GENDER, ISLAM, NATIONALISM AND THE STATE IN ACEH

Tjoet Nyak Dhien and friends at the moment of capture.
Source: Royal Institute of Linguistics and Anthropology, KITLV, Leiden. No. 4356.

GENDER, ISLAM, NATIONALISM AND THE STATE IN ACEH

THE PARADOX OF POWER, CO-OPTATION AND RESISTANCE

Jacqueline Aquino Siapno

RoutledgeCurzon
Taylor & Francis Group

First Published in 2002
by RoutledgeCurzon
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon, OX14 4RN

Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada
by RoutledgeCurzon
270 Madison Ave, New York NY 10016

RoutledgeCurzon is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group

Transferred to Digital Printing 2006

Typeset in Stempel Garamond by LaserScript Ltd, Mitcham, Surrey

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record of this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book has been requested

ISBN 0–7007–1513–4

Printed and bound by Antony Rowe Ltd, Eastbourne

For my great-grandparents Ambrosio Mejia Aquino and Leocadia de Guzman, my mother Cora Aquino Vinluan, my brother Jay, my sister Diosa, Jafar Siddiq Hamzah, Fernando de Araujo, and my kindred spirit network of true friends

... whose real gift to me is their view of the world.

Contents

Preface

This book sets out to open up the space for interpretation of history and politics in Aceh which is now in a state of armed rebellion against the Indonesian government. It lays out a groundwork for analyzing the way that female agency is constituted in Aceh, in a complex interplay of indigenous matrifocality, Islamic beliefs and practices, and state violence. The book provides a historical, ethnographic, and literary analysis of the competing and contradictory representations of Islamic identity, nationalism and gender relations in Aceh – a region which is considered to be the most Islamic province of Indonesia, the country with the largest Muslim population in the world. Despite the existence of a large body of literature on Aceh, the important question of how gender is produced and articulated in Islamic society is understudied (with the exception of James Siegel's pioneering work on 'male marginality' in *The Rope of God*, 1969, written more than thirty years ago). In particular, the situation of women in a region of armed conflict, in a place that has had the unfortunate legacy of being unjustly categorized as a breeding ground for 'GPK terrorists' and 'Islamic fundamentalists', has received very little nuanced, historiographic analysis. I provide an analysis of Acehnese Muslim women's political subjectivities within the larger context of the failure of the Indonesian state and military to integrate and pacify the Acehnese. My analysis of poor, rural Acehnese women's resiliency to survive war and refugee camps is also contextualized within the current international responses to the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the U.S. and the changes that have happened since in the world community's perceptions of Muslim communities, women and Islamic cultures, so-called 'Islamic fundamentalist movements', and the 'war on terrorism'. The September 11 attacks have had a profound influence on the Indonesian government and public's response to U.S. President George Bush's 'war on terrorism' and simultaneously, on their own internal security approach towards the conflict in Aceh.

However, I must point out from the very beginning that those who are looking for an 'update' on the current events in Aceh will be seriously

disappointed with this book. This book does not provide a comprehensive chronological analysis of current political events in Aceh. Nor is it a book about human rights violations in Aceh. That kind of work is much better done by numerous local and international human rights NGOs, political organizations and women's groups that have been doing excellent documentation and analysis of current political events in Aceh. Rather it is a book that sets out to critically examine some conventional popular assumptions about contemporary history and politics in Aceh in particular on the topic of women's political subjectivities.

The book provides an analysis of the different ways in which women have created spaces beyond the conventional and institutionalized practices of doing politics. My interest is not so much in organized women's groups per se but in women's agency and the complex, often contradictory and paradoxical configurations of gendered agency. I argue that the sometimes syncretic, sometimes competing interaction between the two systems of authority in Aceh – Islam and matrifocality – provides all kinds of possibilities and spaces for negotiating female power and agency. Thus the book goes beyond the conventional political analysis on Aceh that focuses so much on Islamic militancy, but looks at its intersections with other formations such as piety, religious education, matrifocality, and traditional ideas of power.

Finally, the book makes a contribution to the different pluralistic interpretations and practices of Islam, or more appropriately perhaps, Islam(s) – beyond the 'pure philosophy' of Islam. Several colleagues from the Middle East who are in Middle Eastern Studies, Gender Studies, and Islamic Studies and are Arabic speakers have generously read and commented on this book. They cannot imagine how much I have learnt from the comments they made on the margins, especially with regard to Arabic words that have acquired a very different meaning in the Acehnese and Indonesian contexts, and with local practices that seemed too un-Islamic and 'way-out-there' from their Arab and Middle Eastern perspectives. The more open-minded were fascinated and appreciative of these pluralistic interpretations and practices of Islamic beliefs in Aceh and Indonesia, while the ones who were not so open-minded insisted that these interpretations were 'wrong' and that these Acehnese and Indonesians should perhaps go to the Middle East to study and learn more about how to practice and interpret Islam the 'right' way. While the book discusses some aspects of 'normative Islamic piety', most of it is more concerned with local Acehnese perspectives, conceptions and practices, for which I make no apologies.

While there have been excellent scholarly work on Gender Studies and Feminist Theory on Indonesia, these studies tend to avoid or completely ignore the role of Islam as a powerful cultural, religious, intellectual and socio-economic centrifugal force. On the other hand, there is a significant amount of political science writing on Islam in Aceh and Indonesia but they

tend to focus on 'Islamic militancy' and political Islam, on urban elite politics and often on male-dominated and predominantly male institutionalized political systems. This book focuses on Islam not so much as a political force, but as a practice of everyday life, and on rural and non-elite formations in the making and remaking of Acehnese identity and nationalism vis-a-vis Jakarta and the Indonesian state.

FIELDWORK AND ETHNOGRAPHY

On my first trip to Aceh in 1992, Acehnese friends in Medan helped me get on a night bus that would arrive in Banda Aceh at dawn where I would be picked up by my foster family. It was a nine hour bus ride. In restrospect it was that first journey which endeared me to this place called Aceh in *Selat Melaka*. In the middle of the night the bus stopped somewhere in East Aceh next to a warung so that everyone could stretch and get something to eat. When I came down the bus, a thin, old Acehnese man wearing a black *peci* (Muslim hat worn in mosques like the one worn by Sukarno and Naguib Mahfouz) bowed his head and greeted me warmly: *'Assalamu' alaikum'*. ('May God's peace and blessing be with you.') I returned the greeting, *'Alaikum salaam.'* With this small gesture he wiped out all the doubts planted in my head by friends in Jakarta who told me all sorts of horror stories about the 'extremism' of the Acehnese and the terrifying situation in Aceh under DOM (*Daerah Operasi Militer)*. It was my very first contact with the warm hospitality of the Acehnese and one that I shall never forget.

After several months of fieldwork in Aceh, from 1992, 1993, 1996 overwhelmed by the intensity of political violence I despaired at how I would ever be able to write with an ethic of responsibility and in a different style from the urgency of human rights reporting and political activist work. The government and military have a monopoly of spectacular horror storytelling and react brutally towards those who challenge their version of events. Perhaps the excerpt below best captures the threat that storytelling poses to the Indonesian army. The short story, *'Telinga'* (Ears) is about a military officer in a far-away province somewhere in Indonesia (it could be Aceh, West Papua or East Timor) who sends his Javanese girlfriend Dewi packages of human ears, as a token of his longing for her. After receiving the ears, Dewi writes to her beloved and asks: 'But then how do you make sure that these people whose ears have been cut off no longer hear voices?'

> *'Maafkanlah aku Dewi, jika setelah sekian lama baru sekarang bisa kubalas suratmu. Baiklah kuceritakan padamu betapa sibuknya kami melawan suara-suara yang mengajurkan pemberontakan. Kalau musuh datang menyerbu, kami tinggal menembaknya. Tapi suara-suara itu berteberan di udara tanpa bunyi, sehingga kami tak akan pernah tahu siapa yang kira-kira sudah mendengarnya. Semua orang*

seolah-olah bisa tiba-tiba saja berubah menjadi pemberontak. Kami tak akan pernah bisa tahu siapa lawan siapa kawan, kami terpaksa membantai semuanya.'

'Forgive me Dewi, it took me so long before I could respond to your letter. I can't begin to tell you how busy we've been trying to fight against these voices spreading subversion. If an enemy comes to attack, we can easily shoot. But these voices are dispersed circulating in the air soundless, so we never know who has already heard them. It is as if everyone can suddenly transform and become a subversive. We will never be able to know who is the enemy and who is not, so we are forced to eliminate all of them.'[1]

In November 1990, one of the military commanders in charge of Aceh, Pangdam Mayjen H.R. Pramono made the following statement: 'I have told the community, if you find a terrorist, kill him. There is no need to investigate further. Do not let people become victims. If they don't do as you order them, shoot them on the spot, butcher them. I advised the people to carry a *machete*, or other kinds of weapons. If you meet a terrorist, kill him.'[2] Conducting research in Aceh was difficult. All over Aceh there were posters of 'wanted GPK terrorists' and warning signs stating that anyone who supported GPK Aceh Merdeka will fall under the full weight of the law. One of the questions the military and police often asked me throughout my stay was whether or not I had a 'questionnaire'. When I replied that I didn't, they didn't quite know what to make of the seemingly innocuous fieldwork on 'women' that I wanted to do. It seemed to me, however, that at that time, compared to the topic of 'politics', the military and police considered the subject of 'women' an insignificant issue which could not be of any real threat to internal or national security.

I conducted research in the *pesisir* (coastal) regions of Aceh Besar, Sabang, Pidie, North Aceh, East Aceh and South Aceh, and one interior region in West Aceh (in Woyla). My decision to live in several field sites instead of one particular place had to do with my interest in the different ways Islam is practised in urban and rural areas, in particular with regard to gender relations. I first visited Aceh in 1992 to conduct a pilot survey and travelled extensively in Banda Aceh, Lhokseumawe, Idi, Peureulak, and Langsa. In 1993 I returned for a two-month visit and travelled in Aceh Besar, Pidie and Takengon, Central Aceh. In 1996, I conducted fieldwork for twelve months in the regions of West Aceh (Woyla and Meulaboh), South Aceh (Singkil), Pidie (Sigli) and North Aceh (Lhokseumawe). During my fieldwork totalling more than 14 months, over a four year period (1992–1996), I had main bases in the cities of Banda Aceh and Medan and travelled extensively from North to South, and East to West Aceh, living in different districts ranging from a period of two weeks to two months. In addition to

fieldwork in Aceh and Medan, I conducted extensive interviews with Acehnese refugees in Malaysia and Singapore from 1992-1996. I have also lived with and worked very closely with Acehnese immigrants in Astoria, New York for a period of eight months in 1998 (January-September 1998), working as an interpreter for political asylum cases and becoming a co-founder of an international forum to discuss current issues pertaining to Aceh.

During the first week of my arrival in Banda Aceh in 1996, I was summoned by the Indonesian military and interrogated by five men regarding my research. They informed me that I was going to be put under surveillance 'for my own good' because there have been foreign journalists and researchers who have been killed and they wanted to make sure to 'protect' me. They wanted to know which villages I planned to live in and who I planned to interview. I showed them my research permits and sponsorships from several Indonesian institutions in Jakarta, including the Indonesian Institute of Sciences (LIPI), the Majelis Ulama Indonesi (MUI), and my security clearances from BAKIN and other agencies. After looking through the papers, their leader said to me: 'But of course you must remember that here in Aceh you can have a room-full of permits from Jakarta and they wouldn't be applicable here at all.'

After I came home from the interrogation, I spoke to my bestfriend, a young Acehnese woman whom I had been corresponding with since 1992 during my first visit and told her what happened. I mentioned the possibility of doing a completely different project and perhaps moving to some other place in Sumatra, but she replied: 'If you go, then you will have done exactly what they want you to do – leave, and they would have succeeded.' It was her confidence and trust in my work and her extraordinary friendship which sustained me through all the military checkpoints and interrogation I had to put up with throughout my stay in Aceh. In retrospect, I also found it quite hopeful that my project was strongly supported by specific people in government institutions who extended their help beyond official duties to produce permits to enable me to stay in Aceh safely and interview freely (including conducting interviews in prison) despite the intimidation of some members of the Indonesian armed forces. I decided that the best way to go about doing research was to adopt a non-directed approach; my methodology depended on 'learning how to waste time in order to gain it'. I learned from the very beginning that a well-planned research approach was the worst possible strategy since they also demanded to check and flip through notebooks and journals during road checkpoints. Because asking the wrong questions could lead to expulsion, I had to wait for long periods of time until it was 'safe' to ask that question or until someone from the government or military raised or answered a question I had wanted to raise. I took notes, kept a fieldwork journal and did not use a tape-recorder except when recording songs and oral traditions. The strategy of moving to

different villages was in part due to my interest in the differences in Islamic practice in urban and rural areas, but also to avoid being followed around by *intel* (military intelligence) and endangering the people who adopted me into their homes and also those whom I interviewed. Due to the politically sensitive content of this work, I have refrained from mentioning the real names of people I interviewed, except for those who have already agreed to be mentioned and who have very high public profiles in the opposition movement.

In current debates about the politics of representation, the question of 'is ethical fieldwork possible?' has prompted scholars to interrogate rather than pretend to avoid their own positionality and the baggage that they carry with them during fieldwork and ethnographic interpretation.[3] It helped a lot that I am Filipina and didn't look foreign (most people thought I was either Malay or from some other part of Indonesia). It also helped being socialized as a woman and being more accustomed to silences and listening sensitively to what is hidden and implied, sitting in the corner or at the back, and being invisible, thus able to observe more carefully, rather than being an exhibitionist about one's presence. This enabled me to live in rural villages without attracting too much attention from the army and their *intel.* Even though I was raised in a devoutly Catholic family in Pangasinan, Philippines and had been indoctrinated with history lessons about the 'militant terrorist Muslims' in Mindanao, Southern Philippines, I had applied (but was rejected) to join Tarekat Naqsyahbandiyah (the *ulama* had advised me to come back in later years). My own upbringing in provincial Pangasinan, Philippines (in Bonuan Gueset, Dagupan City) and our later immigration to the U.S., living as an immigrant in California, and raised by a very strong single mother made me acutely sensitive about class politics and the subtle practices of marginalization embedded in everyday life. Our first home was in inner city Oakland which was populated mostly by Cambodian, Vietnamese, Laotian refugees and Filipino, Thai, Korean, Chinese immigrants, and African-Americans. These communities living in inner city Oakland, home also of the Black Panthers in the sixties and seventies, are a very vibrant, dynamic part of non-capitalist American culture, yet many of them lacked a sense of entitlement and were treated as 'second-class citizens', marginalized in social representations in the media and other public discourses generally, their city often labelled as 'one of the top ten most violent cities in the U.S.' Because we were its inhabitants, my sister and I often walked the streets of inner city Oakland at night, curious and adventurous immigrants that we were, heedless of the police sirens that often went by. It was only later when we received scholarships to go to the Seven Sisters' women's colleges in the East Coast that our upper middle class classmates told us we came from a neighborhood with a 'bad' reputation. So when people in Jakarta warned me with stereotyped stories about Aceh and the 'extremist' Acehnese, I thought that I might feel very much at home in Aceh.

Even though I initially arrived in Aceh in 1992 without an authority figure to introduce me, paradoxically the fact that I was female and travelling alone actually worked more to my benefit than disadvantage. This is an important example of the liberal character of Islam in Aceh, I think, because as Lila Abu-Lughod (1986) notes regarding her own fieldwork in Egypt but also in other Muslim societies, a young woman travelling alone would usually be considered a 'problem'. I found that in Aceh, this was not the case: I was put under the category of 'musafir' rather than 'woman'. In Islam, one of the categories of people who ought to be shown kindness and are most deserving of help, aside from orphans (*yatim piatu*) and the poor and homeless (*fakir miskin*), are travellers from far away places (*musafir*). In Islam it is believed, as Barbara Metcalf writes elsewhere that 'travel ... inculcates a modest and humble disposition and encourages a state of permanent vulnerability and uncertainty in which one learns to be dependent on God, outside of one's normal moorings.' (Metcalf 1996: 2).[4] Women often invited me to have meals at their homes for *buka puasa* during Ramadan. My research in different districts was arranged for me by several foster families who brought me to their own villages and introduced me as a daughter, a sister, or a niece. To this day, these adopted relationships continue. One Acehnese family in particular generously introduced me to many different groups in Acehnese society and treated me as though I was a true member of their family. Most of what I know about Aceh I learnt from them. Pak Yakob Djuli who is now in his seventies was a friend of Tan Malaka and it was because of my own admiration for Tan Malaka that we formed a long lasting friendship. Pak Yakob taught me about *'dirajahkan'*, about Malay and Acehnese magic and *ilmu kebal*. Bang Adam Djuli worked closely in the Jakarta palace with Sukarno and was a 'Sukarnoist', but after the coup and counter-coup in 1965 when Sukarno was deposed and thousands of suspected communists where massacred, had to flee and live in exile under extremely difficult circumstances. Through him, the Acehnese refugees in Kuala Lumpur, and the refugees and immigrants in New York and Utah, I learnt about the difficulties of Acehnese refugees and those living in exile and the diaspora and their tumultuous experiences of dispossession and displacement. Perhaps even by looking at the experience of this one family and their initial utter commitment to the common project of Indonesian independence and nationalism, we could learn a lot about the history of the Acehnese and their betrayal by the Indonesian project. Oom Nur and several other Acehnese aunts and uncles fostered my appreciation and sensitivity to Acehnese language and oral traditions. Their unusual poetic sensibilities and genuine love for Acehnese language and pantuns was a source of entertainment for me.

The stories and analysis in this book are strung together by the common thread of the weaving of a political imaginary which gives hope in a place where violence and death has been both extremely devastating

and often illogical and meaningless. What I have tried to do is present divergent articulation of histories that are neither unified nor continuous but always already broken and contaminated. In December 1996, I took my last bus ride to Banda Aceh, two days before I was to leave Indonesia for good because my fieldwork and research visa had ended. At the bus station in Medan, I saw a cosmopolitan-looking woman in her thirties who was travelling with her little boy. I vividly remember thinking to myself, 'this woman is courageous, travelling on a night bus to Aceh with her little son'. She and her son happened to sit on the left seat across the aisle from me. The first military check-point happened in Langsa, East Aceh. Three military soldiers got on the bus demanding to see everyone's *Kartu Tanda Penduduk* (KTP) or identity card. They told all the men to come down from the bus and fall-in-line for inspection. They then searched the men's bodies by roving the tip of their gun around the men's waists. They told the women to stay in the bus but show their KTP and open their bags for inspection. The young man on my right side who had fallen asleep was forced to wake-up at gunpoint. An elderly Acehnese woman whose KTP had expired since 1994 was told that she should not be travelling in Aceh until she renewed her KTP. When the soldiers had finished, the bus went on its way. The second checkpoint was in Idi, still in East Aceh, only a few hours from the first checkpoint. This time, the search was conducted by the Police, the same procedure, asking everyone to show their KTP, telling the men to come down and the women to open their bags. By the third check-point somewhere near Lhokseumawe, North Aceh, the young mother on my left asked me in Indonesian: 'Is this normal here?' (*'Apakah ini biasa di sini?'*) When I said 'yes', she continued, 'This is my first time to visit Aceh. I'm from Jakarta. I can't believe my sister in Banda Aceh did not tell me about this, otherwise I wouldn't have brought my son.'

After the third checkpoint I told her to go to sleep since it was probably going to be the last one. A few hours later when we passed a town in Pidie, there was another military checkpoint. Exactly the same repetitive procedure, asking for identity cards, checking the bags in the luggage compartment for smuggled weapons and *ganja* (marijuana). The fifth checkpoint occurred in Sigli, again the same procedure, with armed soldiers checking civilian passengers for their identity cards. Five checkpoints during a nine-hour bus ride. For several months, I went to different villages asking Acehnese if they thought the political situation had improved since the mass killings of civilians from 1989-1993 under DOM. During my fieldwork, I witnessed government officials making numerous speeches about the sincerity of the government and the great improvement of basic infrastructure. I found some answers to my questions when I took that last bus ride to Aceh, thinking throughout that journey that if this is how they treated innocent civilians on a bus – with great suspicion, contempt,

and in some instances brutality – then how much more so with people whom they had real reason to suspect.

One of the consequences of government counter-insurgency against so-called 'subversives and troublemakers' is the increased numbers of military and police stations and troops all over Aceh. Previous experiences with brutal punitive measures have taught all drivers of buses, cars, trucks and motorcycles to slow down and feign utter submission and compliance when passing military and police stations to allow the military to execute their tasks properly: i.e. checking everyone's KTP (identity card) to intimidate clandestine or potential sympathizers and supporters of the independence movement, checking bag's for smuggled weapons and marijuana (grown illegally on a large scale in Aceh). On a psychological and experiential level, it is the most pernicious form of intimidation of civilians to bow to military force. In the ongoing violence in Aceh, it is not 'Islamic fundamentalism' nor extremism which is held responsible by ordinary people for armed conflict and increasingly patriarchal practices, but the ultimately violent and criminal nature of the Indonesian state in its behaviour towards poor Acehnese. For many ordinary Achenese, the Indonesian police and military has become a main source of "insecurity" in their lives.

On September 7, 2000, the bodies of five people were found in a deep ravine in North Sumatra, one of them identified as the body of Jafar Siddiq Hamzah, a prominent human rights lawyer who was held in such high esteem by Acehnese people for his work defending poor peasants against government abuses and brutality in Aceh and North Sumatra. He was one of my closest friends in this world and when I first heard of the news of his brutal murder, my world fell apart. We had just spent several months helping him to recover from cancer, treated by some of the best surgeons in New York, only to be mercilessly undone by his torturers who were extremely sadistic in their work. I remember thinking that perhaps I needed to leave this world for several years because I no longer understand why human beings could do these things to each other. He had been stabbed several times, his face smashed and poured with acid so that it would be completely unrecognisable, and then his body dumped in a deep ravine where his murderers hoped he would never be found. It is sadly ironic, that he who fought so hard in his life to make peace and who was described as 'truly one of the gentlest of human beings',* was killed in the most monstrous, sadistic manner. There has been no rigorous investigation of his murder and those of thousands of others, despite strong pressure from the international community on the Indonesian military for accountability on disappearances, murders, rapes, and massacres in Aceh.

*For more information on this case, see for example, 'Remembering Jafar Siddiq Hamzah' and 'Violence in an Era of Reform', obituaries and speeches presented during a memorial to honor his life at the Graduate Faculty of the New School for Social Research, New School University, New York, October 23, 2000.

As I follow news reports about Aceh on a daily basis, there seems to be less and less hope of justice for all the women widows in Aceh whose husbands were murdered and who must bear the responsibility of raising orphaned children on their own. No justice for all the mothers whose sons were sent to prison with long sentences for 'criminal' acts they didn't commit, nor for the young children whose family members they held up as role models were tortured then executed, their bodies left on the side of the road. There will be no justice also for the military soldiers and the police, especially for the poor and the lowest ranking, who are going to have to pay for these crimes against humanity while the generals and their bosses are left untouched. And as the days pass, the news about Aceh becomes increasingly predictable – the people who sign and approve huge amounts of funds and troops to increase the efficiency of the killing instead of allocating these funds for permanently displaced refugees and ending the violence, continue to get away with murder.

I do not claim to speak for the subjects of this book or for their struggle, for any research and ethnography is ultimately solely the writer's own interpretation of her fieldwork, interview, and analysis of archival materials. In my analysis of events, statements, texts and spoken words, it is likely that my interpretations risk pleasing no one, not even the people I sympathize with. I have no control over how this book may be interpreted, but I assume full responsibility for its contents.

Acknowledgements

I wish to thank several people, communities, and institutions who made it possible for me to embark on this *perantauan.* This book is a revised version of my Ph.D. dissertation at University of California-Berkeley. Throughout my studies at UC Berkeley, Sylvia Tiwon provided the rare combination of strong intellectual support and friendship. If this work has any important insights at all, I owe it to her guidance. Aihwa Ong, Vicente Rafael, David Lloyd, Amin Sweeney and Robert Goldman provided much need support and advice during critical stages of my Ph.D. career. The Department of South and Southeast Asian Studies provided a block grant and the Vice-Chancellor's Research Award for Dissertation Writing. The larger University of California system in general has been an ideal intellectual home to me for 8 years and it is only after I've left and gone to a different continent that I realized what a truly unique place it is. I wish to thank my colleagues and friends at UC Berkeley, UC Irvine, UC Riverside (especially Deborah Wong, Rene Lysloff, and Sally Ann Ness), UCLA, UC Santa Cruz, and UC Davis (especially Suad Joseph and Barbara Metcalf) where I presented several sections of this book and received extremely useful suggestions. Henk Maier at Leiden University also kindly sent me helpful suggestions on earlier drafts of this project.

My preliminary fieldwork in 1992 and 1993 were funded by grants from the Social Science Research Council Pre-Dissertation Fellowship and a Luce Grants-in-Aid. The dissertation fieldwork from January-December 1996 was funded by the Joint Committee of the Social Science Research Council and the American Council of Learned Societies Dissertation Fellowship. In Indonesia, my research project was sponsored by the *Lembaga Ilmu Pengetahuan Indonesia* (LIPI or Indonesian Institute of Sciences) and the Majelis Ulama Indonesia/Aceh (MUI). I wish to give special thanks to Soehartono Soedargo and Erwiza Erman at LIPI who were extremely kind and helpful to to me during the research visa application process. The *Majelis Ulama Aceh*, under the leadership of the late Prof. Ali Hasjmy, prepared the necessary letters of introduction to police and military officials to enable me to conduct research in rural villages.

I was very fortunate to be part of two residency research groups at the University of California Humanities Research Institute at Irvine both of them on Gender studies. They influenced me a great deal, not only in terms of writing this book and developing theoretical frameworks but also in meeting other women scholars whose intellectual and political integrity are a source of inspiration for me. I wish to thank Judith Butler and Wendy Brown for inviting me to participate in the residential group on 'Feminism and Discourses of Power' from January–June 1995 and the other members of this group for their rigorous criticism and friendship: in particular Nancy Fraser, Anne Norton, Irene Wei, Nancy Campbell, Saidiya Hartman, and Angela Harris. The residential group on 'Gender and Citizenship in Muslim Communities' expanded my understanding of Islam to comparative studies of Muslim societies and sharpened my theoretical analysis. For their critical insights, mentorship and camaraderie, I want to thank Suad Joseph, Sondra Hale, Jasamin Rostam-Kolayi, Ula Taylor, Islah Jad, Kristy Bright, and Carol Bruch. Patricia O'Brien, former Director of UCHRI and the staff there gave me a very special intellectual home during these two residencies.

In Aceh, the Lembaga Bantuan Hukum- Banda Aceh and Lembaga Bantuan Hukum-Medan which were the main human rights NGOs doing excellent work on struggles for social justice at the time I did fieldwork in 1992, 1993, and 1996, provided a kindred spirit network for discussion and many cups of coffee at the nearby warung. Male intellectuals and nationalists in particular Alamsyah Hamdani, Noer Nikmat, members of the Djuli family, the late Iwan Dukun, the late Ali Hasjmy, the late Sayed Mudhahar Ahmad, Ahmady Meuraxa, Mohammad Zaini, Ibrahim, Abdul Jalil, Bang Hasby and many others challenged me to have a more nuanced understanding of Acehnese history and gender politics. Jafar Siddiq Hamzah who was found murdered in September 2000 was the best colleague, friend, and comrade one could ever hope to have. I want to express my enduring appreciation and gratitude to him, to M.N. Djuli and Bang Adam Djuli for their unflagging support throughout my fieldwork and for their important and critical insights on this book.

My greatest debt goes to many Acehnese women. Due to the ongoing conflict in Aceh, it is best not to mention their full names because unlike the men above who have a very public persona, they work behind-the-screen. Shedding public light on their courageous work may put them in even more danger. I especially wish to thank Fatimah who travelled with me throughout Aceh and taught me most of what I know about praying. The elderly women in Sigli whom I lived with who taught me how to be patient through reading the Qur'an and practicing writing Arabic script several hours everyday. Kak Hamdiah who travelled with me to North and Central Aceh, Cut Zahara who travelled with me to Pulau Weh. Meutia, Intan, Ibu Ratna S., Suraiya I., Asna H., Ibu Warni, Linda, Kak Yusrah, and Suraiya K. who invited me to meals, worked collaboratively in organizing conferences

on Aceh, and engaged me in long, intensive, critical discussions about the current political situation in Aceh.

I finished the revisions for this book at the Australian National University in Canberra with the support of a Luce Post-Doctoral Fellowship. There were many colleagues and friends who showed genuine interest in my work and who critically engaged my ideas. In particular I want to thank Benedict Tria Kerkvliet, Melinda Tria Kerkvliet, Kit Collier, Kathryn Robinson, Andrew Walker, Reynaldo Ileto, Ann Kumar, Craig Reynolds, Virginia Matheson Hooker, James Fox and Amrih Widodo. I was very fortunate to have spent several months writing with other women whose seriousness in struggling not just 'to make room' but to create a different intellectual space was a source of inspiration for me, especially Kaori Maekawa, Kim Ninh, Tomomi Ito, and Lorraine Salazar. I also wish to thank several friends, mentors, and colleagues whose presence and example of feminism as praxis has sustained me: my sister Diosa, Alexia Bloch, Hendro Sangkoyo, Herb Feith, Deborah Wong, Sally Ann Ness, Samya Burney, Margaret Herbig, Ula Taylor, Saraswati Sunindyo, Chandra Mohanty, Lisa Trivedi, Nancy Fraser, Suad Joseph, Sondra Hale, Islah Jad, Marguerite Waller, Nursyahbani Katjasungkana, Selma Widhi Hayati, Masako Ishii, Ann Capling, Jennifer Nedelsky, Robyn Sloggett, and Kyungsoo Choi. My editor at Curzon, Jonathan Price, deserves a special thank-you for making my first experience with the mysterious world of book publishing pain-free.

My deepest gratitude goes to my family and community of true friends, especially my mother, Cora Aquino Vinluan, my sister Diosa, and my brother Jay for caring for me and supporting me in the most crucial ways, enabling me to have strength of mind and spirit. My family from Pangasinan, Philippines never imagined that they would spend so much time learning about Acehnese politics and living with Acehnese. My love and my thanks goes to Fernando de Araujo whose care and companionship during the last stages of this book deepened my understanding of what life is all about.

I dedicate this book to so many Acehnese friends and adopted families from whom I learnt so much, some of whom have now passed away or been killed: the late Habibah Hamzah, the late Asna Zainuddin, the late Iwan Dukun, the late Ali Hasyimi, and most especially Jafar Siddiq Hamzah, my fried who was killed who lives on in me. This book is dedicated to all the people who helped me since I first began to do research in Aceh in 1992. To so many people who've paid a very high price – their lives – for justice. To the poor people in the villages where I lived who have a lot of resources in their own land but are not able to use or benefit from what they own, nor have a chance in life by the whole meaning of life. With my admiration and our hope.

Chapter 1

Power, Hegemony, and Agency
The Ambiguity of Women's Political Subjectivity in Aceh

> 'The starting point of critical elaboration is the consciousness of what one really is, and is "knowing thyself" as a product of the historical process to date, which has deposited in you an infinity of traces, without leaving an inventory. ... Therefore, it is imperative at the outset to compile such an inventory.'
>
> Gramsci in *Prison Notebooks*, quoted in Said, *Orientalism* (Said 1978: 25)[1]

In the consolidation of the modern Indonesian nation-state, Islam and gender relations have been reconstructed in a particular way: on the one hand Aceh is represented by Acehnese Muslim nationalists as having a long tradition of 'strong, fighting women" and on the other hand it has been reconstructed by the Indonesian state and the military since the New Order under Suharto as the cradle of 'Islamic fundamentalism". This contradiction is further complicated by the fact that Acehnese have had a history of fierce independence opposing the central state (although the character and leadership of the rebellions have been different in specific historical contexts), their cultural nationalism finding expression in strong Islamic identity as a symbol of cohesiveness. In its attempts to completely discredit and criminalize the independence movement, the Indonesian government has framed the struggles for social justice in Aceh as a 'religious conflict about Syariat Islam' (the implementation of Islamic law and the formation of an Islamic state) rather than a structural conflict about the re-organization of the nation-state and economic capital, and redress of grievances of human rights violations, among many things.

In Aceh, the politics of Islamic resistance has become more patriarchal in response to Indonesian state violence. Yet while state Islam and state policies are 'bad' for women (eroding women's public roles, gender stereotyping in state policy, law, and programs for women; inequality in the economic sector)[2], resistance Islam is not necessarily more inclusive of women. Within Islamic communities, there is a conflict between the

apologists who say that Islam is a liberatory force for women and on the other hand, the women activists (for example the women's congress *Duek Pakat Inong Aceh* in February 2000[3] and Wardah Hafidz 1993[4]) who argue that Islamic fundamentalism is misogynist and that there is a serious women's problem in Islamist movements. I argue that when Acehnese Islam is not reacting to outside colonizing power – such as the Dutch or the Indonesian state – it is not compelled to be defensive. If there were no armed rebellion against the Indonesian state, Acehnese Islam would less likely construct Islamic identity into militant, patriarchal lines which restrict women's roles and mobility, but rather for centuries has allowed the co-existence of long-standing matrifocal beliefs and practices with Islamic values.

In this book I look at some of the consequences of the armed conflict on social relations, in particular the gendering of struggles for power – how women's bodies and female sexuality are sites appropriated by all kinds of groups to fight their wars and struggles. What 'good Muslim women' are supposed to do and what they in fact do. One of the main questions presented in this book concerns the role of Islam in contemporary Acehnese nationalism. Is Islam just one of many political-economic, socio-cultural factors in the making of subjects, and if so, then why do most researchers over-privilege political Islam in their analyses of Muslim societies? This is a question which has troubled scholars working on issues of gender in Muslim communities in other parts of the world (see for example Hale 1999 and Kandiyoti 1991).[5]

My analysis of agency explores the complex interplay of militancy, activism, and piety: the place of the sacred within the political and the political within the sacred. It is no mere coincidence that the most militant pro-independence activists in Aceh are also the most pious (the most obvious example is Teungku Bantaqiah but also other ulama and religious leaders, lawyers and student leaders who are renowned for being *alim*). I look at the different meanings of what it means to be *alim* and the interpretations of *jihad filsabillilah* within the context of Muslim discursive traditions. I also argue that beyond the current events' reporting which place too much emphasis on Gerakan Aceh Merdeka (GAM, a movement for independence) and recently-formed NGOs, there exist long-standing traditional ideas about power, local knowledges, and strategies that continue to have a very strong hold over Acehnese. For example the concept of *keramat* (sacred; supernatural; source of blessing)[6] and *muslihat* (also *peungeut* in Acehnese; ambiguous or impure opposition which may ostensibly appear as co-optation). The question of female agency in a relatively egalitarian society which has become increasingly patriarchal and the politics of everyday opposition under Indonesian state oppression is organized around the concept of *muslihat.*

My theoretical arguments concerning the contradictions between feminism and nationalism and the paradoxes of female agency borrow

from innovative ethnography on other parts of the world especially on Palestine (Islah Jad 1995 and Julie Marie Peteet 1991); Northern Ireland (Begona Aretxaga 1997 and Allen Feldman 1991); South Africa (Anne McClintock 1994; Gay Seidman 1993); Polynesia (Deborah Elliston 1997); and Australia (Joy Damousi 1999). The ethnographic and historical analyses of these scholars provided for me an immensely useful comparative framework for analyzing the discourses of gender and nationalism, women's activism and political consciousness, male militancy, political subjectivity, matrifocality and domesticity, which go beyond redundant conventional analyses.[7]

In Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities, Etienne Balibar argues that wherever powerful lineal, tribal, or kinship solidarties still exist, the formation of the nation is incomplete (Balibar 1991: 102). In Aceh, this 'incompleteness' has on the one hand opened up radical possibilities for belonging and on the other hand has also instituted a new form of community which privileges men and marginalizes women. I critically examine the projects of well-meaning male nationalists and cosmopolitan feminists whose definition of 'feminism' is confined to modern, organized movements for example, *Gerakan Aceh Merdeka* (GAM) and *Gerwani* (Wieringa 1995)[8] and occlude forms of female agency which do not conform to their particular definition of feminism. How do we begin to analyze forms of female agency that take the form of uncategorizable, errant, paradoxical subjectivities? In the final chapter, I provide a longer analysis of transnational women's groups and NGOs who adopt a primarily gender-based notion of feminism (and subordinates conflictual issues such as class, race, First World/ Third World inequalities) under the paradigm of 'gender'. Feminist analyses of nationalist movements have tended to begin from the assumption that women are universally subordinated in all nationalist movements and that 'no nation in the world gives women and men the same access to the rights and resources of the nation-state'. (McClintock, 1995: 353).[9] The absence of women in nationalist movements is thereby interpreted as undemocratic:

> '... nationalisms are from the outset constituted in gender power, but, as the lessons of international history portend, women who are not empowered to organize during the struggle will not be empowered to organize after the struggle. If nationalism is not transformed by an analysis of gender power, the nation-state will remain a repository of male hopes, male aspirations and male privilege.' (McClintock, 1995: 385)

I argue that in Aceh women's relative absence in nationalist movements may not necessarily be a marker of female subordination especially if the women themselves consciously choose not to participate due to the fact that women were not present or actively enlisted to participate from its inception.

Instead they have formed alternative axes of power (for example in Aceh, the emergence of the historic women's congress called Duek Pakat Inong Aceh in February 2000) that can no longer be ignored or dismissed. It may be useful to explore mechanisms, practices and spaces outside the discourse of nationalism where women exercise power, independence and agency, in order to understand the disinterestedness, ambivalence, even animosity of women to nationalist organizations. In her analysis of the contradictory politics of feminism, modernity, nationalism and post-coloniality, Lila Abu-Lughod cautions about 'the special difficulty of recuperating the voices of any but middle-class and elite women in the study of nationalism'. (Abu-Lughod 1998: 24).[10]

This argument for looking at discursive formations outside nationalism and nationalist movements is not new, there is the critical scholarship of the Subaltern Studies group (Chatterjee 1993, 1986, Guha 1988, Spivak 1988), and in the Philippine context, an essay by Reynaldo Ileto, 'Outlines of a Non-Linear Emplotment of Philippine History' (1988). He argues that historians, in particular leftist historians, have a tendency to look for political agency in modern forms of political organizations – nationalist movements, political parties, and so on, and formations outside progressivist organizations are considered 'backward', 'outmoded' (in colonial historiography dismissed as 'banditry'), because they are inchoate and not organized in a way that is comprehensive and more comprehensible to the world of thought of the secular historian. He writes, 'The concept of development is still understood as a universal "given" – the "given", for example, of any text emanating from the national government and its technocrats. Surprisingly enough, even the critics of government and the technocratic elite, whether of the right or left in the political spectrum, while pointing out distortions and misapplications, fail to escape the very discourse of development.' (Ileto 1988: 130) He further adds that while the left 'look upon the masses as the real "makers of history", the masses are not allowed to speak'. (Ileto 1988: 135)

My analysis explores the following questions: why is it that the nationalist movements in Aceh is predominantly male (not necessarily dominated by men, but predominantly male in membership), and why is it that women (compared to young men) are not as passionately inclined to joining the independence movement or of enlisting to 'die for' the nation? What kind of relationship do women have to the nationalist consciousness? What kinds of subjects are produced by the school of militant nationalism in Aceh – does female activism and militancy take the same path as male militancy?; What are the different ways in which men and women talk about violence and the desirability of independence? How does militant nationalism in Aceh construct the female subject? How do we begin to analyze political violence beyond the constraining language of '*inventarisasi*' (inventory of human rights violations) and the representation of Acehnese women as political victims rather than as political actors?

Feminists theorists like Aretxaga argue for more nuanced awareness of the 'embodiment of emotion in social action' in understanding female political subjectivity in situations of armed conflict. In 'The Gendered Politics of Suffering', she argues that emotions including silence, anger, empathy, disgust, waiting, anxiety, grief, and mourning, even if suppressed, 'does not imply that the emotions disappear; they remain there, more or less inchoate.' (Aretxaga: 105:). Thus the double meaning of the title of her book 'shattering silence' – women breaking the silence, and silence that is shattering.

For example in a different context, in July 1999 in East Timor, just before the historic August 30 referendum to vote for integration or independence, I met the mother of a young man named Gaspar, 23 years old, who drowned in Atauro during the student mobilization campaign for Independence. She was a single mother who had raised several children alone, in a farming village in Baucau. While most of the male nationalists who spoke at the funeral articulated the rhetoric of martyrdom, the young man's mother expressed her grief in contraposed subjectivities. She said to us in Tetum:

> *'Hanesan inan nebe hahoris, fo susu no hakiak nia to boot triste ho tanis, maibe hanesan inan Timor ida, hau hatene tanba saida maka nia mate. Nia mate hanesan ema Timor oan ida maka hakarak fo buat ruma ba nia rai. Hau la triste.'*
>
> 'As the mother who gave birth to him, breastfed him, and raised him, I am extremely sad and filled with grief. But as a Timorese mother, I understand why he died. He died as a son of Timor who wants to contribute something to the struggle of his homeland. I am not sad.'

When we left, this woman's words continued to stay with me and with my companions, some of them nationalist male leaders in the CNRT (Conselho Nacional da Resistencia Timorense). They commented on how moved they were at the selflessness of this mother and of her deep love, understanding, and commitment to the common project of nationalist struggle. It was easier for them to identify with the latter part of her statement – the stoic, steadfast mother who is not sad about losing her son, because he is not only her son but the son of Timor who wants to contribute something to the struggle of his homeland. It was an accountable way of justifying the deaths of so many young people, in the face of what sometimes seems like meaningless death and violence. In a society with a high rate of widowhood and loss of sons it seemed the most appropriate. Yet what stayed with me was this woman's bifurcated expression of self: the intimate self, the one who gave birth to, breastfed, and raised her son, had to be suppressed in order for her to make some meaning out of her grief and loss.