiro who declared in 1975 to oppose Indonesian government. It is motivated by resistance to economic and social exploitation of natural resources in Aceh done by Indonesian government. The natural resources In Aceh bring about 33 million quintillion a year but only about one percent returned to Aceh (Suraiya, 2000;2)

In order to defeat Free Aceh Movement, the government of Indonesia assigned Aceh a so-called Special Military Operation Status (in the 1989 – 1998 period, where thousands of soldiers were sent to capture the members of Freedom Aceh Movement. While conducting this 'operation', the military did not only arrest the rebels but also civilian, including men, women and children, some of whom were not members of the movement.

Since Military Operation Status was assigned, thousands of women have been widowed, their husbands murdered or kidnapped. A lot of children were also orphaned. Some women faced sexual violence from soldiers, in part as a deliberate instrument of terror against their communities. These raped women became pariahs in their own communities that did not want to associate with anyone dangerously tainted by the Free Aceh Movement. Because of the threat of sexual violence and its consequences, the single women with children to support could no longer go out safely to work in the fields.

The commander of the Indonesian armed forces General Wiranto revoked the status in late 1998, after the falling down of Indonesian president, Suharto, and with many human rights abuses well documented. Data from the Coalition of Human Rights NGOs had documented 7,727 cases of human rights abuse between 1990-1998. But the situation did not improve when the special status was revoked. From January 1999 to February 2000 the Coalition documented nine cases of 'massacre' in which 132 civilians were killed and 472 wounded; 304 arbitrary detentions; 318 extra-judicial executions, and 138 disappearances.<sup>1</sup>

From February 1999, the Indonesian army started deliberately displacing inhabitants from some parts of Aceh. From June to August 1999 there were 250,000 to 300,000 internally displaced persons no human rights investigation has been conducted so far on this tragedy (Amnesty International, November, 2000).

Many women in Aceh believe that the conflict must be brought to an end in a peaceful way because violence has affected women in multiple ways. Women constitute 53% of Aceh's population, and have suffered grievously throughout this conflict. Data from the provincial government shows there are no fewer than 460,000 female heads of households, of whom 377,000 are widows (Suraiya,K, 2001). These figures are the result of the violent conflict, wherein Aceh men are either killed or imprisoned, and thus the households are left to women's care.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.infid.be/infidforum2001-fidar-aceh-eng.html>

As citizens, women too have suffered at the hands of the Indonesian state, having been raped and abused by the Indonesian army. Culturally, they have been repressed by patriarchal norms and practices of their own community and through the wrong traditional, strict and sometimes also fundamentalist interpretations of Islamic law, such as, the forcible imposition of dress codes and cutting hair of women who do not cover their head. At home, they have faced domestic violence, being beaten and raped by their husbands.

Thus, in Aceh conflict situation, women are clearly affected, but in the process of solving the conflict women's voices are not taken into account and women are not involved in decision making of resolving of the problem. Acknowledging this condition, some women's organizations in Aceh realized that women have to take part in the process of finding solution. Several women's NGOs initiated in 2000 a conference where women of many different background sat together to think about a peaceful solution based on what women need's and interest were- needs and interests often neglected by the Indonesian government as well as the members Free Aceh Movement and local governments.

*Duek Pakat Inong Aceh* or the *All Aceh Women's Conference* was held on February 20-22 in 2000, in Banda Aceh, capital city of Aceh province. Over five hundred women from various backgrounds representing organizations with a special commitment to the needs and aspirations of women, sat together at the conference. On the agenda was assessment and formulation of their position and their role in achieving a peaceful solution to the conflict that has devastated their lives.

It is the first time ever that such a conference has been held in Aceh. Hence, more detailed analysis on this conference is crucial to see how women in the conflict situation acknowledge the conflict and work together to find peaceful solution, while at the same time they are neglected by other elements of society.

This conference was a process of women to determine their life and their future based on their self-determination. At the time, there were three different positions regarding Aceh

future: Indonesian government proposed autonomy, Free Aceh Movement argued for independence, and student organizations and some NGOs argued for referendum. However, women and women's organizations were not part of these social and political processes.

Even though women are victims of military violence they could have a significant force in society to bridge boundaries and to advocate for peaceful, non-militaristic concepts of security. The All Aceh Women's Conference (Duek Pakat Inong Aceh), organized in 20-22 of February in 2000 was attended by 437 women from 11 regents in Aceh, coming from different background.

This was not only a historic event - as it was the first time in 400 years that women in Aceh spoke about their concerns and rights in public - but was also the first conference which recommended peaceful solution for Aceh. The conference is also significant because it was attended by the representatives of various parties engaged in the prolonged and bloody conflicts in Aceh (student movement, women that supported the Free Aceh Movement, women's from Indonesian Government institutions, and various NGOs), reflecting a democratic effort that has never before been successful (Indonesian Observer, 2000), Quoted to Dr Gade Ismail, a historian of Syiah Kuala University in Banda Aceh, saying: "women have given us, men, an example of how to solve differing opinions in a democratic manner (Bianpoen, The Indonesian Observer, 2003).

The conference was motivated by the worsening social and political condition in Aceh at the beginning of the year 2000, where Aceh become a killing field for the warring sides as well as the people fleeing from the Aceh Freedom Movement and the Indonesian Military<sup>2</sup>. The situation was such that five or six people were killed every day, reaching up to 145 victims in the month of February of 2002 alone. Many widows, often having five to seven children, faced the hardship of finding daily wage of Rp. 5000 (less than one dollar) (*Jakarta Post*, 13 March 2000). Children suffered from mental trauma and

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<sup>2</sup> Budianta, Melani, Women's Response to Militaristic Security, The Case of Aceh Women. [http://www.advokasi.com/awas/awas.php?sub=Sumatra&id=2&mode\\_print=1](http://www.advokasi.com/awas/awas.php?sub=Sumatra&id=2&mode_print=1)

under severe malnutrition and could not go to school. There were many people expelled, forcefully resettled from their villages, living in the refugee camp in order to be safe from the both of the warring parties (*Kompas*, 3 March 2000). The congress was also held at the peak of the crisis, when "Aceh was on the threshold of deciding the province's future" (Bianpoen, Indonesian Observer, 2000).

A great number of Acehnese represented by students and some NGOs demanded from the Indonesian government that a referendum is held in Aceh to decide the status of the province. But there were also many voices disagreeing with the referendum as a means to find peaceful solution to the Aceh problems.

However, the Conference statement pointed to justice and peace as the main concern for the resolution of the conflict. It also insisted that the future of Aceh depended on the implementation of the Islamic law that provides large place for women's participation in social change in a peaceful atmosphere (Duek Pakat Inong Aceh, 2000:3) The conference demanded at least 30 percent for women's participation in all political and institutional decision making and issued 22 recommendations in the field of Islamic law, politic, social change, economy, and peaceful solution in Aceh. The women also demanded from the Indonesian government to stop military violence, conduct fair trials for human rights abusers, and respect Acehnese decision to observe Islamic law.

They also came up with specific figures of what they perceive as fair economic distribution of local resources. They demanded equal rights for women and women's access in the economy. The Conference statement was ended by urging people not to dwell on revenge, to break the chain of violence and hatred and continue with non-violence activities in achieving peace.

This study will analyze all women's conference in Aceh held in Banda Aceh in 2000 as the manifestation of women's participation in peace solution in Aceh. I will look at the process of formation, objectives, and the background of this conference. I will also analyze the documents produced during the conference as the site of struggle where

different groups of women have different ideas about peaceful solution and conflict in Aceh. I also hope to be able to find the lessons that could be learned for the women's organization from the struggle to find peace solution.

## **1.2. Analytical Framework**

This research will rely on extensive feminist literature on political violence and armed conflict, and women's organizing for peace. Much of the early literature on violent conflict was largely gender blind, with women's participation simply not identified in political violence and armed conflict, guerilla groups and paramilitaries or peacekeeping forces. The analyses tended to portray a simplistic division of roles: men were the perpetrators while women were victim of sexual abuse and force abduction. Similar to this was the notion that related women to peace (passivity) and men to war (aggression).

## **1.3 Research Objective**

The objective of this research is to explore the emergence of women's conference in Aceh through the gender lens, but I also hope that this research will contribute to the field of studies on women's organizing against violent conflict and their participation in the peace making solutions, in general. My objective is also to identify some recommendations and suggestions for women's NGOs and NGOs working on women's issues in Aceh to strengthen civil society's capacity for peace building.

As a theoretical starting point, the research will consider power relation between men and women, and the ideas of womanhood and manhood, masculinity and femininity as they are produced in the local Aceh context, where social, cultural and religious practices and norms, and violent conflict intersect, and often reinforce each other. I will also explore mechanism, practice and spaces of the Conference within the discourse of nationalism of the Free Aceh Movement, within which women exercise power, independence and agency.

Another theoretical premise of this research is that peace is gendered. In this case, gender perspective is relevant in peace building strategies because, on one hand women and men as social actors often have different roles, relation and identities in peace building and violence-reduction initiatives. On the other hand, women and men may have different needs and interests, which are part of their strategies and organizational frameworks.

#### **1.4. Research Question**

My main research questions concern first, the motivations of the organizers, and the objectives of the conference. I will be also asking: What were the recommendations/solutions that the Conference proposed? What were the expected outcomes? What role did the differences among women – in political and other affiliations – have for the organization of the Conference, and for all the formulations of the Conference objectives, solutions and outcomes? How did different women's groups perceive the results of the Conference?

#### **1.5. Research Methodology**

I will use both primary data and secondary data as the source of information. Primary data sources are key informant interviews by phone with individuals involved in the whole process of the conference. The women interviewed were from different backgrounds organizations, but all of them gave great attention to women issues in Indonesia and specially in Aceh. Besides, they have different ideas about the Conference, some of them supported it and some were against. It is significant to have different opinions and perspectives in order to get a comprehensive picture of the Conference. Secondary data will focus on the documents used at and produced during the Conference.



As the structure of the paper, I will theorize on global discourse about women, peace, conflict and women's organizing for peace, and then move on gender, religion and nation in Aceh: Women's Past and Present in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 will be dedicated to analysis of the Conference. The conclusion will reflect upon the results of the study.

## **Chapter 2**

# **Global Discourse on Conflict, Peace, Gender and Women's Organizing**

### **2.1 Gender and Conflict**

This research paper takes a critical descriptive and exploratory on emerging women's initiative in peace activities, in this regard is a women's conference which has been conducted in Banda Aceh. To analyze the emergence, the formulation, the objectives of the conference, I will situate it in the context of armed conflict situation and struggle for independence movement and focus on how gender and peace are related.

In order to analyze how gender influence the conflict and the situation in which women organization for peace emerged. Here I bring up the work of Cynthia Cockburn (2001) who elaborates a feminist view of gender as an issue of power, and uses this perspective to analyze four moments of conflict. Firstly, in the period before armed violence breaks out, secondly, in the times of war and oppression, thirdly, in the process of peace making and finally, in post war periods. I found this analysis is appropriate to be used in analyzing the conflict and look at how it relates to the efforts of women in building peace in Aceh.

Firstly, in the period before the conflict occurs. Cockburn highlights the significance of analyzing the causal factors of the conflict and the extent to which it is gendered. Cockburn says that one of the causal factors of the conflict is economic distress. In this point Cockburn builds her own analysis based on the work of Johan Galtung who introduced the concept of structural violence and noted that one of the causal factors of violence is the condition where the potential development of individual or group is restricted by the condition of a relationship, especially by uneven distribution of power and resources (Cockburn, 2000:17).

By using feminist analysis, she says that in this problem embedded gendered phenomena, where economic distress usually leads to depressed wage and increased unemployment among men, as the consequence, status of men as bread-winner has been shifted by the increases of female headed households. Another point She makes is that increased militarization usually precedes conflicts. This is a common phenomena that conflict also followed by the increasing militarization and it comes together with the increasing of expenditure on army, often at the expense of public services such as health and education sector (Cockburn, 2001;18). As a lot of evidence shows, cutting expenditure on public services making women suffering more because they usually depend more on the public services provided by the government.

Secondly, in times of war, Cockburn puts in that during the conflict mostly men participate in war. Men have been joining in national militaries, popular militias, and political police force. The participation of men to fight in war is motivated by several reasons such as for money, honor, patriotism or brotherhood, in self-defense, for liberation and to liberate other. Moreover, she revealed that the idea of masculinity and femininity are underpinned in the conflict period (Cockburn, 2001;19).

In the context of conflict in Kashmir, veiling women are examples of how conflict determines the notion of masculinity and femininity. In this regard, women are viewed as the producers of the members of community and the identity of community. Men are seen as the controllers, who control women in order to keep them pure, one of the forms

controlling in by covering them with veil (Machanda.R., 2001: 61). In the context of Aceh, Ulama, Free Aceh Movement and Military reinforced the idea of masculinity and femininity. Forcing women to cover their hair is also motivated by the idea that women are the identity of the Acehnese community.

The evidence of large-scale rape is other pictures of war and violence conflict. Men and women are affected by war differently; Cockburn argues the body is also another subject during war. Women and men's affected differently due to their different body, for example women and men often die different death and tortures and abused in a different way, its happened as not only because of the different sexes but also culture which ascribe to women's and men's body differently (Moser&Clark, 2001: 13).

Thirdly, in the process of peace, Cockburn points out that in the conflict situation, while men focusing on fighting, often women who put a lot of efforts in maintaining peace in community and establishing working link across community demonstrated by Mulholland's work in Ireland and Palestine (Mulholland, 2001, 170).

Moreover, she also argues that politics inspiring women's activities for peace take different forms such as peace for justice or peace against military, the activities are gender specific but they are not a single category, some stress on women's nurturing role which highlighting the generous feeling of care and love which opposite to violence, and others focusing on campaigning to against war, and seeking ways to negotiate and push government to create a creative diplomacy and international peace-keeping (Cockburn, 2001:25).

In her last point, Cockburn remind us that even though it is obvious that women have been involved in many activities for peace with a various ways, their substantial work often goes unrecognized in the table formal negotiations especially in the process of decision making.

The final is the post conflict. In this stage Cockburn maintains that after conflict is usually followed by the increase of refugees, she quoted the data from UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) showing that the population of refugees including asylum seeker are over 22 million and a half of the world's long term refugees are female. (UNHCR 2000).

In the same time, Cockburn underlines that women and men may experience displacement differently. She pointed out that women in refugee camp have different and unique problem since their responsibility is not only for themselves but also for their rearing, controlling and educating children. Beside, women also suffer more due to their female body process such as menstruation, lactation, gestation, and parturition. Furthermore, women and girls are at risk of torture and raped by male camp guards and inmate, while young men and boys risk being recruited into violent gangs and paramilitary forces.

Even during and after the conflict women suffer the most but in the post war women are less considered since the contraction has different consequences to men and women, such as in the employment retraining for ex-combatant, men usually prioritized while women are forced to return to their gender role before conflict. Most of women become widows and single parents beside that they also have to earn not only for themselves but also for their children. The women's condition even worse, since the absent of the jobs they could not access to credit, capital and land which lead to increasing of poverty among the women.

Beside, women also less participate during the reconstruction, she pointed out most of women participate in International humanitarian aid agencies and NGOs, but often such organizations are not involved in decision making process. Women also give contribution and participate in the process of strengthening of civil society and democratic structure; women's involvements are often used by political parties without recognition.

In term of justice and social construction as well as the truth and reconciliation process, she pointed out that both processes are gender dimensions. She substantiates her point by taking the example of case of rapes which had been done during the conflict rarely been prosecuted through war tribunals as a violation in the post conflict.

From the all four stages which has been noted by Cockburn, it is relevant to link it with the situation in Aceh before conflict, during and in the process of finding solution where women came up with the issue of peace, and examine how all the process are gendered.

Looking at the four stages as has been put forward by Cockburn, makes it significant to think about conflict and peace and the position of women in peace process, in the context of Aceh. In some point, what Cockburn has pointed out about the background of the conflict which very much focuses on economic factors. I find this analysis is quite relevant in analyzing the causes of the conflict in Aceh since unequal distribution of natural resource between central and local government became the main factors which fuel the conflict. However, in the case of Aceh, conflict was not merely generated by economic factors as has been mentioned by Cockburn but also caused by political factors. In other points, what Cockburn has traced about the participation of men in war and women during the process of finding solution but often women's voices are not recognized. In Aceh women's conference which had been held in 2000 was the reflection of where women's voice, need and interests were not taken into account the resolution which proposed by the both many actors in Aceh including government, Free Aceh Movement and Ulama.

Beside the work of Cockburn, I also use the work of Machanda (2001) who elucidates the different perspectives on looking at relation between women and peace. I found these both analyses are appropriate to be used in analyzing the conflict in Aceh and how it relates it to the efforts of women in building peace.

Machanda (2001) has highlighted that predominant reasons of relationship between women and peace has been theorized in three reasons. The first is biological reason. This

perspective highlights that women's involvement in peace relates to their biological essence as mothers. According to hers, this way of looking at women and peace highlights the biological connection in the binary stereotype of women related to peace, while men are related to war. She argues that this two absolute separation (women and peace, while women and war) emphasizes the structural inequality between men and women at the heart of patriarchy (Machanda, 2001; 15).

Secondly, the connection women and war is based on the cultural construction which connect the construction of the idea of masculinity and femininity in patriarchal societies where women predominantly relate to peace since their primary capacity as child bearers and nurtures which favors certain values such as the ethics of care and rewards cooperation rather competition and conflict (Machanda, 2001; 16).

The other reason for women's involvement in peace is the argument of justice as has been put forward by Cynthia Cockburn. Different from two perspective above that look at biological and cultural determination as the motivation women's engagement in peace, this perspective tends to look at unequal relation, excluded and marginalized which experienced by women during the conflict motivates them to take part in peace (Machanda, 2001:17).

However, she argues that regardless of cultural or biological as well as justice reasons, it is significant to take into account women's entry into peace process because women's experience during the conflict will present the different perspective to the structure of power relation and different values of peace building process. Additionally, she noted that that by taking the different assumption that women's nature tend to peace and passivity while men to war and aggression; it neglects women's experience in peace effort. In spite the fact, the evidence shows that women are not only the victim in the conflict but they are also the actors who exercise their agency.

In the context of Aceh, women's involvement in peace as reflected in the initiative of All Women Conference was much more motivated by the increase of the tension of the

violence where women become the objects and victimized, in the same time women were marginalized, excluded from the process of decision making and in the efforts of seeking solution. This condition was relevant to the perspective that has been put forward by Cockburn that emphasizes on argument of justice.

## **2.1 Theorizing On Gender and Peace**

Gender usually is used as the synonym for one's biological sex or reference of women's concerns. Recently, there is a plenty of literature on gender as a concept and elements inherent in gender analysis. So gender can be referred as a social construction to differentiate women and men and define the ways in which women and men interact with each other. Gender is determined by the number of expectations and norms within a society concerning appropriate female and male behaviors, characteristic and roles. Moreover gender and gender role are culturally specific, learned, and changeable over time, and influenced by variables such as age, race, class, and ethnicity (Strickland & Duvvury, 2003: 5).

As noted by Corrin (2000), the literature on women and peace building confirm that the concept of gender refers to social relationship produced by cultural, social, economic and historical process and various roles played by men and women.

As quoted by Jack (2003) in UNDP 2000, during the conflict – like in the context of peace - gender relations are typically characterized by unequal access to, or distribution of power. Gender discrimination often happens and it influences the dynamic of armed conflict. Gender analysis in armed conflict emphasizes the differences between women and men in terms of their gendered activities, their needs, their acquisition and control of resources and their access to decision making process in pre-conflict, conflict and post conflict situation (Jack el Amani, 2003: 12).

Moser and Clark (2001) in their introduction have highlighted that in the conflict situation gender issues are significant. Linking to this, it is not only conflict that it is



gendered, peace also gendered, as noted by Moser (2001) in analyzing peace it is also vital to include gender as the framework. She argues that women and men have been affected differently by conflict and have different perspective on peace. Additionally, she highlights the importance understand peace also as gendered activities because conflict itself is gendered.

Additionally, they reflected on literature on political violence and armed conflict, pointing out that the earlier mainstream literature tended to be gender blind with women's participation simply not acknowledged (Moser and Clark,2001:3) But later literature tended to represent one way of looking at division of roles between men and women. In this regard, men were regarded as perpetrators of violence, and the defenders of the nation and of their wives as well as children, while women were seen as victims, especially of sexual abuse and forced abduction.

This one dimension looking at men's and women's identity in the conflict period has been emphasized by Machanda (2001), in her study about women in the South Asia she noted that in the meta-narrative of histories in the South Asia, the dominant motif of women in violent conflict is the grieving Mother. In the same time traditionally, history has ignored the experience of women in organized political violence, maintaining survival strategies, resistance and peace building (Machanda, 2001: 9).

## **2.2 Women's Organizing**

In the context of conflict and peace, Pankhurst (2004) classifies the works of women's organization into several forms. Firstly, some women's organizations which focus on developing the capacity to work openly to protect and extend human rights. (Especially in Latin America), secondly, women's organization which focuses on maintaining and ensuring the social fabric did not collapse during the conflict. These kind of organizations including for example various forms of community organization and welfare provision in the refugees camps in the Northern Island, El Salvador and Guatemala. Thirdly, women's organizations which focused on the need to talk about,

participate in and strengthening peace in the name of women. Finally there are those women's organization which explicitly attempts to challenge women's oppression and gender inequality in post conflict reconstruction (Pankhurst, 2004:8).

Pankhurst argues that all these type of organizations are crucial in addressing common weakness in existing peace building strategies such as the lack of attention to women's need, the marginalization of gender analyses, and the absence of efforts to challenge particularly discriminatory practices in institutions and in society more widely. Unfortunately, these challenge and changes are difficult to achieve since many women's organization face great obstacles in ensuring their continued survival. The problems are range from lack of funding and training in the areas of management, leadership, as well as lobbying. Besides that, some women's organizations also have had to face great resistance, marginalization, discrimination and stigmatization by powerful government and non government organizations with tensions running high (Pankhurst, 2004:22).

However, she argues that women's organization have play a significant role in achieving many goals that many peace building efforts should attempt to provide such as increasing women's income, to enhance women's abilities to participate in political processes and civil society, to increase the number of women who become the leaders and representatives and to reinforce efforts to challenge masculine cultures in institutions and society more widely (Pankhurst, 2004:9).

## **Chapter 3**

# **Gender, Religion and Nation in Aceh: Women's Past and Present**

### **3.1. Gender Relation, Nation and religion**

This chapter will explore the competing constructions and representation of Islamic identity and gender relations and identities in Aceh. By looking at changes in gender relations and religion, I will also look at how these have been influenced by conflict.

Siapno (2000) said that Acehnese historiography in print, in particular by Dutch and other European, Australia, and American scholars is abundant and impressive, especially in the field of philology, Islamic studies, sufi romance, anthropology and history of trade and the comers in the straits of Malacca. However there has hardly been a significant work at all on gender politics in Aceh. An exception is James Siegel's (1965) pioneering research on male marginality published more than thirty years ago. Another is the book about gender, Islam, nationalism and the state in Aceh, which does not focus much on analyzing gender relation and gender identity Siapno (2000). So, in this chapter I use these two books and reflect based on my observation and my experience of living in Aceh as Acehnese Muslim woman.

Islam is a significant aspect in Acehnese community, and is taken seriously by Acehnese. For many people religion is not seen merely a matter of personal guidance of the

interaction between god and humans but rather as the provider of basic principles, rules and norms which govern the entire life, including the relation between men and women. At the same time religion also influences the culture. It can be said that culture and religion in Aceh have been integrated, and the culture it self has been formed from the basis of religious rules. Thus, gender relations have also been constructed through the intersection of religion and culture in Aceh.

Nation is important in this equation too. Women are seen as an important part of the community, especially in relation to the nation and national identity. The status of the women is considered as inseparable from the status of the nation. There is a belief in Aceh that, when the status of nation is low, reflecting the chaotic condition of the nation, the status of the women also tend to be low; when the status of nation is elevated, reflecting the progress and civilization of that nation, the status of women in that country is also elevated. In classical Aceh's history and in the classical literature women were described as autonomous persons with strong power and capacity to make decision on their own. This literature also contained a number of names of women who ruled successfully the country and who stood in front to lead the war during the struggle against Dutch colonisation (Siapno, 2000:179). Succession of female heads of state was portrayed, who had title such as Paduka Shah Alam or Ruler of the Universe. Aceh was led by number of women successfully for 60 years, under the leadership of Sri Sultanah Tajul Alam Safiah Ad-din 1641-75), Sultanah Nurul Alam Nakiyyat Ad-din (1675-78) and Sri Sultanah Inayah shay Zakiyyat(1678-88) and the last was Kemala Ad-din Syah (1688-99). (Aceh. Siapno: 51). However, the history of women in power in Aceh has been discontinued by the intervention of Ulama (Islamic scholars) who issued Fatwa restricting and prohibiting women's participation in politics.

Leadership of women is a controversial issue in Aceh, as in many Muslim societies. However, Ulama had great influence and their interpretation toward women's engagement in politics succeeded. This encouraged men to use religious arguments as tools to prohibit women's participation in political power. Ulamas adopted Islamic teaching as it was interpreted in the Middle East, and very much influenced by patriarchal

culture. Azyumardi (1989) argues that the authority of women in politics ended as the consequence of the intervention from Middle East, especially Mecca-based approaches to Islamic law and Islamic jurisprudence, which excluded women from participating in public sphere.<sup>i</sup> Mernissi (1993:23) also gives a radical account that women's leadership had been restricted and forbidden by Islamism imported from Mecca. Since that time women's leadership in Aceh become a problem and ended up in restricting and prohibiting women's engagement in politics. As the consequence, politics was regarded no longer as women's domain. This was quite interesting since women's withdrawal from authority was not due to lack of their qualifications but derived from different interpretation of Qor'an about women's involvement in politics and struggle for power.

This struggle was also important during colonial times, but in an interesting way. As described by Siapno (2000), during anti-colonial struggles, Dutch considered Aceh men as the enemy, and the women were often seen and described as innocent civilians, and non-target of various police actions and police violence. The daily secret telegrams sent from Aceh to Buitenzorg (now called Bogor, one of the city in West Java, where colonial authority was situated) reported about the number of people killed during the occupation. The casualties were categorized into men, and accidentally killed women. It seems, however, that a lot of these women who were accidentally killed by Dutch police were seen as men because of their regular clothes - a pair of black trousers called *luweu tham asee* or dog-chasing trousers. It is possible that the Dutch police mistook them for men, as they may have been thinking of women with the framework of feminine dresses that Dutch women wore; thus Aceh women were seen either as disguised as men, or were simply not distinguishable from men, within Dutch cultural perceptions. Thus Dutch police-men were thinking of Acehenes women in term of the Dutch housewives, and consequently, along with enemies, women were classified as a special category.

From this point of view it was obvious that during colonial time (women's) clothes was not an identity issue within Aceh. It was not there to categorize the difference between men and women, as women and men wear the same kind of trousers, a habit rarely found

in the other region of Indonesia where clothes is very a significant means in differentiating gender identity.

The condition described above is sharply contrasted with the condition of women in Aceh today. Many factors have changed this perspective: since Islamic law is introduced in Aceh which is followed by the reinforcing of gender identity is one of a significant factor. As Islamic law has been applied, women had been forced to cover their hair even by violent way. It was done based on the idea that women are the identity of Acehnese community and to set the boundaries between women and men and other women from different religion.

### **3.2. Gender and Power in Past and Present**

Gender relations in Aceh at present are a mixture of old, transformed and new rules, norms and practices. Past is well illustrated by James Siegel (1961). In his work *Rope of God* He provided significant information about anthropological interpretation of gender relations in Aceh, that was strongly Islamic and at the same time matrifocal. In his analysis He emphasized the marginality of men in the structure of Acehnese society. Acehnese traced decent through both male and female lines: the relatives from the father side called wali and the relatives from the mother side called karung. Another significant feature of Aceh's gender relations in the past concerns inheritance. Women used to get houses and some times rice-land when they married, which they did not only have access to, but also control over it. Men, on the other hand, were usually without resources in the village until their parent die or they earn enough through trade to buy rice-land. This practice used to be an established custom among Acehnese: people gave their daughters land or built the house for them. After marriage most of the men would usually go out of village, travel to city to earn money, while they would leave women who work in the rice-field and take care of the children.

While in most Muslim communities the dominant role of the man is to be a head of household, and perform important role as husband and father, in Acehnese matrifocal

system the men used to be posited in the marginal role (or what Siegel called 'Male marginality'). In Aceh, a wife is referred to as *peuromoh* meaning the owner of the house, one who controls and manages the house, while men trade and migrate. Staying on land, women would gain power, get used to making decisions and controlling property. Even when their husband would be present, women would not lose their power of control and decision making. Men would come home on special occasions, such as before Ramadhan. Due to this arrangement men used to be regarded as guests in their houses (Siegel, 1965: 179). This led to women becoming more independent economically. Thus one could argue that in Aceh women were used to having social position and power and authority of owning the land and the home.

The picture of women's present situation, especially in the decades during the violent conflict with Indonesia, and after the conflict, is totally different. Urbanization, modernization, and the changing of politics in Indonesia are among the factors which shifted and changed the condition in Aceh, (Usman, 2003: 114) especially for women. As noted by Siapno (2002) this process of changing gender relations has been taking place since the period of colonization. She said that, one of the factors was the intervention of Dutch administrators in reinforcing the new model of household. Further she elucidated that due to the failure of Dutch administrator to colonize Aceh through coercive means, policies were shifted to enforce Dutch hegemony through educational system, by introducing western-style secular schools. The purpose of this secular school was to emancipate the Muslims from their religion and to assimilate the Acehnese into supposedly more politically effective arrangements of family and household for the purposes of taxation, based on male property holders as heads of family. (Siapno, 2000: 89). In Aceh at that time the idea of male as breadwinner was not recognized, as it was mostly women who headed the household.

In the area of Suharto, the process of domestication of women that started with colonialism continued, creating women's organizations and setting program which reinforced new model of gender relation, and new ideals of womanhood. In this context, the gender inequality is reinforced by reducing women's role only to caring for children

and being housewives whose responsibility is to maintain the household and to support their husband's career. This program contrasts sharply with traditional Acehese ideas about women as having much power in their household (Wieringa, 2002:97).

Prolonged conflict between Free Aceh Movement and Indonesian Military also changed women's lives. During the conflict women faced three subjugating powers: the Indonesian military, Free Aceh Movement and patriarchal ulama. Ulama and Free Aceh Movement look at women as what Yuval-Davis called "the symbolic barriers of collectivity identity and honor" (1997: 45). In this context women are seen as the symbol of collectivity of Acehese Muslim community. Indonesian Military also sees Aceh women as the symbol of the honor of the Acehese people. For this reason, the Indonesian Military has targeted women as the subject of gender specific violence, aiming to launch terror and humiliation in order to break the resistance of Free Aceh Movement. Since women are viewed based on their function to reproduce the members of the community, this reproductive role become the target of Military operation in Aceh. Estimates on the number of Acehese women that were raped by Indonesian Military during the operation are very high.

It is important to note that the central government of Indonesian has framed the struggle for social justice in Aceh as the religious conflict over Islamic law and the implementation of Islamic state, rather than a structural conflict about reorganization of the nation-state and economic capital and human right violations (Siapno, 2000: 79).

In year 2002 the Syariah Law was implemented in Aceh, dictating Acehese women to dress and behave in certain ways: they have to cover their hair, and are prohibited from wearing pants similar to trousers commonly now used by men (and in the past, by women too). Since the introduction of this law, the Ulama and Free Aceh Movement continuously worked together, constructing Acehese women as the symbol of the strength of Islam and nation in Aceh. This concerted action really puts women in disadvantaged position, since they were seen as the object of the state and religious institutions, and their agency is neglected. As noted by Chhachhi (1991) women, in their proper behavior, their proper clothing, embody the line which signifies the collectivity



boundaries. In Aceh women are also regarded as the boundaries. In Ulama's perspectives Muslim women have to be different from other women, in order to show their identity as belonging to Acehnese community.

### **3.2. Women's Organizing in Aceh**

Women's movement in Indonesia has emerged in the first decades of the twentieth century, with a great variety of women's organization evolving and identifying a broad range of gender interests. The first interest women organized around was the issues of education and marriage law reform. They also had great concern on body politics and unequal rights, the issues of women's labor as well a resistance to traditional customs and colonial domination (Wieringa, 1995: 63). During the leadership of Suharto, women's organizations were controlled and their programs were limited and adjusted to be relevant to the objectives of the state: to control women's movement and to force upon it the idea of womanhood based on state perception.

Women's movement in Aceh emerged during the period of struggle for independence from Indonesia, the New Order of Suharto and reformation era. Women's organizations in Aceh could be classified into three types: first, organizations built by state; second, Muslim women's organization, and third, women's non-governmental organizations, among which one could find secular and autonomous organizations.

When he gained power in 1965, Suharto boosted the role of the wives of important government officials into wife's organizations such as Dharma Wanita (Organization of wives of state employees), Dharma pertiwi (Organization of the wives of military) and BKOW (Formal coordinating Bodies of Women's organization), and created a new mass-based organization called PKK (Pendidikan Kesejahteraan Keluarga) or the Family Guidance Welfare Movement. These state-based women's organizations were supposed to replace the remarkable women's mass political organization called Gerwani. They promoted the idea of womanhood and wifedom under construction of the state through

the program of PKK. Unlike women's NGOs these organizations are not fighting for women's right.

On the ideological level PKK promotes the Panca Dharma Wanita (Five Duties of Women), which are to be loyal companions of their husband, to procreate for the nation, to educate and guide the children, to regulate the household, and to be useful members of society. All these tasks have been carried in a way which is relevant to the idea of kondrat (women's moral code), which prescribes that women should meek, passive, obedient to the male members of the family, sexually shy, politically passive, modest, self sacrificing and nurturing (Wieringa, 2003).

The homogenous concept of household imposed through the PKK program onto Aceh - that male is a bread winner and the women are obedient housewives - contrasts sharply with the traditional conception of household structure in Aceh based upon a matrifocal system. As the result, Acehenees women who have had much independence and power in the household find PKK values limiting their power (Siapno, 2002: 176). However, even though this program is contradictory with their values and their perception of household, Acehese women seldom refuse and criticize the program in public, since it is forced by government and its apparatus and resisting it is dangerous.

Beside the formal organization formed by government, several Muslim women's organizations in Aceh gained prominence: Aisyiah (a female wing of Muhammadiyah, Muslimat Nahdhatul Ulama, (a female wing of Nahdhatul Ulama) and Muslimat Al-Washliyah (a female wing of Al-Washliyah). Muhammadiyah, Nahdhatul Ulama, and Al-Washliyah are three Java-based religious organizations, and their female wings have strong relations to the central offices. The existence of the three organizations is really the continuation and partly the integration of several Islamic organizations emerging in Indonesia since the beginning of the 20th century. The goal of all these three Muslim women's organizations is to empower the role of Muslim women in various fields of life and to prove that Islam, as religion, does not hamper women to work and engage in different kind of activities. In this context, it can be said that existence of these

organizations came from the deep concern with the reality of women's subordination and marginalization. On the one hand, the patriarchal culture and the patriarchal way of understanding towards the principles of Islam have caused the emergence of the common perception among the community that women cannot be a leader, due to their supposedly different abilities (compared to men). As the consequence, women are placed in domestic sphere while men are in public area. The situation described above has motivated and spirited Indonesian Muslim women to redefine themselves, to formulate their actual position vis-à-vis and among men, and to re-think their domains, rights and roles in building nation and umat (Muslim Community).

Those Muslim women's organizations have the same historical background as their parent organizations, and are not an independent. Still, the three Muslim women's organizations have historically acquired autonomy and independence from their parent organizations led generally by men. Furthermore, the three organizations share the same objectives. Referring to its statutes the goal of Aisyah is to create prosperous, just and noble people based on Allah's order, by maintaining and enhancing Islamic principles through various activities, such as to enhance Muslim women's dignity and prestige, to get women involved in the organization, to keep the faith and to do more worship, to have good morals, to improve education and instruction, to deepen sciences, to maintain the unity of Indonesia and to participate in the national development (The Statutes, Chapter III and IV). Meanwhile the purposes of Muslimat Nahdhaul Ulama is to carry out Islamic principles according to guidance of Ahlul-sunnah wal jamaah, to make Indonesian women aware of their religious rights and duties and national duties as an individual or a member of the society (Aisyah Hamid Baidlowi, 1991:12). The purpose of Muslimat I-Wasyliyah is to apply Islamic doctrine to be happy in the world and Hereafter, to enhance Muslim women's dignity and prestige as a part of the application of Islamic values and to involve Muslim women in the national development based on Pancasila (Five principles).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Pimpinan Pusat Muslimat Al-Washliyah, *Anggaran Dasar dan Anggaran Rumah Tangga Muslimat Al-Washliyah*, Jakarta, 1997

Almost in all regions of Aceh province these women's organization have its branches, they set up a wide range of activities such as building kindergarten, establishing vocational school for female students which focus on increasing women's skill. They are also concerned with the issue of reproductive health and women's health. Regarding Islamic teaching they set up a regular program for reciting Quran and learning of Quran knowledge

The falling down of Suharto from power in 1998 has changed the political atmosphere not only in Indonesia as a whole but also in Aceh, resulting in emerging democratization and opening the wider space for people to participate in politics and create climate for the development of civil society institutions. Furthermore, people gained power to question the rules and policies which have been applied in Aceh, which merely benefited the local, and central government and disadvantaged local people. This also impacted on women's organizing. Furthermore, most of the independent women's NGOs in Aceh, created after the fall of Suharto, were concerned with devastation and destruction of women's lives due to the conflict.

Women's non government organization in Aceh can be classified based on the period of their emergence. Derived from my interview with some women's activist in Aceh I can conclude that women's non government organization emerged during and after the military operation. Among organizations created during military operation are Flower Aceh, YPW, KKTGA, MisPI, dan Daulat Remaja, while the organization established after Military Operation are Matahari, RPuk, Balai Syuro Inong Aceh, Dara Lajuna, Orpad, Srikandi Aceh, Spura, Mapuan Aceh, PHIA and Perempuan Merdeka. Although they started in different times, these women's NGOs share similarities: they emerged as the tension of the conflict increased, and women suffered the conflict, victimized, marginalized and disadvantaged by many actors including the Free Aceh Movement, Military and the local Aceh community.

Thus, it can be said that the impact of conflict is one of the factors which encouraged the emergence of women's organization in Aceh. Conflict has created a lot of impact on

women's lives. One of them was the increase of women's displacement. In order to feel secure, women tended to live in refugee camps, in poor condition, suffering from lack of food and clean water. Pregnant women and women with children especially suffered since their special needs were not provided by humanitarian aid. These conditions resulted in establishment of women's organizations which focused on humanitarian aid, such as RPUK (Women Volunteer for Humanitarian Aid).

The collapse of New Order Regime became the momentum of the growing in numbers of the NGOs in Aceh, including Women's NGO. Furthermore, some national Indonesian and international organizations started to establish their link in Aceh. Such as LBH APIK (Legal Aids Institute, Apik) a Jakarta based organization which focus on promoting women's right and PEKKA, also a women's organization which focuses on peace and justice from Indonesia, UNIFEM and OXFAM as transnational). Earlier, due to authoritarian regime of Suharto they could not build their relations with women's group in Aceh.

It is worth noting that some NGO started to organize the civil society even while Aceh was under the Military Operation Status. However, due to the repressive state of New Order regime which controlled the movement of society, the organizing process ran slowly, even stagnant. But the continuing process of organizing under difficult conditions has resulted to the establishment of some organization on the grass root level. The examples of such women's NGOs that are still currently active in Aceh, based on their primary focus areas include the following:

1. *Flower Aceh*, whose work focus is on the issue of violence against women; empowering women to gain access to decision making and resource management; and protection from state violence and fear.
2. *ORPAD* (Acehnese Women's Democratic Organization), an NGO whose work involves organizing and education of women on political issues. ORPAD works with women from many walks of society including streets traders, students and

the farming community. Its mission is to socially, economically, and politically liberate women and the society of Aceh in general.

3. *Mispi* (The True Partnership of Women in Aceh) focuses on education of human rights as women's right and good governance.

4. *RPUK* (Women Volunteer for Humanity), is a group of women which has activities to assist the women and children victims.

The situation of these women's NGOs is often difficult, not only because of the relation to the Indonesian state and local community, but also because of their relation to the donors and international feminist networks. Because of NGO's dependence on funding, in many cases the local organizations have to fit their concern to the program of financial institutions. Thus the NGO do not have bargaining power since the money will be allocated to other organization if they refused to comply. This would have consequences on the program, and impact on women's needs. As pointed out by Siapno (2002), women's NGO activities in Aceh are being often framed to fit network of global feminism, with gender programs getting the most attention from international organizations (and in particular on violence against women) being often defined in an a historical, apolitical context, with no analysis of colonialism.

As Siapno (2002) found in many cases national Indonesian women's organizations also came with their agenda without considering Aceh women's needs and interests. As an example she looked at one of women's organization based in Jakarta, funded by transnational networks that came to Aceh to establish an organization which focuses on women's rights. While in Aceh in that time the number of refugees was very high, most of the women in refugees camps ignored the issues of rights since in their perception what they needed was women's economic empowering (because their economic resources have been destroyed), instead of women's right. Refugee women thought that economic development program was more important for them. But these needs were not recognized by the women's group from Jakarta.

Beside that, NGOs tend to change their programs based on the dominant issues (often defined by donors). For example, in Aceh issue of gender and violence against women is preferred to issue of children trafficking, so most of organizations takes these issues as their main concern. At the same time competition among the organizations for funding is unavoidable. It often happens that an NGO has to change their focus and area of activity as the currents on important issues in Aceh change.

Nevertheless, the contributions of women's groups in term of promoting women's issues are very significant. During the military operation especially, Aceh women's groups played significant role in resolving social problems and promoting women's needs and interest. According to Suraiya, Director of *Flower Aceh*, women's organizing shares a great contribution to women in Aceh in terms of increasing women's self-confidence. Women are now aware of their position, know the politics, know the ways to demand their rights, build the cooperative power and develop local culture that has been destroyed (Suraiya, 2001; 1.

To sum up, a variety of women's organizations exist in Aceh. They have different background and activities, different main concerns. Organizations formed by the state focus on promoting the idea of womanhood and wifehood through the program of the so call PKK (Family Welfare Guidance). Religious women's organizations focus on increasing of religious awareness among women and challenge the patriarchal way of understanding Islamic teaching as one of the causes of marginalization of women in Muslim community. Finally, independent women's organizations, next to addressing violence against women and women's human rights, also enter the field of women's political participation in the society.

## **Chapter 4**

# **Women's Involvement in Peace: All Women's Conference (Duek Pakat Inong Aceh)**

This chapter explores the All Women's conference held in Banda Aceh on 20-22 February 2000. I will explore emergence of the conference, and formulation of the objectives and recommendations.

### **4.1 The Emergence Of The Conference**

The status of Aceh as military operation region has been revoked in 1998, but the military operations were still ongoing. As the result, the tension and violence never stop. The demand of people to bring to justice the perpetrators of violence during military operation would never be realized, even though a number of investigations have been done to find the facts about human right violations.

Since the collapse of New Order regime in Aceh and the resignation of Suharto as Presiden in Indonesia, The government used religion as the tool to resolve the conflict. In Habibie era Syariat Islam (Islamic Law) was the predominant issue. However, this issue was not new in Indonesia. In the old order regime state of Sukarno, the government also used the same way to defeat the rebellion movement led by Tgk. Daud Bereuh.

As has been noted by Siapno (2002) the implementation of Islamic law in Aceh was an attempt to discredit and criminalize the independence movement. She argues that the Indonesian government has framed the struggle for social justice in Aceh as a religious conflict about Islamic Law (Syariat Islam) rather than a structural conflict about the reorganization of the nation state and the economic capital, and redress human right violations, among many things (Siapno, 2000:1). Since it has been raised, the issue of



Islamic law has gained a lot of critics, specially from some women's activist, student's organizations/NGOs and human right activist.

The introduction of Islamic Law in Aceh was regarded as an instrument to accelerate the solution to Aceh problem. However, looking at the root of the conflict, one could argue that Islamic Law has been used by Jakarta not to solve the problem but rather to win the heart of Acehnese people and turn them away from the issue of gross human right violations perpetrated by the state through its apparatuses.

Link with this, Suraiya Kamaruzzaman, one of my interviewees, argues that the implementation of Islamic Law in Aceh is used as a mean to silence women's voice. The Islamic Law tends to focus on control of women, for example, what women have to wear. Thus, Islamic Law was used to force women to cover their hair. Kamaruzzaman says Islamic law has been politicized. This is evident in its focus on symbolic things such as forcing women to cover their hair, and absence of other substantial aspects of the Syariah Islam (Islamic Law) means.

Beside the overwhelming issue of Islamic law, the growing levels of violence which has been perpetuated by both the Indonesian government and the militant movement has led to increase demand for a referendum as a non violent and democratic solution. The idea of referendum came up at the All-Aceh student Youth Congress, held in February in 1999 in Banda Aceh. With the participation of more than 200 groups, including many youth groups, several mass organization, and groups of victims of violence, this congress decided that organizations should set up the support for the idea of referendum. This led to the birth of the Aceh Referendum Information Center (SIRA), and the media spread the information regarding referendum to whole Aceh community (Aguswandi, 2004:389).

On November 9, 1999 a coalition of many student activist and youth groups held the biggest rally in the history of Aceh, with over 1 million people rallying in the capital, Banda Aceh, to demand referendum over a 'self-determination of autonomy' as

suggested by Indonesian government or independence, as a solution preferred by the militant movement. This rally was not only a landmark for the civil society movement but also it could put pressure on Free Aceh Movement to support the idea of referendum. The first time the issue was raised the members of the FAM refused referendum because in their perspectives the problem in Aceh can only be solved with war and independence. But after looking at the massive support of the Acehnese for a referendum they started to support it even though their main objective was still independence.

Since that time, referendum was regarded as the best solution for achieving peace in Aceh and it was supported by many elements of Acehnese society, except the military and the government. But the government totally disregarded the demand of all Acehnese for referendum, and still looked at autonomy, and introduction of the Islamic law as the solution for the conflict. Because of this powerful opposition many people, including some women's activist and women's NGOs, argued that this will be difficult to achieve. The mid-way solution of the different perspectives was thus further sought.

It is interesting to know what were the positions of the women, what were their voices and perspectives. From the interviews I conducted with some of them, it was revealed that women's voices were not taken into account in the three solutions proposed (Autonomy, Islamic Law and Referendum). However, the result of my interview with some women's activists also shows that women have different voices and perspectives of solution in Aceh. Suraiya said that:

I do not think that all women support referendum, since the demand of referendum was followed by the increasing of tension and violence. I read one local newspaper reported that in one of villages in Aceh, Military asked people to clean the graffiti of referendum with their tongue. You see the effect of referendum.

Based on this condition, women who constitute a half of population in Aceh proposed a demand that their voices and perspectives need to be taken into consideration. In order to implement this idea, according to the women, it is necessary to conduct a conference

where all level of Acehnese women can share their opinions and perspectives toward the conflict and participate in the efforts of finding solution for Aceh. The emergence of the conference itself was based on this objective.

To set up this congress was not an easy task, since the fact that before and after the congress, the women met with so much resistance from many sides. As Naimah (an interviewee) said, she often received hate mail and threatening phone calls, from the very beginning. Besides terror through phone calls, she was asked to make the Conference to recommended referendum. On the other hand, she also got threatening calls from opponents of referendum, threatening in case the Conference would come up with suggestion for referendum.

From the beginning, the idea about the Conference has been suspected and the intensions behind it were questioned by the groups who supported the referendum. Nani (an interviewee) said that from the beginning it has been obvious that the Conference would go against the desire of the majority of Acehnese people to conduct referendum. The same negative responsetothe Conference also came from student's and men's groups. In their opinions this Conference was full of political interests and the significance of this conference was questioned.

## **4.2. Motivation And Objectives**

As has been written by feminists, conflict may open a window of opportunities or women's emancipation and for the establishment and flourishing of women organizations. Beside, it also gives women the chance of entering the public areas, the space closed to them during colonialism and the New Order era. But the conflict does not only disempower women. It also empower women on the other side (Samuel, Kumudini, 2001:190).

In the context of Aceh, this perspective is true. Even though conflict has devastated the women's lives, damaged their livelihood and their future, the conflict also opened large

chance for women to emancipate themselves. Moreover, conflict has created the chance for women to establish women's organizations at all levels and participate in searching for the efforts to establish peace in Aceh.

There are many reasons of women's involvement in the peace movement. In Sri Lanka for example, ethnically diverse conflict has encouraged some rural women to establish a women's organization called Mother's Front. Based in Northern part of Sri Lanka, this women's organization was based on the common interests to protect their children from the effects of conflict. This motivation obviously derived from their roles and duty as mother ( Samuel, Kumudini, 2001; 193).

In the case of Aceh, women's motivations in taking place in peace movement was encouraged by their willingness to end the conflict and start to build peace. Women also wanted to end all forms of human right violations, spreading for almost 3 decades and destroying Aceh economically, socially and culturally. As the results, women have had to bear the most serious consequence of violence. Several village in Aceh are called "kampong janda" (village of widow) because they consist of thousands of women whose husband have been kidnapped, disappeared, killed, imprisoned and fled to Malaysia to avoid arrested by the military.

Naimah Hassan, (Chair Person of the organizing committee of the Conference; an interviewee), reveled that the Conference was motivated by devastating condition of women due to the loss of their family and loved ones. Their children live in the refugee champs with lack of healthy food, and sanitation. Beside, during the conflict most schools have been burnt by military or Free Aceh movement members. Also a lot of teachers were displaced to other regions for seeking safety. She added that if this condition kept going, it would bring bad effect to next generation. Aceh will lose one generation. So the conflict had to be ended in a peaceful way. Women's groups were the first in Aceh who demand for solving conflict without using violence.

Beside that, Naimah Hassan argues that the reason why women should participate in finding solution is because women constitute the majority of the victims during Aceh under status of Military Operation area. Their voices and perspectives will give different pictures on solving the conflict but they are often neglected in the resolution process.

Among the three options mentioned above, none of parties considered women's interests and needs. This condition led to some women's organization in Aceh react that whatever ways to solve conflict in Aceh women must be involved. Not only because women are the primary victims during the conflict, but also because women constitute a big population. (Interview with Naimah)

Violence and treat continue to occur in the daily life of people throughout the province of Aceh. As pointed out by Naimah Hasan, conflict has made women lose their power; their positions are marginalized, their voices are unheard; this sharply contrasts with the time during struggling against Dutch Colonialism, when women had strong power, their voices were recognized, even they could replace their husbands to led the war. Many women considered that they have to participate in seeking solution for Aceh, where their voice, interest and need are accommodated. Thus All Women's Conference was held in Banda Aceh from 20-23 February, 2000, the capital of special region of Aceh, situated on the northern part of the Sumatra Island.

### **4.3 Preparations**

In early September 1999, it was decided that the Conference will gather all the representative of all various levels of women's activism in Aceh. The Congress was important to meet women's aspirations, interests and needs which have not been accommodated in the resolution by Free Aceh Movement, the Military, or even the Acehnese community itself. So it was considered urgent to set up a space where women can sit and talk together about their interests and needs. At first women felt that it was impossible to implement such an idea since the tension of conflict was so high at that

time and they could not get any supports from others women's organization whose work was focused on humanitarian aids (Interview with Syamsidar) .

According to Suraiya, at the meeting held by BKOW (Coordinating Body of Women's Organizations) in 22 December 1999 (to celebrate the so called Mother's day - Hari Ibu), this initiative reemerged. However, since BKOW is the representative of organization of the government, some women - especially from women's NGO - worried that this Conference will be used to the government interests. But they decided to join and support it in order to keep the agenda on the track. This meeting was attended by 200 women of 68 organizations in Banda Aceh. Beside, its formation also coincided with a One Million Signatures Solidarity Action for Peace in Aceh which was organized by the PEKKA, a women's group in Jakarta which focus on peace and justice (Observer, 2000).

The Conference did not only get support from women within but also from outside Aceh. The conflict and its impact on women has been a concern of individuals and women's organizations in Jakarta (The capital of Indonesia). Debra Yatim (Coordinator of PEKKA, an organization which focuses on peace and justice) and Chusnul Maríyah were among those who showed concern from the beginning. Because of their intervention and participation in the Conference, the voices were heard that this conference was initiated by feminists in Jakarta to impose their interest. But it was denied by Syamsidar (Organizing committee of the conference), who said that the idea of the Conference originated from women in Aceh. She agreed that the contribution of feminist from Jakarta was there, but they only took part in fund raising (Interview with Syamsidar).

#### **4.4. Process of Selection of Participant**

At the end of the Mother's day celebration, the women directly determined the way in which this Conference would be organized. They decided that the organizing committees would be chosen from different women's organization in Banda Aceh as well as outside of Banda Aceh. Naimah Hasan, the Director executive of BKOW was elected as the chair person of this Conference. The committees have been changed several times, as some

women's organizations which supported the referendum found that the Conference would not put referendum on their agenda, while a great number of Acehnese had demanded it. But there were also many voices that did not agree to have the referendum as the means to find solution to Aceh problem.

The Conference was attended by 437 participants representing women from 11 regencies in Aceh. The participants of this conference were various. They ranged from students and women that supported the Free Aceh Movement, women in government's institution, and various NGOs. Moreover, the participants were also coming from different level of social strata, education and organizations.

The selection criteria for participants required that participants should represented women's organization or the organizations concerned with women's development issues. This point also was criticized, according to Nur Asikin (an interviewee, one of the participants). She withdrew from the committee since she did not agree with many the decisions, one of them being the selection of criteria. She questioned why the participant had to go through the criteria. According to her as long as the women were not PKI (Communist) every one can participate. Other women disagreed with her opinion. Individuals were allowed to participate in the Conference if they had interest in gender issues, but only as observers, with right to speak but without right to vote (Recommendation of Congress, 2000:1).

The Conference was not only attended by the Acehnees women who live in Aceh but also from outside, including Jakarta, North Sumatra and other parts of Indonesia. As Naimah says, each participant would represent 5.000 women in their area. This was the first time a conference was held in Banda Aceh that represented all level of women in the region. It became the hallmark of women's movement in Aceh. It also showed the evidence that women cannot be only regarded as victim but also the subject to exercise their power.

The variety in background of the participants of the Conference did not bring discord in the main end-result of the Conference. Women came with one voice: Aceh problem must

be solved in a peaceful way. This was the main and a joint desire of all women from the Conference. But when referendum was talked about, problems came. The first problem was whether referendum should be talked separately or included in the topic of Politic and Security. The debate about referendum that took so much time it was whether to include or to exclude the Referendum from the Conference Recommendations. After discussing about 9 hours finally the women decided to exclude Referendum from the Recommendation. It was followed by the walked out of some women who were pro-referendum, led by Nur Asikin. Most of the participants made a decision to drop referendum since they did not want to be trapped by the dilemma. Nursity (an interviewee) said:

In our point of view, referendum was unclear concept. In reality we see that referendum was used by some parties as their means to keep violence in Aceh going. People were trapped between two parties, those who oppose referendum and those who support referendum. One side was forced to accept it while the other side was forced to refuse it. So we see that referendum has potential to create violence in the society. For this reason we did not see that referendum will solve the conflict, but may rather increase the tension and violence, since the government and the military opposed it. Besides, the reason to support referendum is too weak. One woman argued that we have to support referendum because men already supported it. So why not we? I found this unreasonable.

Referendum was a new concept in Aceh. Most people did not know what it was all about. Hence, the role of Center for Information on referendum is very significant in spreading and socializing the information. But in reality, referendum was misunderstood, as many people so the referendum not as a choice about two options, but as a voice for independence. As Suraiya said:

In the village people thought referendum was *pre mandum-mandum* meaning everything is free, independent.

Due to referendum being interpreted different ways by different parties, the women viewed this issue will lead to violence So women proposed the idea that conflict in Aceh need to be solve with peaceful means, avoiding use of violence.



Twenty two Recommendations were produced during the Conference to put justice and peace as the main concern and exclude referendum. Women have tried to be inclusive and democratic, not to be pro or against one or another party, Free Aceh Movement or Indonesian Military. It can be said that women had different opinions than other parties, including student, *ulama* and the government, in term of what is the best solution for the conflict.

According to Suraiya what women have produced during the Conference showed they were more advanced than what men did, as men only suggested one option - a referendum. But women could see the problems and solutions more general and comprehensive. The conference aimed to assess and formulate women's position and their needs, interests and roles in achieving a peaceful solution to the conflict which has been damaging their lives. Furthermore, the Conference also established women as major players in achieving a peaceful, just and prosperous society and the future of the region. It was recognition of women's role as actor in political, economic and social sphere, which was ignored for long by warring parties.

#### **4.5. The Results and Recommendations**

During the Conference 5 groups worked on different issues such as (a) women's position in Islamic law and in *adapt* (customary law), (b) the involvement of women in politic, (c) women's participation in economy and (d) access to local economic resources and (e) women's involvement in peace solution. After discussing for 48 hours, women in the conference produced 22 Recommendations covering the above five important aspects of women's lives. They put Peace and Justice at the heart of their concerns. This is supported with concrete Recommendations in the five strategic areas of development, including politic, economic, Islamic law, adat (traditional law), achieving a peace and social change (Recommendations of the Conference, 2000).

In the field of Islamic law the Recommendations contain the demands for the government to give freedom for Acehnese community to implement Syariat Islam (Islamic law) as the

governing legal basis and insists that Islam should be interpreted as supporting equality of men and women as well as Islam should be understood from the women's perspectives.

As I have mentioned above, the implementation of Islamic Law in Aceh is very much link to the political issue as the government take this as a means to win the heart of Achenese people and not to solve the real problem – problem related to violation of human rights, and unequal natural resources distribution between local and central government. But in women's perspective, women's future especially, and of Acehnese people generally, depended on the implementation of Islamic law. This could potentially open a large room for women to participate in social change in a peaceful atmosphere.

In general, there are two perspectives toward Islamic law, the apologists who say that Islam is a liberatory force for women and on the other hand women activist who argues that Islamic fundamentalism is misogynist and that there is a serious women's problem in Islamic movement (Siapno, 2000:47). The women in the Conference seemed not to belong to either of the two. On the one hand, they are close to the first group as they do not oppose Islamic law. But they are also close to the second group as they demanded that Islamic law should be understood through more gender equity, since the understanding of Islamic law in Aceh was influenced by patriarchal culture and male bias.

In the political field, considering that women constitute a half of Acehnese population, women demands at least 30 percent of participation in all political and decision making bodies. Actually this point links with the topic debated among feminist in Indonesia. In order to increase women's involvement in politic, they set up a quota to include 30 percent of women in legislative bodies and in other decision making processes.

During and after Aceh had the status of Military Operation Area, women became the target of violence. Huge numbers of women were raped, tortured, killed and kidnapped. So the women insisted to government to form the investigation team in Aceh in order to investigate a wide range of human right violations during and after the military operations. Besides they also demanded the withdrawal of all military troops from the

province. It is also important to take into account the establishment of the *Kanun Ureung Inong Aceh* (Women's Legal Council) which strives towards genuine (i.e. women friendly) Islamic interpretation of women's position in public life.

In the economic field, the Conference acknowledged several issues including: empowering women economically, giving women equal opportunity to access the mainstream economy and local economically viable resources. Link to this point the conference also considered women's wage in term of eliminating wage discrimination between women and men.

Furthermore, based on this point it was also talked about budget allocation between central and local government which should take into consideration that Aceh would receive 80% of its marine produce, 75% from mining wealth, 80% of forest revenue and 100 % from liquid natural gas. The conference further insisted that government does not involve foreign loan in development of Aceh, since Aceh province is very wealthy with natural resources. This budget allocation was supposed to be implemented from April 2000.

In term of social change, several points were included, among which: giving women space for enhancing their abilities and capacities, and rebuilding education and training facilities destroyed during the conflict. Women also demanded that to have equal right in traditional institutions. Women's reproductive health and women's maternity leave were highlighted in this point as well as rehabilitation of sex workers. It seems that at this point what women mean by social change was about – change of social norms and attitudes towards sex and reproduction.

Last point was about peace effort in Aceh which covered the issues of withdrawing military from Aceh, insisted that government should put pressure on both warring parties to stop fighting and perpetrating violence. From this point of view, I assumed that women in the conference put the government in the neutral position rather than as the party who involved in the conflict since the recommendations proposed to the

government. However, the women that I interviewed gave a reason why the recommendation went to government because the government as the ruler has to take any responsibilities toward all communities.

It is interesting to notice that the idea about peace came as the last but it does not mean it became less important and less concerned. Looking at the result of the conference comprehensively it can be said that the women look at the conflict in Aceh caused by a wide range of factors from unequal distribution of natural resources to the controlling of local government authority by central government. So they proposed the peaceful way of solving the problem in Aceh by looking at the root problems and investing the effort to solve it.

## Chapter V

### Some Reflections On The Conference

The narrative of women in the conflict situation tends to portray women as the victim, powerless and passive. However, based on study done by Machanda (2004) about women in the South Asia conflict revealed that beyond the victimhood of the women, they have shown their agency. Women have formed Mothers fronts and coalition for peace, women also have become guerrillas, soldiers and women have emerged as agent of social transformation and conflict resolution (Machanda, 2004:15).

In the context of Aceh, what Machanda has mentioned above has a relevant to look at how conflict had opened up the space for women to challenge the notion that women are not only the victim of the conflict but they also the subject and the agent in their community. The initiative to conduct the conference which was attended by all level of the women in this region had successfully showed their power and their active participation in finding resolution for the prolonged conflict in Aceh.

In the same time, the division of labor which places women in private and men in the public sphere has made the involvement of women in public sphere invisible, but it does not mean that they are absent. Many studies has shown how women have taken the initiative to conduct a certain activities in order to reduce the conflict and to establish peace (Machanda, 2004: 15).

The Acehnese women's activity discussed above has challenged this division of labor. Prolonged conflict has exposed women to a new domain where previous was only dominated by men. In a society with a very strong patriarchal culture embedded in it tend to limited space for women to involve in the public, including in Aceh, women are rarely involved in the process of decision making, once the women enter to this men's arena the women find the resistance from men.

From the beginning the idea came up, this conference has been criticized by many parties especially for those who support referendum for the solution of the conflict. The women had been intimidated and threatened by others parties who suspected the conference was used by some parties for their interest.

The processes of conducting this conference shows the significant also problems of cross-regional alliances in a multicultural society. As I mentioned in other chapter, the initiative to hold this congress derived from a meeting held by 200 women of 68 organizations in Aceh. Two Jakarta women from a group called PEKA (Women for Peace and Justice) named Debra Yatim and Chusnul Mariyah were invited to give their perspectives in the meeting, and involved in formulating the basic ideas for this conference. It can be said that role of these two Jakarta women were undoubtedly significant in supporting this conference. The involvement of PEKA in the process of the formulation of the conference was initially a cross regional response to a statement from the activist of women's NGO called flower Aceh that all women's in Aceh want peace, so that they need support from other women of other region.

The involvement of cross regional activism, however, created a number of problems. The participation of the Jakarta women during the December meeting gained criticism and negative responses from many Acehnese participants, living in the legacy of Jakarta centralistic hegemony. The ethnocentrism of Javanese politicians in the ruling elite, and the wounds inflicted by the Indonesian military, as the consequence strong anti-Jakarta/anti Javanese sentiments rose not only in Aceh but also in many regions in Indonesia. As the result the presence of the Jakarta women was also used by those who dislike the women's conference to identify that the congress is a agenda of women's from Jakarta.

Furthermore, in many cases have shown the evidence that partnership across national boundaries are also significant in supporting local movements. The development agencies such as UN representative and others of women activists from other countries have contributed a significant contribution in term of strengthening the women's self-

confidence but also to share the different experiences and information also to get lesson learnt from mistakes and strategies. Beside, global network communication such as email and website also play a significant role in disseminating information to the through out the world, especially when international pressure is needed to push a certain issue locally. Like the case of the Acehese women above, however, this relation of local and global were at risk since it can create an accusation this activity were funded by foreign capitals or serving foreign interests.

Besides, the women's also faced other problems that complicate the struggle of Acehese women in the conference among others are the resistance of men that goes hand in hand with patriarchy. Most of the media, such as local news paper and the social and political forces in this region are still strongly influenced by patriarchal bias. As the result, they are reluctant to acknowledge the contribution of the women through this conference. It can be seen that the voices of women and their suggestions were not very much taken into account in following attempts of peace making by the central government as well as the local communities. But only Naimah Hassan among many women leaders who participated in the All Aceh Women's Conference was invited to be in one of the members of the peace commission.

In order to implement the recommendations produced during the conference and to socialize the existence of the conference in the society, the women have formed a formal body called Balai Syura, a women's organization that will manage the networking amongst women. Hence, it is clear that to build more strategic alliances among community specially among women's organization is a very important in order to create the success women's story in Aceh

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<sup>i</sup> <http://www.rsi.sg/malay/image/vuew/20050516140253/1.html>

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