

A Postcolonial Inquiry of Women's Political Agency in Aceh, Indonesia: Towards a
Muslim Feminist Approach?

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ABSTRACT

In this dissertation, I develop a postcolonial theoretical approach to localized Muslim feminism(s) in Aceh, Indonesia, based on interviews with women in Aceh in 2009 and 2010. One of the central aims of this study is to challenge the dominant exclusivist discourse of 'Islamic' feminism by providing a viable alternative for 'Muslim' feminism(s), derived from collaborative, indigenous, and post-secular politics. I address the need for a religious feminist model of subjectivity that incorporates both the political and ethical dimensions of agency in potentially non-patriarchal and non-state-centric formations. I suggest a communal understanding of religious law as an alternative to conceptualizing religious law (*syariah*) in terms of a personal ethical code or a system of laws emanating from a state. I propose an alternative discourse of feminist agency and religious identity, one that reaches beyond a secular-liberal epistemology and challenges the hegemonic discourse of state-centrism within a privatized religious identity.

Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my life partner, Cut Magfirah, for her endless support.

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Chapter 1: The Politics of the Postcolonial in Aceh

This dissertation offers a postcolonial feminist¹ approach to women's agency in Aceh, Indonesia, one that facilitates an examination of the assemblage of ethical, political, and religious expressions found in the narratives of Acehnese women regarding *syariah*,² informal/communal politics, and life in a post-conflict Aceh. The analysis of interviews with women in Aceh provides evidence in support of a broader shift away from the terminology used by scholars and activists of a dichotomy between religious (Islamic) feminisms and secular (non-religious) feminisms. The terminology of Muslim Feminism(s) presents a potential alternative to an Islamic/secular divide.

The first focal point of this inquiry is developing a localized understanding of women's political agency in Aceh that is inclusive of communal (non-individualistic) ways of being; non-state-centric³ ways of knowing and being; and of a broader understanding of religion (Islam) as a spectrum of embodied relational practices and values. The second focal point of this inquiry is a critical engagement with the colonial legacies in the writing of Acehnese history that aids in understanding how Acehnese women position themselves in relation to Indonesian-nationalism, colonial feminisms, and Islam. The third and final focal point of this inquiry is how women inhabit, construct, and deconstruct religious law (*syariah*) in Aceh. The international

¹In the Acehnese and Indonesian languages all instances of the letter 'c' are pronounced as (IPA) tʃ or 'ch.' Aceh is pronounced (IPA) ʔa'tʃeh or as a'-ch-eh. Aceh is sometimes referred to as *Atjeh*, *Achin* or *Achen*.

²The primary languages referenced throughout this dissertation are Indonesian and Acehnese. *Syariah* is the Acehnese cognate of *Syariat* in Indonesian and is sometimes referred to as *Sharia*, *Shari'ah* or *Shari'a*, which are more commonly used to reference the Arabic term *شريعة*.

³To be clear, the use of the terms 'state-centric' and 'non-state-centric' is not a quantitative reference to the presence or the absence of a centralized state in a particular location at a particular time. Rather, state-centrism refers to a way of engaging in politics and inhabiting socio-political space that presumes it is natural and therefore normative to conceptualize politics as the behavior of individuals or groups of individuals in relation to a modern-state. I am arguing against the notion that a modern-state is necessarily required, or even desirable, for meaningful political engagement.

community of scholars and activists concerned with Human Rights in Aceh provide the context to which *syariah* is often criticized. The interviews with Muslim women in Aceh offer an alternative explanation of *syariah* in Aceh as being both obscured by the state's attempt to regulate *syariah* and obscured by Human Rights discourses grounded on liberal-secular values that oppose the ethical and political embodiment of non-Christian (Islamic) religious values.⁴

The usage of a 'postcolonial feminist approach' (postcolonial as a modifier to a feminist inquiry) rather than a 'feminist postcolonial approach' (feminist as a modifier to a postcolonial inquiry) is a conscious decision on my part to be as clear as possible in how I am engaging the fields of Feminist/Women's Studies and Postcolonial Studies.⁵ On the one hand, postcolonial feminism takes gender inequality as a basic starting point and incorporates racial and socio-economic inequalities within (neo)colonial discourses. Uma Narayan describes this kind of analysis in terms of a political intervention into feminist analysis (Narayan 1997). She describes postcolonial feminism as,

an attempt to, publicly and in concert with others, challenge and reverse an account that is neither the account of an individual nor an account 'of the culture as a whole,' but an account of *some* who have power within the culture. It is a political challenge to other political accounts that distort, misrepresent, and often intentionally fail to account for the problems and contributions of many inhabitants of the context. It is a political attempt to tell a counter-story that contests dominant narratives that would claim the entire edifice of 'our Culture' and 'our Nation' for themselves, converting them into a peculiar form of property, and excluding the voices, concerns, and contributions of many who are members (Narayan 1997, p. 9-10 emphasis original).

⁴ It has been widely argued among scholars in Religious Studies that the core ethical and political principles found in secularism are grounded in Western Christian thought (see Asad 2003, 2005, 2012; de Certeau 1975/1988; Said 1978). There are still debates over how far back secularism's roots go in Christianity, but there is a general consensus that it emerged within Christian thought (Berger 1999).

⁵ While I attempt to give equal weight throughout the dissertation to insights from feminist and postcolonial theorists and practitioners, the present study originates from a series of questions regarding a perceived gender inequality among electoral candidates in the April 2009 provincial elections in Aceh. If I was forced to choose I would say feminist, rather than postcolonial, theory and praxis is more essential to the overall analysis.

On the other hand, feminist postcolonialism takes racial and socio-economic inequalities within (neo)colonialism as a basic starting point and incorporates gender inequality into an already racialized analysis. Jane Jacobs describes the process of incorporating feminism into postcolonial analysis in terms of geography, ecology, and land ownership (Jacobs 1996). In the following passage, Jacobs describes the significance of feminist postcolonialism within her own work.

The emphasis of my book is on a racialised politics of differentiation although this is not intended to relegate other constructs to the sidelines or to say that feminist theory has nothing to offer the rethinking of imperialism. For example, Spivak (1988a: 107) calls 'the practice of masculinism': the way in which imperialism depended upon masculinist possession of 'virgin' lands and patriarchal tamings of feminised wildness (Jacobs 1996, p. 3; Spivak 1988/1994 & Shohat 1991 were cited in this passage).

A postcolonial feminist approach is one that identifies the practices of (neo)colonialism as being influential in the formation of the 'nexus of power and identity' and one that is intercessional to the politics and praxis of Feminist/Women's Studies (Jacobs 1996, p. 13; Rajan and Park 2000; Bahri 2004). The necessity of adopting a postcolonial feminist approach to scholarship and research on Aceh extends beyond the need for a general critique of contemporary notions of civilization, history, and religion. As noted by Kwok Pui-lan, the 19th/early 20th century feminist projects of 'saving brown women,' often in the name of Christianity, were part of "a colonial ideology helping to camouflage the violence and brutality of colonialism by sugarcoating it as a form of social mission" (Pui-lan 2002, p. 63). In the case of women's agency in Aceh, a postcolonial feminist approach challenges the conceptual boundaries imposed by secular-liberalism onto Muslim women's subjectivities. Secular-liberalism primarily conceptualizes Muslim women's subjectivity in terms of their relationship to the patriarchal and hyper-individualistic modern state. A postcolonial feminist approach, by

contrast, proposes an indigenous-localized understanding of agency for women in Aceh that is egalitarian, non-state-centric and grounded in local customs and norms.

Women's political engagement in Aceh is a hotly contested topic because of the history of women-centered *adat* (customary norms and values) and the marginality of Aceh within the modern Indonesian state as one of the few remaining internal 'Others' left to be civilized. These legacies present several challenges to scholars, activists, and government officials who are primarily concerned with promoting women's empowerment and women's rights in Aceh. A significant element of this challenge is the controversy over the continual expansion of the state's implementation of *syariah* in 2001, 2004, and 2006. The pre-colonial history of Aceh suggests that women should be able to hold leadership positions across Acehnese society because of the long standing legacy of matrifocal *adat* in the region and the recent 'opening up' politically and economically of Aceh after a peace agreement was signed in 2005 between the Free Aceh Movement (*GAM*) and the central government of the Republic of Indonesia. The 2005 Memorandum of Understanding (MoU-Helsinki) and the corresponding Law Governing Aceh (LoGA) in 2006 granted the province increased political, social, and economic autonomy within the Indonesian state. Alongside these seemingly positive indicators of economic development, academics, activists, and government officials have observed that women in Aceh are not being adequately represented in provincial politics and women's bodies have become the most visible site of state control through the enforcement of *syariah* in Aceh through enforcing a dress-code that primarily targets women.

In this dissertation, Acehnese women's involvement in informal/communal politics is considered in addition to women's involvement in formal political institutions. In order to find

out about how women in Aceh understand their own interventions in the political sphere, I traveled to Aceh to learn about Acehnese women from their own perspectives. I conducted sixty-seven interviews between the spring of 2009 and the summer of 2010 along the East and West coasts of Aceh in order to determine how women are engaging in politics and the significance, if any, that the expansion of the state's implementation of *syariah* had on them. I analyze these interviews using a postcolonial feminist approach.

1.1 Scope

The works of Judith Butler, Saba Mahmood, and Jacqueline Siapno have had the greatest impact in allowing this project to materialize in its present form (Butler 1990, 2004; Mahmood 2005; Siapno 2002). I found Jacqueline Siapno's ethnography on gender, Islam, and nationalism during the separatist conflict in Aceh from the mid-1990s to the early 2000s to be very informative in terms of explaining what life was like in Aceh before the devastation of the tsunami in 2004, the end of the conflict in 2005, and the aggressive expansion of *Syariah* by the state. From the beginning of the separatist movement in Aceh in the late 1970s until the tsunami struck in late 2004, foreign researchers and journalist were often denied access from the Indonesian government to enter the province of Aceh. Siapno's fieldwork in Aceh during the 1990s and early 2000s is one of the only examples of ethnographic research focusing on religion and gender that I am aware of during this tumultuous period.⁶ Siapno relied on performative and poststructuralist feminist theory in her analysis of what she interpreted as the cultivation of a militant religious identity within the separatist movement and in reaction to state-based violence in which women were active participants. I extend her examination of

⁶ John Bowen conducted ethnographic research on religion and identity of a minority ethnic community, the Gayo, in Aceh during this period (see Bowen 2003).

early Acehnese *hikayat* (folktales) and the biases against women in the historiography of Aceh in two ways: by analyzing the discursive legacies of two late 19th century historical figures and by conducting interviews with women in post-conflict Aceh to see how life in Aceh has changed since the devastation of the tsunami, the end of the separatist-conflict, and the expansion of the implementation of *syariah*. The first historical figure is the Acehnese heroine, Cut Nyak Dhien, who is known for taking up arms against Dutch colonial forces and is less well known outside of Aceh. The second historical figure, Raden Adjeng Kartini, is the more prominent Indonesian-nationalist heroine. A national holiday in Indonesia celebrates her heroism annually. While I do find Siapno's emphasis on militancy to be overstated given the relative success of the former separatist movement, Free Aceh Movement (*GAM*), at demilitarizing and reintegrating into civil society, her analysis of the overlapping of a matrifocal *adat* (local customs and norms) and the practice of Islam in Aceh helped me to frame my own examination of how *syariah* as a triple-dialectic of 'space, time, and social-being' is inhabited, constructed, and deconstructed by women in Aceh (Siapno 2002; Soja 2011).

Judith Butler's influence on this study extends beyond her introduction of gender performativity and the dialectical relationship of power as dispersed and interconnected in identity formation within a post-secular age (1990, 2004). Butler's insights into subjectivity, place, and embodiment have allowed for a more nuanced and multi-dimensional analysis to emerge for Siapno, Mahmood, and myself on a topic that is often thought of along a binary typology of resistance/oppression or freedom/unfreedom. Academics and activists often frame discourses on women's agency in predominantly Muslim societies under the umbrella term 'Islamic feminism(s)' within a set of liberal-secular values. These discourses have the adverse

effect of positioning Islamic traditions and practices as subordinate or inferior to liberal-secular values within a set of universal Human Rights. Saba Mahmood's emphasis on the need to recognize how agency is being used by scholars has greatly impacted this research project. Mahmood is critical of a liberal-secular subjectivity, framing it as part of "the *illusory* character of the rationalist, self-authorizing, transcendental subject presupposed by Enlightenment thought" (Mahmood 2005, p. 13).

Mahmood's analysis of agency in the Egyptian women's mosque movement during the 1990s allowed me to begin conceptualizing women's agency in a non-liberal way. I needed to think outside of the Western Enlightenment legacy of my academic training and become more self-reflexive in order to do this project. More specifically, her analysis of agency makes it possible to think of a non-liberal subjectivity as not being necessarily illiberal (Mahmood 2005, pp. 17-39). Mahmood argues "the self is socially and discursively produced" and that the "historically contingent arrangements of power through which the normative subject is produced" need to be taken into account when analyzing agency (Mahmood 2005, p. 33). In the case of Aceh, the women I interviewed often described themselves as strong supporters of *syariah* within their community while at the same time they do not necessarily view the state as a legitimate source of *syariah*. There are multiple competing historical arrangements of *syariah* in Aceh that are often in conflict with one another. Mahmood's treatment of the concepts *ṣabr* (patience) and *al-ḥayā'* (modesty), paired with Siapno's consideration of the concept *muslihat* (achieving one's goals through indirect means) when describing non-liberal expressions of Muslim women's agency, proved to be beneficial when analyzing interviews from Acehese women who are politically engaged within the community in non-patriarchal and non-state-

centric ways. One woman describes having to subtly '*pengaruh*' (influence/persuade) members of her community to support young girls continuing their education past elementary school and postponing marriage until after they finish their education while still working within local religious (Islamic) customs and norms (100701_007 2010, p. 7).⁷ In another case, a woman is able to successfully negotiate the acquittal of a man who was wrongfully incarcerated for a land dispute in her dialogues with the police, the court, and village officials.

As this introduction shows, this dissertation project aims to adopt a localized-indigenous conception of 'Muslim feminisms' that would allow for an understanding of women's agency in Aceh that is egalitarian and non-state-centric in orientation. I further argue that scholars, activists and government officials ought to rethink the current prevailing usage of the classifications 'Islamic feminism' and 'secular feminisms' and even replace them with a single category of 'Muslim feminisms' on the grounds that an Islamic/secular divide is based on a secular-liberal conceptualization of religion and society that is reductionist, Eurocentric and marginalizing of non-Arab and non-West Asian Muslim identities from being legitimate sources of feminist politics and praxis. Based on interviews I conducted in Aceh, I argue that women's political engagement is primarily located within informal political arrangements along the periphery or outside of the state. I argue this is in part due to the perception of many of the participants interviewed that formal political institutions are corrupt and ineffective. Regarding the recent expansion of the state's implementation of *syariah*, I further argue that for women in Aceh *syariah* is expressed and embodied as a kind of 'heterotopia' (multiple places at once)

⁷ The numbering system for the interviews corresponds to the date and ordering of the interview based on the following: the first two digits denote the year, the third and fourth digits denote the month, the fifth and sixth digits denote the day of the month, and the final three digits denote the order in which the interview was recorded on that day.

that cannot be adequately explained by the current dominant discourses in academia and in the international media that portray *syariah* as representing an essentialized utopian/dystopian future. In the next section, I discuss the methodological considerations of this study followed by an outline of the remaining chapters of this dissertation.

1.2 Methodology

This study draws on the disciplinary orientations and insights of Anthropology/Sociology, History, and Political Science as well as the multidisciplinary and at times interdisciplinary area studies of Women's Studies, Religious Studies, and Southeast Asian Studies in order to address the theoretical and qualitative challenges of this line of inquiry. A multidisciplinary approach differs from a single disciplinary approach in that it attempts to compare and contrast two or more disciplinary perspectives in order to provide a solution to a particular issue or problem (Repko 2008, pp. 13-15). A second research method that is commonly conflated with interdisciplinarity is transdisciplinarity. Repko distinguishes transdisciplinary from multidisciplinary as a "collaborative research and problem solving that, unlike interdisciplinarity, cross both disciplinary boundaries *and sectors of society* by including stakeholders in the public and private domains" (Repko 2008, p. 15 emphasis original). In contrast, an interdisciplinary approach can be understood as an integrative process that 'crosses boundaries', 'bridges', 'maps', or 'blurs' disciplinary epistemologies and theoretical 'insights' in order to address a problem that cannot be satisfactorily answered within any one discipline (Repko 2008, pp. 11-15, 22-24; Klein 1996, pp. 37-42). Several divergences exist among scholars engaging in interdisciplinarity: first, regarding the direction that interdisciplinarity is heading in, i.e. towards a unified theory of scientific inquiry or towards a

rejection that objective and value neutral claims are desirable or even possible in scientific inquiry; second, whether interdisciplinary is restricted to the process of meshing research practices with individuals outside of one's discipline or if a deeper conceptual critique of the disciplinary structure of the modern university is required; and third, whether a comparative analysis that is problem-centered is sufficient to claim interdisciplinarity or if interdisciplinarity compels the 'synthesizing' of new knowledge formations (Lattuca 2001, pp. 10-14). For the purposes of this dissertation, I side with the latter in all three respects. An interdisciplinary methodology allows for a more holistic approach to the study of women's agency in Aceh and for competing academic discourses to engage one another.

In contemporary universities in the Global North, individual disciplines are defined by a common curriculum or area of expertise that is generally agreed upon among practitioners and one that is differentiated from other disciplines by a similar set of required courses for majors, minors, and graduate programs across universities (Lattuca 2001, p. 7; Klein 2005, p. 32). Disciplines as they are constituted today are a relatively new phenomenon in the university that emerged in the mid to late 19th century (Lattuca 2001, pp. 4-7). Before modern disciplines appeared, the curriculum was divided into the study seven core subjects of the '*quadrivium*' (arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, music) and the '*trivium*' (logic, grammar, and rhetoric), the study of classical languages (Greek and Latin), and the study of Greek philosophy (natural, moral, and mental) (Lattuca 2001, p. 5). The addition of courses in the natural and applied sciences was resisted at first and eventually was adopted in the second half of the 19th century as elective courses. The increasing demand for these electives paved the way for the disciplinary structures that have come to dominate universities in the Global North.

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the usage of 'discipline' dates back to Chaucer and Wyclif in the 14th century and refers to the practice or training that was given to a disciple or scholar in the mental and moral virtues (O.E.D. 2012, discipline). Discipline was understood in opposition to the medieval notion of 'doctrine' or doctor/teacher that was concerned mainly with abstract theories. By the 16th century the ecclesiastical usage referred to the method of control/order within a church (O.E.D. 2012, discipline). The modern usage of discipline grew out of these early usages into both the scheme in which knowledge is organized according to scientific principles in relation to key assumptions about the way the world works and its application by practitioners within the subject. This shift occurred as disciplinary knowledge grew more self-referential and narrow in focus, such that the medium of exchange of knowledge became increasingly removed from how the world is experienced outside of disciplinary contexts. The Alliance for Social, Political, Ethical, and Cultural Thought (ASPECT) program at Virginia Tech under which this dissertation was written grew out of a perceived need to integrate individual disciplinary knowledge formations in order to foster new and innovative ways of understanding social, political, ethical, and cultural dilemmas that would be otherwise constrained by individual/multi-disciplinary methodologies.

In her essay 'On Tricky Ground,' Linda Smith challenges scholars and activists to approach questions of methodology from an indigenous person's perspective regardless of whether their research topic deals explicitly with groups of indigenous peoples (2008). Smith states that in many cases indigenous peoples, also referred to as "natives, indigenous, autochthonous, tribal peoples, or ethnic minorities" have been forced to give up sovereignty over a territory to an outside force such as a settler/colonizer (Smith 2008, p. 114). In this way,

Indigenous people have been and are being defined as the 'other' to a settler/colonizer and in terms of method, are often positioned along the margins of society or of knowledge. I find Smith's assessment to be largely consistent with current academic discourses of the territory of Aceh and the Acehnese as a linguistic, cultural, or ethnic group that is positioned on the periphery of the socially, economically, and politically dominant Javanese. Since the late 19th century, Aceh has been the subject of a series of invasions and occupations by the Dutch, the Japanese, and the Javanese dominated Indonesian state with the aim of subjugating the Acehnese in order to maintain the territorial integrity of pre-independence colonial boundaries in the archipelago.⁸

From a methodological perspective that is indigenous-based the researcher ought to consider alternative, indigenous forms of knowledge production, such as knowledge "derived from the immediate ecology, their experiences, perceptions, thoughts, and memory ... through dialogue, storytelling, and family and community rituals and legendary archetypes" (Battiste 2007, pp. 115-116). Indigenous knowledge offers an alternative to linear constructs of truth and utilizes a wide spectrum of diverse perspectives.

In this study, I conducted semi-structured interviews to allow participants to have a greater influence on the direction and outcome of the data collection process. I considered quantitative surveys and closed-ended questionnaires as a possibility at the onset of the project insofar as they would have allowed for an increase in the size of the respondent pool. However, several factors prevented surveys or closed-ended questionnaires from being viable options

⁸The methodological significance is evident in the dearth of research that challenges the legitimacy of the configuration of the present Indonesian state and research that links the perception of a recent decline of women's spaces in Aceh with the increased incorporation of Aceh into the Indonesian state (for examples of scholarship critical of the modern state in Southeast Asia see Reid 2010; Sears 1996, 2007; Scott 2009).

given the constraints of the population being researched, such as multiple languages being used (Acehnese, Indonesian, and English), variations in literacy rates, variations in educational levels, and a history of mistrust of government officials or people in positions of authority. After researching possible qualitative and quantitative techniques, I determined that the least intrusive and least threatening response rate would likely come from audio-recorded semi-structured interviews done in public or in the homes of participants.

I sought and gained approval from the Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board for two different protocols by the Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board for use in this research project. I conducted the initial field research in January 2009 and required written and verbal consent from participants available in English and Indonesian as well as the option to opt out of the audio-recording component. The first protocol potentially limited the pool of respondents because they would have to be literate in either Indonesian or English and they would have to be willing to have their names recorded on the consent form. Since the first protocol was focused on interviewing women candidates and party officials, this did not appear to pose a significant problem. There were seven respondents for the initial field research in 2009. For the follow-up field research in 2010, the population was expanded to include primarily women residing in Aceh who were 18 years old or older and self-identify as being Acehnese.

I conducted the second field research trip between May to August of 2010 and across a much wider geographic region in Aceh, including seven regencies across the East and West coasts of Aceh. There were sixty participants interviewed across a wide range of ages, geographic locations in Aceh, educational levels, literacy levels, rural/urban populations, and income-levels. Two of the interviews were with men in Aceh. One was an expert on *adat Aceh*

(Acehnese customs) from the museum in Banda Aceh and the other was the Commander of a *Wilayatul Hisbah* (Syariah Police)⁹ office.

Two additional interviews were excluded because the respondents did not self-identify as Acehnese. While they were both born in Aceh, their families migrated to Aceh from other parts of North Sumatra and they did not speak Acehnese. The geographic origins of the sixty respondents was as follows: one from *Sabang* (a small island off the Northern Coast of Aceh), five from *Banda Aceh* (the provincial capital), eleven from the area surrounding *Sigli* in *Pidie* along the East Coast and central mountains, eight from *Pidie Jaya* (Greater *Pidie*) along the East Coast, three from *Lhokseumawe* along the East Coast, three from *Aceh Barat* (West Aceh) near the city of *Meulaboh* along the West Coast, three from *Aceh Timur* (East Aceh) along the East Coast and mountains, one from *Langsa* along the East Coast, two from *Aceh Barat Daya* (Southwest Aceh) along the West Coast, two from *Aceh Tengah* (Central Aceh), two from *Aceh Jaya* (Greater Aceh) along the West Coast and central mountains, nine from *Bireuën* along the East Coast, and ten respondents who did not disclose a specific regency in Aceh (see Figure 1 at the top of page 15). While statistically this is not a representative sample of the population, it does allow for a broad exposure to different socio-economic groups across generations and across geographic divides within Aceh. There is a relatively even distribution of participants who came from regencies along the coast and those who came from regencies spanning the mountainous hinterland.

⁹ The translation of *wilayatul hisbah* as 'syariah police' is based on its usage in the Indonesian language and the common reference to its interchangeable usage with *polisi syariah*, which is the literal translation of 'syariah police.' Its usage is a departure from the original Arabic meaning of 'provincial/governance in accordance with Islam.'

Figure 1. Map of regencies in Aceh. Participants were interviewed from the lighter colored regencies below.



My first exposure in academia to the concept of Indonesia or even Southeast Asia was as an exchange student at the University of Hull, England where I had enrolled in a graduate course on writing Indonesian history. During this course I discovered an interest in studying Indonesian history and Islam in Southeast Asia. I also met my future spouse, whose family turns

out to be from Aceh. Since then, I have learned that one of the colonial legacies of knowledge production in the region is the development and proliferation of Southeast Asian Studies. Shamsul suggests that social science research on Southeast Asia can be viewed in terms of three stages, “(i) the construction of knowledge; (ii) the bureaucratization of knowledge; and (iii) the consumption of knowledge” and each stage continues to be dominated by the former European and North American colonial powers in the region (2007, p. 142). The role of the Western ‘expert’ continues to dominate the practice of the social sciences through various centers for Southeast Asian Studies in England, the US, Australia, the Netherlands, and Canada (Shamsul 2007, pp. 140-45; Laffan 2011). The standard practice has been to maintain the colonial educational systems after decolonization, which for the social sciences has meant that they are primarily being conducted from outside of the region. In the case of Aceh, this has meant sending students to the Netherlands or to England, New Zealand, Australia, and Canada. At the same time, state supported universities in Southeast Asian countries, such as the University of Indonesia or the University of Malaysia, have focused primarily on the natural or practical sciences. The preferred starting point for research on the region in the Global North continues to be ‘methodological nationalism’, which is “the creation of knowledge based mainly on the ‘territoriality’ of the nation-state” and the perpetuation of colonial educational norms regarding where research can take place and under what conditions (Shamsul 2007, pp. 140-42). A recent example can be found in Michael Laffan’s *The Making of Indonesian Islam*, where the territorial integrity of the Netherland’s East Indies and the post-independence state of Indonesia are legitimized as *prima facie* categories throughout his analysis (2011).

One of the underlying aims of this dissertation is to contribute to a counter-hegemonic approach to methodological nationalism within the study of Aceh. In the 1990s, a group of Southeast Asian scholars began to challenge the legitimacy of scholars in the Global North dominating the study of the region by holding a conference on ‘Southeast Asian Studies *for* Southeast Asians’ based on the perceived lack of research originating from within the region, including work on feminism and sexuality studies (Shamsul 2007, pp. 140-42). The significance of this paradigm shift is its challenge to the dominant position of foreign researchers in the field which has the potential to create new spaces for gender-egalitarian approaches to the study of the region.¹⁰ This relates to my own introduction to the region because one of the first principles I was taught was to assume that ‘Indonesia’ (the nation-state created out of the Dutch colonial territory rather than from pre-colonial sociocultural homogeneity) does and should continue to exist as a natural category of analysis. I have since learned to acknowledge these limitations in Southeast Asian Studies/Indonesian Studies as units of analysis and to reject them as misguided methodological assumptions that privilege an outsider’s perspective. In this study, I primarily focus on the social dimensions of space and how people inhabit space differently, and contextualize the meaning of that space, rather than viewing space empirically in terms of size or fixed boundaries. To be clear, I reject the moral and political legitimacy of the categories of ‘Indonesia’ and ‘Southeast Asia’ as fixed and stable placeholders in this study. I am not alone in rejecting these categories. Several scholars on the region including Laurie Sears, Anthony Reid, and Jacqueline Siapno argue for deconstructing these categories and decentering their historical legacy of a privileged status in scholarship from the Global North (Reid 2010;

¹⁰ This study was conducted with the support of several local non-governmental organizations that are actively promoting a similar mission of developing partnerships with local Acehnese and inter-Asian scholarship.

Sears 1996, 2007; Siapno 2002). The privileging of the category Indonesia is grounded on what Laurie Sears describes as a 'Javacentric' worldview in Western scholarship that is "focused on the dominant empires and peoples of the island of Java" that emerged under European colonialism in the 19th and 20th century (Sears 1996, p. 4).

The semi-structured interview questions focus on four main topics. The first topic asks participants about changes over time in formal and informal groups in their community that support women. These can range from government sponsored or non-government organizations to informal Qur'anic study groups or other women's discussion groups at the '*Meunasah*' (a small mosque that does not hold Friday services). The second topic asks participants about changes over time to the status of women in their communities in Aceh. The third topic asks participants about what *syariah* means to them and how the expansion of the state's implementation of *syariah* has affected women in Aceh. The fourth topic asks participants to discuss what women's empowerment (*pemberdayaan perempuan*) means to them and whether they support this concept as government and non-government officials implement it. The intention behind asking these questions is to draw out a localized-indigenous conception of feminism in their own words and thereby be able to describe how such a conception relates to broader discourses of feminism or women's empowerment in Aceh. A final question that I asked to end the interviews was what their aspirations were for their daughters' and other young girls' future in Aceh.

Once a draft of the interview questions is completed, it is beneficial for the primary investigators to take a moment to consider how their own background and worldview could potentially impact the study. It is becoming increasingly common in the humanities and social

sciences, especially in Women's and Gender Studies, to find a discussion of the researcher's positionality as part of the study's methodology. The importance of the reader being able to understand how the researcher is related to her research and how the research has been conducted beyond following IRB guidelines is paramount when adopting a postcolonial feminist approach (see hooks 2000; Hekman 1997; Narayan 1989; Sandoval 2000; Shohat 2006). A postcolonial feminist approach involves identifying and decentering the legacies of (neo)colonialism, which is considered to be a crucial step in countering epistemic racism, sexism, and other forms of oppression within the academic production of knowledge. Chela Sandoval describes a similar approach in terms of a transformative process as a 'methodology of emancipation' from the colonization of knowledge (Sandoval 2000, p. 2). In my case, there are a number of factors about me that will likely influence how one reads the rest of this dissertation and agrees or disagrees with the conclusions that I draw. In the following paragraphs I will be as candid as possible about how this study was conducted, analyzed, and interpreted with all of my strengths and weaknesses as a researcher. As someone who is committed to supporting radical social change towards freedom from oppression in all of its manifestations, it is necessary to elaborate on the presuppositions, biases, and limitations that I bring into this research project in order to avoid unintentionally reproducing a privileged narrative of domination. This elaboration begins with a brief discussion of why I am researching Aceh, Muslim women's agency, and socio-political spaces of religious law (*Syariah*).

In practical terms, having a partner whose family is from Aceh has had a significant impact on my research. When I meet someone from Aceh and I mention my spouse's name or I am introduced as being the spouse of so-and-so, they immediately make the connection that

her family is from Aceh. This tends to spark a conversation about why I am studying Aceh, allowing me to be able to 'break the ice' with potential respondents. The result of this personal connection is that in one sense I seem to be accepted as part of the community because of my wife's status as a member and because I am a practicing Muslim. Yet in another sense I seem to be viewed as an outsider to the community because of my basic language skills in Acehnese and my unfamiliarity with all of the social customs and norms. In Aceh, being a practicing Muslim has generally had a positive effect. It has allowed me to be accepted, probably because my religious practice and my marriage provide a commonality that helps to overcome many of the negative stereotypes of foreigners.

To make matters more complicated, Acehnese is not the only language historically spoken in Aceh and as of yet there has not been a complete linguistic study of the Acehnese language. Acehnese has multiple dialects spoken across the province and is distinctive from other languages spoken on the island of Sumatra (Reid 2006, pp. 7-8). Aceh has historically been a multilingual society where most people on the coastal regions would also speak Malay, both as the language of trade and as the language used for transmitting Islam (Reid 2006, pp. 7-8; Reid 1993, p. 3). Today, the Indonesian language, a derivative of the older Malay language, is the official language in public schools and universities. However, I encountered villages in which it was not widely spoken and people appeared to have trouble conversing in it. One negative aspect of conducting interviews in the Indonesian language is that it is associated with the national government in Jakarta, which only recently in 2005 ended a prolonged military campaign in the province. There still remains a connection between Acehnese nationalism with

the Acehnese language that could potentially negatively impact participants' responses given in Indonesian.

A second consideration is my racial-ethnic and class status of being a white Western male elite coming to Aceh, at least in part, as a researcher from a North American university.¹¹ My appearance to people in Aceh is likely as a white male of European descent or *bule* (somewhat derogatory slang for 'white people') who appears out of place in what is otherwise an ethnically heterogeneous community with descendants from South Asia, the Arabian Peninsula, China, and parts of Southern Europe, particularly Portugal. My racial-ethnic and class status creates a significant barrier between myself and many Acehnese people for several reasons, primarily because of the historical legacies of European/North American (neo)colonialism that continue to foster armed conflicts, social and economic inequalities, and environmental devastation in the region.¹² Clearly defined racial identities were an important part of the Dutch East Indies as a mechanism of social control and remains a divisive factor today (Gouda 2008, pp. 22-23; Vickers 2005, pp. 25-30).

A third important factor for understanding my positionality in this study is my gender. My gender status as a male poses serious challenges when arranging interviews, conducting the interviews as an open and honest dialogue, conforming to and at times challenging gender

¹¹ When I told people in Aceh I am coming from Virginia Tech, they had either never heard of the university or only knew of the April 16th shootings at Virginia Tech. I believe this is because one of the victims, Partahi Lumbantoruan, was from a neighboring province in Indonesia and it was widely publicized in the national and local media in 2007.

¹² As recently as July 2011, a US court ruled to reinstate a case against a prominent US oil and gas company, ExxonMobil, for human rights violations in 2000-2001 at its natural gas plant in the regency of Lhokseumawe, Aceh (Mears 2011). One of the respondents that I interviewed informed me that she had planned to speak at a rally in Lhokseumawe against a mass execution carried out in 2000 by the Indonesian military, but received death threats and decided not to attend the rally. Siapno describes a long history of human rights violations perpetrated by ExxonMobil (formerly Mobil Oil) since the early 1990s include providing facilities to the Indonesian military for detaining and torturing civilians, providing bulldozers and other equipment for digging mass graves, and providing logistical support to the Indonesian military(see Siapno 2002, p. 43-47).

roles, and being able to analyze the data in such a way that takes into consideration my own assumptions and biases regarding Acehnese women. A recent study that deals with issues of positionality within field research in Aceh is Siapno's *Gender, Islam, Nationalism and the State in Aceh* (2002). Siapno investigates Acehnese women's agency within the context of increased state violence during the 1990s and early 2000s. In her analysis, female agency in Aceh is approached as fluctuating between the practice of Islam and the traditional ideas of power in matrifocality (Siapno 2002, p. x). She noted that in her own research "it also helped being socialized as a women and being more accustomed to silences and listening sensitively to what is hidden and implied ... rather than being an exhibitionist about one's presence" (Siapno 2002, p. xiv). I took this advice to heart during my field research and consciously tried to avoid dominating or guiding the interviews beyond asking the same open-ended questions to each participant. In summary, I would describe my methodological approach as postcolonial feminist in that I am principally concerned with identifying historical legacies of multiple forms of oppression and connecting theoretical insights drawn from academic discussions with concrete examples in the real world that have the potential to positively impact people's lives. The following section provides an outline of the main points from each of the remaining chapters of the dissertation.

1.3 Chapter Outline

In chapter two, I begin by introducing recent debates over the influence of liberalism and secularism on how scholars theorize agency in predominantly Muslim societies. Theorists such as Saba Mahmood, Jacqueline Siapno, and Judith Butler are central in supporting this section's main argument that liberal-secular conceptions of agency based on individual choice

and procedural rationality constrain the potentiality of women's agency to emerge in informal/communal arrangements. I argue that one of the central tenets of Islamic feminist scholarship is the emphasis on shared responsibility among Muslim women across spatial, temporal, and cultural boundaries such that an image of a universalized Muslim woman is constructed in opposition to or in contention with particular examples of non-Islamic, often secular, groups of women (Badran 2009; Moghadam 2002; Robinson 2009; van Doorn-Harder 2006). Rather than redefining Islamic feminism to avoid such essentializing and reductive conceptions of women's agency, Tohidi, among others, has suggested abandoning the Islamic feminist project in favor of the terminology of Muslim feminisms (Tohidi 2003). I argue that 'Muslim feminisms' is a more accurate classification and increases the explanatory power of conceptualizations of women's agency for the case at hand of Aceh, Indonesia.

The use of 'Muslim feminisms' is especially relevant to the women I interviewed in Aceh because of their self-identified reliance on Islamic values and *adat* (local customs and norms) that are crucial for explaining how they understand themselves in the world. It is inappropriate to conceptualize identity in Aceh in purely Islamic terms as a type of religiosity nor does it make sense to conceptualize identity in essentially secular terms as a citizen of a pluralistic society.¹³ By embracing the plural form of the term Muslim feminisms, I am allowing for multiple interpretations of Islam and other cultural values to be integrated into more complex articulations of agency for women who identify in part as Muslim, thus, breaking the Eurocentric bifurcation of religious and secular life that so many scholars and activists still rely on to this day.

¹³ It is my contention that the modern concept of citizenship is secular in nature and this usage presupposes that a modern state is universally normative.

I refer to Siapno's study of women's agency during the 1990s as a springboard for contextualizing Acehese women's experiences since the end of the conflict and the expansion of the implementation of syariah by the state in the province. Despite her overemphasis on militancy as a constitutive part of Acehese women's agency, Siapno lays the groundwork for the study with her informative account of *muslihat* (achieving one's goals through indirect means) from Acehese folktales and her critique of the common portrayal of women in Aceh as passive 'suffering stoic women' (Siapno 2002, p. 10-17). Siapno identifies the Acehese adaptation of *jihad fi sabilillah* (striving for God) as an important concept for understanding the meshing between *adat* (local customs) and Islam in a shared Acehese identity (Siapno 2002, p. 52-59). At the same time, I draw from Mahmood's analysis of *Ṣabr* (patience) and *al-ḥayā'* (modesty) as a starting point for developing an alternative conceptualization of agency that is constitutively performative and ethically grounded for women in Aceh (Mahmood 2005, p. 100-104, 171-174).

In summary, chapter two argues that secular-liberal formations of subjectivity produce a particular *a priori* conception of agency that is antagonistic and detrimental to the present study of women's agency in Aceh, Indonesia. A secular-liberal conception of agency encompasses the following characteristics: a) a romanticization of agency as 'resistance' and a fetishization of 'resistance' as 'power'; b) the presumption that 'freedom' is universal, innate, and normative at all times, in all places, and for all peoples; c) the presumption that agency is separable and ultimately disconnected from material bodies; and d) the presumption of an artificial split between the political and the moral dimensions of agency. I argue for an

alternative conceptualization of women's agency that is communally centered as an indigenous localized Muslim feminism that is embodied within the socio-political space of Aceh.

Chapter three provides an overview of Acehnese history and analyzes the effect of disciplinary rifts between the study of Islam and the study of Southeast Asia in the Global North. These divisions lay the foundation for my elaboration on theoretical insights drawn from James C. Scott's concept of 'deliberate statelessness' in a revised conception of world history and the development of a non-state centric method to historiography (Scott 2009). While Scott does not position himself as a postcolonial historian, a recent symposium on his book in *Perspectives on Politics* concluded that his analysis is indebted to postcolonial theory, specifically the work of Frantz Fanon, and that an anarchist history acts as a postcolonial counter-narrative to deterministic civilizational discourses such as found in Samuel Huntington's *The clash of civilizations and the remaking of world order* or Jared Diamond's *Guns, germs, and steel: The fates of human societies* (Diamond 2005; Huntington 1996 cited in Roberts 2011, p. 85-86). The impact of colonialism on people living on the peripheries of state control has led some groups to engage in a politics of 'deliberate statelessness', which presents a direct challenge to the dominant historical myths in academia that promote the normativity of urban growth and the civilizing benefits of technological progress issuing from urban life. I argue that an anarchist history is consistent with and is able to elaborate a postcolonial feminist approach by being critical of universal claims to the necessity for urban development and claims of the need for developing/maintaining a centralized state. A postcolonial feminist approach to historiography allows for the possibility of theorizing agency outside of the

constraints of state-centrism, the privileging of urban life, and the constraints of liberal-secular conceptions of social equality and freedom.

In order to understand the experiences of the women interviewed, I analyze two historical cases from the history of Aceh that were mentioned by some of the interviewees in the course of interviews I conducted in Aceh. The first case is a comparison between the nationalist heroine Raden Adjeng Kartini from Java, who is revered annually with her own national holiday in Indonesia, and the Acehnese heroine Cut Nyak Dhien, who is still very alive in Acehnese social memory while being regarded as only a minor heroine within the larger Indonesian nationalist narratives. The second case deals with the recent expansion of the state's implementation of Syariah in Aceh and the competing discourses surrounding who initiated it and what Syariah actually represents to women in Aceh. Each case provides insights into understanding the interviews with Acehnese women from a non-state centric and non-patriarchal understanding of Acehnese history. In summary, chapter three makes the argument for acknowledging an embedded patriarchal state-centrism within colonial historical narratives about Aceh that needs to be combated in order to develop a more nuanced understanding of agency.

Chapter four develops a localized-indigenous understanding of political engagement in Aceh that is explicitly non-patriarchal and non-state-centric. The concepts of *muslihat* (achieving one's goals through ancillary or indirect means), *Ṣabr* (perseverance in spite of adversity), and *al-ḥayā'* (reticence or modesty) from Jacqueline Siapno and Saba Mahmood aid in developing insights into how Acehnese women are positioning themselves within the wider community. The beginning of chapter four introduces the political process of the modern state

of Indonesia with an emphasis placed on provincial politics in Aceh and the role of women within formal politics. My initial research on women candidates in the run up to the 2009 provincial elections resulted in unanticipated findings that there is a public perception expressed by those interviewed that women in Aceh are somehow '*masih belum cukup kapasitas*' (lacking the capacity) to successfully participate in formal politics and there were very few women in Aceh participating in formal politics at the provincial level (090117_000 2009, pp. 4-5). In response to these unexpected findings, I shifted the focus of my research from formal political parties and institutions to identify informal or communal forms of political engagement that are non-patriarchal (egalitarian) and non-state-centric.

It is in these informal and the communal socio-political spaces in which women in Aceh have the greatest impact. I identify two illustrative examples¹⁴ of women who work from outside of traditional positions of authority legitimized by the state and are able to successfully mediate disputes that are supposedly handled by the state. The first case is of a woman from *Pidie Jaya* (Greater Pidie) who became an influential figure in her village by working her way through school despite social stigmas against it and by enabling other women in the village to further their education. The second case is of a woman from the mountainous region of *Aceh Jaya* (Greater Aceh) who was able to keep one man out of jail and support two women in negotiating through the communal stigmas associated with domestic violence and divorce.

Their experiences during the conflict illustrate an example of political agency that is completely

¹⁴ These two participants were selected based primarily on the availability of relevant data collected during the interview and that I was able to gain extended access to both participants that resulted in richer data collection from both participants. I conducted two separate interviews with one of the participants over a two-day period and spent an entire day with the other participant while traveling in rural Aceh. I believe these interviews are generally representative of the other interviews that I conducted in Aceh. However, some participants in this study were only available to be interviewed for very short periods of time (as short as 10-15 minutes). It is difficult to draw many insights or conclusions for comparison from such short interviews.

separate from the state, and, I argue, of an agency that potentially represents a politics of ‘deliberate statelessness’ (Scott 2009). Their position in the community following the conflict is deteriorating and it appears that the state remains the primary source of instability and violence in their lives. In summary, chapter four contributes to the wider project of conceptualizing localized-indigenous Muslim Feminisms in Aceh that are not grounded in a secular-liberal subjectivity. It also aids in challenging broader discourses of religious feminisms that continue to rely on patriarchal and state-centric models of women’s agency.

Chapter five shifts the focus onto analyzing how women are inhabiting, transforming, constructing, and deconstructing *syariah* in Aceh. I argue that the concepts of a ‘socio-spatial dialectic’ and of *syariah* as a ‘heterotopia’ provide a richer explanation of Acehnese women’s lived experience of *syariah*. These concepts can aid scholars of Southeast Asian Studies to move beyond the dominant explanations of *syariah* as representing either a utopia or a dystopia. Furthermore, I argue that while Acehnese women have been characterized in NGO reports and in the media as appealing to or describing *syariah* in reductionist utopian or dystopian terminology, the majority of women I interviewed responded with a more nuanced view of *syariah* that cannot be clearly placed in either of these categories. Conceptualizing these women’s engagement with *syariah* in terms of Muslim feminisms provides a needed element of flexibility in moving beyond secular/religious binaries that the current dominant academic discourse surrounding Islamic feminism is unable to provide.

The first section of chapter five begins by introducing the work of Russell Jacoby, who discusses the prevalence of an anti-utopian trend in 20th century Western political theory that reduces utopian thought to an overbearing dystopic model of a utopian future (Jacoby 2005).

Instead, Jacoby argues for conceptualizing utopian thought in iconoclastic or blueprint variations that go beyond the reductionist utopia/dystopia binary grounded in liberal political theory. The concept of social phenomena as heterotopias helps us to re-imagine the multiplicity of possibilities inherent in *syariah* in Aceh (Foucault 1986; Soja 2011). A heterotopia is a socially constructed space connected to a particular experience or physical location that acts as ‘multiple places at once’ in ways that challenge and, at times, reinforce hegemonic norms in a society. The first step in allowing for the possibility of the existence of a heterotopia is to recognize the inadequacy of limiting religious ethical norms, such as those found in *syariah* in Aceh, to explanations of either hegemonic or counter-hegemonic discourses. A December 2010 report by Human Rights Watch frames the implementation of *syariah* in Aceh in terms of essentialized hegemonic/counter-hegemonic discourses that have bracketed off more viable particular explanations from Acehnese women by privileging universal explanations of stated-centered Human Rights laws (Human Rights Watch 2010). I argue that the problem with making such appeals to Human Rights laws regarding *syariah* in Aceh is that it presumes a normative legitimacy of the state and a particular relationship between the individual and the state that negates the existence of shared-communal identities. Furthermore, I argue that conceptualizing *syariah* as a potential manifestation of heterotopias provides an alternative basis for analyzing social phenomena that decenter the dominant Human Rights discourses in terms of what Russell Jacoby labels as iconoclastic utopian thought (2005). A heterotopia is a socially constructed space connected to a particular experience or physical location that acts as ‘multiple places at once’ in ways that challenge and, at times, reinforce hegemonic norms in a society.

After introducing the work of Jacoby, I introduce Edward Soja's concept of a 'triple dialectic' between 'space, time and social being' as a way of re-imagining how syariah could be perceived or inhabited in Aceh (2011, p. 11). The appeal of a triple dialectic approach is that it allows for a level of flexibility and malleability that is otherwise implausible. I apply the concept of a social-spatial dialectic as elaborated in the first section to the stories and narratives of women interviewed in Aceh. In the interviews, I asked women in Aceh to explain how they understand syariah and whether their understanding of syariah is different from the way it is currently being implemented by the state. From these interviews, I identified three distinguishable views of syariah: first, those who imply an understanding of the current state implementation of syariah to be consistent with their understanding (syariah as a blueprint utopia); second, those who imply an understanding of the current implementation to be inconsistent or antagonistic to their understanding (syariah as a state-centered iconoclastic utopia); and third, those who imply an understanding of the current implementation to be largely irrelevant but not necessarily inconsistent or antagonistic to their understanding (syariah as a communally-centered iconoclastic utopia). From the perspective of the third group, the question of whether the state is correctly or incorrectly implementing syariah is trivial because they view syariah as being based in the social space of a community rather than in disassociated relationships among autonomous individuals or between individuals and the state. In summary, chapter five argues that understanding syariah as a heterotopia through a socio-spatial dialectic allows for a Muslim feminist model of women's agency to surface, and opens the possibility of identifying an egalitarian non-state-centric Muslim feminist politics in some rural communities of Aceh.

Chapter six concludes the dissertation by drawing together the key points from chapters one through five and identifying how the analyses from each chapter contribute to addressing broader research questions outside of the scope of this dissertation. Academic debates surrounding women's agency, feminist politics, and Islamic ethics are brought together in this dissertation in support of developing interdisciplinary practices and theories applicable to a wider set of debates in Moral Philosophy, Religious Studies/Islamic Studies, Feminist Studies/Women's and Gender Studies, and Political Theory/Political Philosophy. In the next chapter, I begin by analyzing feminist and postcolonial theories of agency as a first step towards understanding women's agency in Aceh.

2. Muslim Women's Agency: Rethinking the Virtues of Resistance

The aim of this chapter is to provide an account of agency based on a postcolonial feminist approach that acts as a starting point for theorizing a non-state-centric formulation of egalitarian politics. I introduce recent debates on the influence of liberalism and secularism on theories of agency in predominantly Muslim societies. Theorists such as Saba Mahmood, Jacqueline Siapno, Margaret Walker, and Judith Butler are central in supporting this section's main argument that liberal-secular conceptions of agency based on individual choice and procedural rationality constrain the potentiality of women's agency to emerge in informal/communal arrangements. While theoretically this argument is not new to scholars in Women's Studies or Religious Studies, it remains woefully absent from political engagement and praxis in the field. In the case of Aceh, the legacies of European colonialism and Javanese neo-colonialism continue to influence how Acehnese women perceive themselves within the world as well as how others view them. These legacies are intertwined with global shifts in the influence of secular and religious conceptions of politics within the region and with the growth in competing visions of modernity.

Section two of this chapter addresses the secular nature of research surrounding feminist accounts of women's agency and argues for a more flexible definition of agency that can accommodate religious norms and practices. I use a postcolonial feminist approach to analyze the relationship between liberal and secular conceptions of subjectivity and their impact on feminist thought. Margaret Walker's critique of a liberal-secular, or in her terms a theoretical-judicial, model of ethics fills in the gap left by a liberal-secular split between ethical and political modalities of agency. Section three begins with a discussion of Siapno's research

on women's agency during the 1990s as a springboard for contextualizing Acehese women's experiences since the end of the conflict and the expansion of the implementation of syariah by the state in the province. The starting point for theorizing a localized conception of agency in Aceh extends out of Siapno's account of *muslihat* (achieving one's goals through indirect means) from Acehese folktales and her critique of the portrayal of women in Aceh as passive 'suffering stoic women' (Siapno 2002, p. 10-17). Siapno identifies the Acehese adaptation of *jihad fi sabilillah* (striving for God) as an important concept for understanding the meshing between *adat* (local customs) and Islam in a shared Acehese identity (Siapno 2002, p. 52-59). At the end of third section, I return to Mahmood's analysis of piety in Egypt and her discussion the virtues of *Ṣabr* (patience) and *al-ḥayā'* (modesty) as an alternative conceptualization of agency that is constitutively performative and ethically grounded (Mahmood 2005, p. 100-104, 171-174).

The fourth section of this chapter considers broader questions of the applicability of non-liberal models of agency and religious feminism in predominantly Muslim societies such as Aceh. A recurring theme in Islamic feminist scholarship is an emphasis on unity or a shared responsibility among Muslim women as part of an *ummah*¹⁵ (community of believers) across spatial, temporal, and cultural boundaries such that an image of a universalized Muslim woman is constructed in opposition to or in contention with particular examples of non-Islamic, often secular, groups of women (Barlas 2002; Badran 2009; Mernissi 1975/1987, 1992; Moghadam

¹⁵ Muslim feminists, such as Asma Barlas and Fatima Mernissi, have paid special attention to the etymology and usage of the Arabic term *ummah* (peoples, community) (Barlas 2002, p. 115; Mernissi 1975/1987, pp. 17-22, 138-39; Mernissi 1992, pp. 87-89). *Ummah* is derived from the word for mother in Arabic (*umm*) and it is related to the term for a religious leader (*imām*) in Islam (for an extended discussion of the usage of *ummah* in the Qur'an see Denny 1977). Asma Barlas argues that *imām* should actually be read as a 'sex/gender neutral' term in the Qur'an and provides support for her main argument that Muslims should embrace a non-patriarchal and "liberatory readings of the Qur'an" (Barlas 2002, pp. 13, 115).

2002). Instead of redefining Islamic feminism to avoid such essentializing and reductive conceptions of women's agency, Nayereh Tohidi suggests abandoning an Islamic feminist terminology altogether in favor of the term of Muslim feminisms (Tohidi 2003). I argue that using the terminology of 'Muslim feminisms' increases the explanatory power of conceptualizations of Muslim women's agency by privileging communal norms and practices (orthopraxy) in Aceh. In contrast, the current dominant trend of using the terminology of 'Islamic feminism' is often associated with theological debates over the correct understanding/interpretation (orthodoxy) of core principles in Islam and privilege a model of religious subjectivity articulated through personal beliefs rather than communal responsibilities and behaviors.

In the case of women I interviewed in Aceh, this is especially relevant because of their self-identified reliance on local customs (*adat*) and Islamic values that are crucial for understanding how they perceive themselves in the world, neither purely Islamic nor essentially secular. By adopting the plural form of the term Muslim feminisms, I am allowing for multiple interpretations of Islamic practices and other cultural values to be integrated into more complex articulations of agency for women who identify in part as Muslim; thus, breaking the bifurcation of religious and secular life that so many scholars and activists still rely on to this day. In the fifth section of this chapter, the problem of understanding the complex power relations between Acehnese women and the state of Indonesia is addressed by appealing to recent trends in democratic theory and historiography that argue for alternative political arrangements to the hegemony of the current nation-state model of governance. This is done through the recognition of group-based identities as legitimate resources for the formation of

ethical and political goals of individual women in a community. In conclusion, I argue that secular-liberal formations of subjectivity produce a particular *a priori* conception of agency that is antagonistic and detrimental to the present study of women's agency in Aceh. Further, I argue for an alternative conceptualization of a theory of women's agency that is communally centered as an indigenous localized Muslim feminism that is embodied within the socio-political space of Aceh.

2.1 Approaches to Agency

Saba Mahmood's analysis of agency in her work *Politics of Piety* on the women's piety movement in Egypt during the mid-1990s provides a foundation for much of the discussion that follows. In her interpretation of the piety movement, Mahmood seeks to provide an account of how "women's active support for socioreligious movements that sustain principles of female subordination" can be understood in such a way that does not impose non-indigenous non-localized values onto seemingly impartial accounts of women's agency (Mahmood 2005, p. 5). There are four interconnected theoretical dilemmas that Mahmood addresses that have obscured accounts of women's lives, especially in predominantly Muslim societies. The first is the long standing tendency for scholars to 'romanticize resistance' as part of a heroic meta-narrative against perceived systems of oppression, regardless if the subject consciously perceives them or not (pp. 5-9).

Mahmood is critical of what she identifies as mainstream (liberal) feminist scholarship because in this literature, patriarchy is routinely assumed to be foundational in almost all social, cultural, or political interactions, especially in the case of cross-cultural scholarship. A deeper significance of Mahmood's critique of a "teleology of progressive politics" built into our

understanding of 'resistance' is that it places subjectivity in a vacuum outside of or only partially accounting for actual spaces of power (p. 9). What Mahmood is suggesting is that the reliance on resistance for defining acts of agency becomes a quasi-academic self-fulfilling prophecy. While Mahmood cites Foucault's lectures on Power/Knowledge, her critique appears to be grounded in part on Foucault's genealogy of sexuality, which argues that what is often perceived as resistance from afar does not necessarily equate to the alleviation of oppression when analyzed up close (Foucault 1990; Mahmood 2005; Abu-Lughod 1998). Foucault's refutation of the 'repressive hypothesis' of Victorian sexuality illustrates how even open 'resistance' to a perceived oppression can become a fetish from which power is dispersed (Foucault 1990). The fetishization of 'resistance as power' is not a new phenomenon, but, as Foucault contends, in its modern incarnation of new procedures of a "technology of power centered on life," it is dispersed through "regulatory controls: a bio-politics of the population" (Foucault 1990, 139-141, 144-145). From this 'resistance as power' perspective, agency is being defined as "the capacity to realize one's own interests against the weight of customs, tradition, transcendental will, or other obstacles" (Mahmood 2005, p. 8). In contrast, Foucault suggests power is not only relational, discursive, and non-hierarchical, it is the relations of power that construct and delineate an individual's agency, not the other way around. According to Judith Butler, "if, following from Foucault, we understand power as *forming* the subject as well, as providing the very condition of its existence and trajectory of its desire, then power is not simply what we oppose but also, in a strong sense, what we depend on for our existence and what we harbor and preserve in the beings that we are" (Butler 1997, p. 2 italics original). From this discussion, Mahmood concludes that the resistance/submission binary presumes power to

be static, hierarchical, and monolithic and this representation is wholly inadequate for the task at hand, which brings us to Mahmood's second dilemma, that of the dual function and the liberal/secular origins of feminist scholarship.

Contemporary feminism emerged as a 19th and early 20th century Western European project within a wider framework of humanist values reacting to an industrializing Europe (see Le Doeuff 1998/2003; Pateman 1989). From the beginning, feminism has maintained dual functions in society as a descriptive analysis of the multiple forms of oppression that women face and as a prescriptive analysis of how to improve the situation of women who were observed to be oppressed (Mahmood 2005, p. 10). This dual role continues through the present and in real world terms can be seen on university campuses across the globe with the convergence of educational and social activist agendas within Women's and Gender Studies (WGS) programs. In abstract terms, this has meant that feminist discourses have tended to carry with them an implicitly liberal understanding of a woman's universal 'normative freedom' or 'freedom of choice' regardless of historical or cultural contexts (Butler 1990, ch. 1).¹⁶ Freedom can be broken down further into positive freedom, which refers to a person's ability to recognize and pursue one's desires and self-interests, and negative freedom, which refers to a lack of external restraints to acting on one's desires and self-interests (Mahmood 2005, p. 11).

¹⁶Despite the diversity of often opposing movements under the umbrella of feminism, normative freedom remained largely intact across different strands of feminism until a series of theoretical shifts in the 1960s and 1970s began to challenge these assumptions: namely, the women of color movements, black feminist thought, womanist thought, indigenous feminist thought, postcolonial feminist thought, and post-structural feminist thought. What each of these loose-knit intellectual movements share is a rejection of liberal humanist values as the primary guiding principles in a world in which the enlightenment project had demonstrably failed during the 1930s and 1940s. The many advances achieved by Western feminists on an increasingly global scale had failed to integrate and acknowledge a silent majority of women marginalized within feminist movements based primarily on racism, economic exploitation, and the legacies of civilizing discourses from colonialism. The normativity of freedom became problematic once gender inequality was viewed not just between men and women but among a multitude of communities of differently positioned individuals and groups.

The tenets of Liberalism contribute further to the solidification of an individualistic conception of freedom by conflating 'self-realization' with an individual autonomous will as the only 'true will' (p. 11). Ultimately, this narrowing of freedom hampers our ability as theorists to detach the action of individual choice from an embedded normativity of every action resulting from an individual's autonomous will. In order to illuminate further Mahmood's critique of an implicit universal freedom, a theoretical and a practical example are provided.

The theoretical example to which Mahmood appeals, from John Christman, is of a "slave who *chooses* to continue being a slave" (Mahmood 2005, pp. 11-12). If this person has the ability to choose not to be a slave and is pursuing her utmost desires and self-interests in remaining a slave (positive freedom) and is not limited in any way in making her decision (negative freedom), then it would follow that she could normatively choose to remain in slavery. The point Mahmood is trying to make is that agency as an individual's autonomous choice limits freedom to a procedural rather than epistemic value judgment, i.e. it is the *means* rather than the *content* which matters, that can result in decidedly illiberal¹⁷ or anti-feminist actions (pp. 12-17).¹⁸ Another way of thinking about this, Mahmood suggests, is arguing that a liberal-secular conception of agency allows for someone to hold two contradictory positions at the same time by maintaining their procedural rationality of normative (negative/positive) freedom, as consistent with a secular ethics, while also inhabiting a lived-experience of not being free, which is inconsistent with a liberal politics.

¹⁷ For the purposes of this discussion, I define liberalism as a set of social, political, and ethical norms and practices that are associated with individual choice as the determining factor of possessing normative freedom and the acceptance of a shared historical narrative of 'civilization progress.'

¹⁸ Mahmood does acknowledge the important contributions of emancipatory feminist theories and politics that have impacted and continue to positively impact women (Mahmood 2005, p. 13). However, such theories and political movements are unable to adequately address the original question of explaining women's agency within cross-cultural contexts that initially appear to be against one's own interests.

A practical example of how a liberal-secular approach to feminism limits our understanding of freedom can be found in interviews from Mahmood's study of the women's mosque movement. The mosque movement originated out of a broader 'Islamic Awakening' (*al-Ṣaḥwa al-islāmiyya*) in Egypt that began in the 1970s and is concerned with the diminishing role that religion (Islam) holds in Egyptian society (Mahmood 2005, p. 3). One example from Mahmood is of the advice Hajja Asma, a *dā'iyāt* (female preacher), gives to women whose husbands commit varying degrees of transgressions against their wives (p. 185). They range from more severe transgressions such as "refusing to pray regularly (*qaṣr al-ṣalāt qāṣiran*), engaging in illicit sexual activity (*zinā'*), and drinking alcohol" to less severe ones such as preventing their wife from, "praying in a mosque instead of at home, practicing supererogatory fasts, undertaking da'wa, or wearing the full face and body veil" (pp. 185, 187). For the more severe 'grave sins,' Hajja Asma does allow for divorce to be considered in circumstances when all other methods of persuasion do not work. However, she states in an interview that, "If it is only a matter of him being harsh with you [*lau kān āṣ ma'aki*], or having a rough temperament [*tabī'atu kān khishn*], then you could have endured it [*titsabbiri 'alēy*]" (p. 186). The initial question of agency as an individual's autonomous choice can be applied to this case by posing the following question: can a woman be considered free if she chooses to remain in a physically or mentally abusive relationship? According to Mahmood, considering an individual's autonomous choice (i.e., applying a liberal understanding of freedom) does not sufficiently explain agency in this case (p. 187). Mahmood describes the ethical imperative behind Hajja Asma's advice as part of embracing the virtue *Ṣabr* (patience) and involving "a variety of techniques of introspection and argument" such that,

moral injunctions are not juridically enforced but are self-monitored and entail an entire set of ascetic practices ... Only through attention to these kind of specificities can we begin to grasp the different modalities of agency involved in enacting, transgressing, or inhabiting ethical norms and moral principles (pp. 187-88).

Mahmood claims to be searching for a middle ground to redeem discussions of agency from collapsing into moral relativism while still resisting the tendency to adopt a resistance/oppression binary, which brings us to the third dilemma that Mahmood addresses, that of defining the parameters of agency prior to the recognition and incorporation of a particular historical and cultural context (pp. 13-15). This may seem counterintuitive to some in academia that tend to place objectivity, scientific rigor, and humanist values on a pedestal above all other ways of knowing. Mahmood's response is to suggest that her discussion of women's agency in the piety movement can "speak back to the normative liberal assumptions about human nature against which such a movement is held accountable" by expanding the potential of agency, "not only in those acts that resist norms but also in the multiple ways in which one *inhabits* norms" (Mahmood 2005, p. 5, 11 italics original). She identifies Judith Butler's work on 'performativity' and the inhabiting of sexed-gendered bodies as being a major influence on how she developed her understanding of agency (Mahmood 2005, 17-22; Butler 1990, 1997).

In her seminal work, *Gender Trouble*, Butler argues that the body and its enactment, both normatively and politically, are central to understanding subjectivity (Butler 1990, pp. 93-97, 124-141). She rejects a universal conception of women's agency as a 'trope' in favor of conceptualizing agency as "tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a *stylized repetition of acts*," both in speech and bodily acts (Butler 1990, pp. 140-141, italics original). Butler is extending J. L. Austin's disembodied concept of the 'performative' to

an embodied concept of 'performativity' that cannot be predetermined prior to being placed within an inhabited historical and cultural context (Mahmood 2005, pp. 17-21). However, Mahmood is critical of Butler's application of performativity because her "political praxis aimed at unsettling dominant discourses of gender and sexuality" results in an excessive superfluity of "contexts where norms are thrown into question or subject to resignification" in favor of "a radical democratic politics" (Mahmood 2005, p. 21). It is at this point that Mahmood reiterates her assertion that a researcher's political aims need to be delinked from the analysis of agency. Mahmood describes how "during the course of my fieldwork, I was forced to question the repugnance that often swelled up inside me against the practices of the mosque movement" (p. 37).

As was the case with the women's mosque movement for Saba Mahmood, the goals and aspirations of Acehnese women interviewed for this study are at times in conflict with my own goals and aspirations as a Muslim feminist living in the US. In short, though participating in feminist discourses about agency, I should not use these to impose particular political agendas at the expense of engaging in and learning from alternative formations of feminist politics.

The fourth and final dilemma addressed in Mahmood's analysis is that of the artificial divide that scholars have drawn between theorizations of political agency and moral agency (pp. 25-41). She locates the origination of this divide with a 'Kantian legacy' in Moral Philosophy that tends to relegate moral acts to individual mental ideas or regulatory processes distinct from behavioral practices and habitual acts (pp. 25-30). Mahmood argues for a return to a pre-Kantian moral philosophy and suggests starting with Aristotle's concept of *habitus*, "an acquired excellence at either a moral or a practical craft, learned through repeated practice

until that practice leaves a permanent mark on the character of the person,” as a point of departure for formulating a more representative and holistic ethical theory of agency (pp. 135-139). Mahmood is critical of the current trend of a liberal-secular approach to ethics or what Margaret Walker aptly identifies as a “*theoretical-judicial model* (TJM) for the doing of ethics” (Walker 2007, p. 43).

A theoretical-judicial model of ethics, the culmination of what Mahmood describes as a trend toward liberal-secular ethics, refers to a trend in Moral Philosophy that emerged during the late 19th century, with the publication of Henry Sidgwick’s *The methods of ethics*, that has come to dominate contemporary Moral Philosophy in the UK and the US (Sidgwick 1874, cited in Walker 2007, p. 36). Instead of advocating for a particular ethical stance, a theoretical-judicial model of ethics provides a guide to how ethical theorizing should be done. Within a theoretical-judicial model of ethics, an ethical theory is recognized as,

a consistent (and usually very compact) set of law-like moral principles or procedures for decision that is intended to yield by deduction or instantiation (with the support of adequate collateral information) some determinate judgment for an agent in a given situation about what it is right, or at least morally justifiable, to do (Walker 2007, pp. 42-43).

A theoretical-judicial approach to ethics calls for a kind of de-boning or disembodiment of ethical judgments from the contextual social realities of a lived-experience, and frames morality in terms of an “individual action-guiding system within or for a person” (Walker 2007, p. 67). It places ethical theorizing on the level of an abstract space of pure ‘moral knowledge’ of logical and systematic unity that is verifiable through the ‘scientific method’ (Walker 2007, pp. 43-45). For many influential Anglo-American philosophers of the twentieth century this is a mark of progress towards specificity and a better understanding the mind (Anscombe 1958;

Hare 1952; Nozick 1974; Rawls 1971). Anscombe opens her seminal work on Moral Philosophy with the following,

I will begin by stating three theses which I present in this paper. The first is that it is not profitable for us at present to do moral philosophy; that should be laid aside at any rate until we have an adequate philosophy of psychology, in which we are conspicuously lacking. The second is that the concepts of obligation, and duty--*moral* obligation and *moral* duty, that is to say—and of what is *morally* right and wrong, and of the *moral* sense of "ought," ought to be jettisoned if this is psychologically possible; because they are survivals, or derivatives from survivals, from an earlier conception of ethics which no longer generally survives, and are only harmful without it. My third thesis is that the differences between the well-known English writers on moral philosophy from Sidgwick to the present day are of little importance.

Anyone who has read Aristotle's Ethics and has also read modern moral philosophy must have been struck by the great contrasts between them. The concepts which are prominent among the moderns seem to be lacking, or at any rate buried or far in the background, in Aristotle. (Anscombe 1958, p. 1 emphasis original).

The passage above is illustrative of why Mahmood's reliance on Aristotle's concept of *habitus* is such a radical shift away from a liberal-secular (theoretical-judicial model of) ethics. Anscombe is describing an ethics of disembodied moral agents floating in a vacuum of pure rationality; where what is right or wrong for a living-breathing person is of little consequence. In contrast to this Anglo-American trend in Moral Philosophy, I conceive, following Walker and Mahmood, a very different understanding of how ethics should be done. According to Mahmood, "it is impossible to understand the political agency of a movement without a proper grasp of its ethical agency" based on the premise that moral acts are inherently communicative, relational, and embodied (p. 30-35). The approach to ethics that Mahmood is describing is similar, in many ways, to what Walker identifies as an 'expressive-collaborative model' (ECM) of ethics (Walker 2007, pp. 66-67). An expressive-collaborative model of ethics refers to an "investigation of morality as a socially embedded medium of mutual understanding and negotiation between people over their responsibility for things open to human care and

response” (Walker 2007, p. 9). There are four core elements to understanding morality as part of an expressive-collaborative approach to ethics.

The first element to understanding Walker’s expressive-collaborative model of ethics is that “morality itself consists in practices, not theories,” which means that moral theories should not be conflated with moral actions (p. 15-16). So, the object of study in ethics is about understanding particular practices within a shared-group and not the study of abstract principles of an undisclosed moral agent. The second element to an expressive-collaborative approach is that moral practices are fundamentally ‘practices of responsibility,’ such that moral practices refer to “commonly shared understandings about who gets to do what to whom and who is supposed to do what for whom” (p. 16-17). This may seem self-evident but it is quite significant in that Walker is arguing that moral practices should be thought of as explicitly collaborative and relational in nature. A third element is that “morality is not socially modular,” which means that moral practices are not separable from “other social practices, nor moral identities from social roles and institutions in particular life-ways” (p. 17). Morality is constituted in multiple social relations of responsibility such that there are “different moral identities in differentiated moral-social worlds” (p. 18). The fourth element is the culmination of the first three elements in that “morality needs to be seen as something existing, however imperfectly, in real human social spaces in real time, not something ideal or nominal in character” (Walker 2007, p. 19). This is in contrast to what was described earlier in this section as a ‘theoretical-judicial model’ of ethics that is “a *codifiable, compact, consistent* (set of) *procedure(s)* for generating or justifying action guiding judgments” within or for an individual moral agent (Walker 2007, p. 43 emphasis original). Mahmood’s approach to ethics is similar to

Walker's expressive-collaborative model when she argues for connecting moral agency with political agency. The example Mahmood offers in support of this connection is the experiences of women in the mosque movement who began wearing a veil as a result of their participation in the movement. Mahmood describes how distortions can occur when moral acts, such as bodily expressions of piety, are discounted or ignored in favor of purely political explanations, such as economic factors, claims of reacting to secularism, or other external pressures. As a final step in rejecting a secular-liberal model of agency, Mahmood reiterates that a theory of agency must be left open and warns against superimposing ethical or political agendas under the guise of specificity (pp. 36-39).

A similar approach can be found in the work of Chandra Talpade Mohanty, who is also critical of defining agency in terms of appealing to a resistance/submission binary, to a liberal feminist subjectivity, to a universal category of women, or to separating political from moral agency (Mohanty 2003). While Mohanty does reject theoretical projects of universalizing women into homogenous categories, she does not reject more practical goals of amalgamating feminist scholarship with political action in the form of collaboration and solidarity across national, racial, sexual, and class divides (Mohanty 2003, pp. 140, 230-31). One aspect of this amalgamation is reversing the position of epistemic privilege such that the least privileged women are considered first and can be a starting point for a feminist analysis (Mohanty 2003, p. 231).¹⁹ It is through women of color's experiences and struggles, Mohanty argues, that a critique of capitalist subjectivities comes into focus, and the pedagogical importance of feminist

¹⁹ The concept of 'centering' on the perspectives of the least privileged was developed in earlier womanist/black feminist thought (see Dill 1980; hooks 1981; Jaggar 1983; Smith 1974; Walker 1983; For a review of the notion of centering and decentering, see Gillman 2010). Mohanty's project of a 'Third World Feminism' develops a transnational articulation of womanist/black feminist theory by incorporating anti-colonial/postcolonial theory with a womanist/black feminist analysis based on her own experiences and knowledge of women in South Asia.

solidarity across first world/third world divides in elucidating gender and power relationships within globalization becomes visible (Mohanty 2003, p. 235, pp. 245-47).

Mohanty is concerned with the decolonization of women's agency from what she identifies as the, "foundational principle of social organization at this time," that of global capitalism (Mohanty 2003, p. 183). She distinguishes a capitalist construction of women's agency from a democratic construction of agency (pp. 182-184). A capitalist construction of agency is based on an increasing trend in applying the market metaphor to public life and the coupling of individual wealth to public participation; the example she uses is of American universities (p. 183). Universities are considered by Mohanty to be one of the few remaining spaces allocated for participation in public discourse and it is this involvement in public life that creates a space for a democratic construction of women's agency (p. 183). According to Mohanty, the spread of capitalism is linked to a humanist worldview in which women and the 'East' are viewed as the periphery to global centers of power (pp. 40-43).

Mohanty's analysis of Third World women in the Global South adds two particular elements to Mahmood's construction of agency: first, a moral prescription to embrace collaboration and solidarity cross-culturally among women, and second, an acknowledgement of the civilizing linkage between capitalism and humanism that positions women and the 'East' as peripheral to humanity. The significance of the first point is that it connects the accounts of Mohanty, Mahmood, and Walker under the umbrella of a postcolonial feminist approach by conceptualizing a collectivist approach to ethics without reverting to a liberal-secular (theoretical-judicial model of) ethics or refraining from engaging in ethics altogether. The second point is a reminder that in order to discuss women's agency, it is necessary to consider

the impact of capitalism within a postcolonial historical and ideological context. This is especially true for the case of Aceh, where the pepper trade and eventual scramble for control of Northern Sumatra led to a protracted war with the Dutch that still resonates with the Acehnese today. In *The roots of Acehnese rebellion, 1989-1992*, Tim Kell argues that economic exploitation first by the Dutch and later by the Indonesian central government contributed to fomenting separatist movements that emerged in the 1950s and 1970s (Kell 1995). Each of these points will be drawn out further in the remaining sections of this chapter. In the next section, I turn to the work of Jacqueline Siapno, who develops a theory of Acehnese women's agency based on similar post-structuralist critiques of liberalism and secularism as found in Mahmood, Mohanty, and Walker (Siapno 2002).

2.2 Women's Agency in Aceh

During the most recent conflict period (1976-2005), only a limited number of foreign researchers were allowed to enter Aceh, which caused international research on Aceh to be restricted. Siapno's research marks one of the first projects after the conflict began that focuses almost exclusively on women's agency in Aceh. She begins by considering the etymology of the term agency (Siapno 2002). Agency derives from the Latin *agentia* or *ag-ěre*, which means for someone 'to do, act' (Agency n.d.; Siapno 2002, p. 6). Similarly to Mahmood, Siapno emphasizes that agency does not originally convey an adversarial or reactionary component, but rather at its root it has a 'neutral quality' (Siapno 2002, p. 6). She also incorporates Butler's concept of 'gender performativity' in order to disrupt the prevailing discourse during the 1990s and early 2000s of Acehnese people's "pure, uncontaminated opposition" to the interests of the Indonesian state (Siapno 2002, pp. 15-19). Siapno does not criticize Butler for embedding a

political praxis into her research. In this respect, she differs from Mahmood's analysis by concluding that Butler was correct to suggest that agency is best analyzed in terms of 'multiple configurations of power' in 'pure' and 'impure' forms of opposition (Siapno 2002, p. 16). This opens the door for Siapno to bring in the Acehnese concept of "'*muslihat*', '*tipèe-muslihat*', or '*peungeut*'" as the basis for understanding Acehnese women's agency during the conflict in the 1990s and early 2000s (p. 11). Siapno suggests that *muslihat* originates from the Arabic term *mosleh/moslehah*, which means "a person who fixes (or corrects) something wrong" (Siapno 2002, p. 11). She argues that in Aceh literature *muslihat* has come to hold a very different meaning, that of "a positive strategy used by small animals or common people in forging alternative power relations vis-à-vis bigger animals and rulers" (p. 11). Alternatively, *muslihat* can be read as deriving from the Arabic term *muslih* or *musaalih* (a peacemaker, conciliator, or reformist), which would also be consistent with its usage in Acehnese folk tales. Many of the characters described as possessing *muslihat* or *tipèe-muslihat* in Acehnese folk tales act as peacemakers or conciliators of injustices against themselves or the people in general. Additionally, *muslihat* as a noun in Arabic derives from the judicial concept of *maslaha* (public interest), which is an important concept in reaching the *maqāsid al-Shari'a* (end goals of following the path of Islam) that calls for taking a 'pragmatic' or 'expedient' approach to Islamic law on pressing matters that are not explicitly clear in the *usūl al-fiqh* (sources of Islamic jurisprudence) in order to meet the needs of the community.²⁰

Muslihat is an old Malay term that Siapno adopts from Acehnese folk tales that were transmitted primarily in old Malay (as *muslihat*, *tipu-muslihat*, or *muslihat perang*) or at times

²⁰ For an extended account of the significance and usage of *maslaha* in Islamic jurisprudence see the following works (Abdelkader 2003, Dien 2005; Opwis 2007).

in Acehese (as *peungeut* or *tipèe-muslihat*) (Siapno 2002, pp. 10-19). There is no direct translation into English for this concept because even a simplified definition of “using indirect means to attain a goal” carries a connotation of dishonesty that is not present in the Acehese context (pp. 10-11). According to Siapno, *muslihat* can be used by good, bad, or in-between characters in Acehese folk tales and is often associated with someone demonstrating *akal* (human reasoning) in the face of overwhelming adversity (pp. 13-16). There are several Acehese proverbs that Siapno identifies as personifying *muslihat*. Two examples she uses are the proverb ‘*lheuk jago meuleut*,’ that translates as “a type of bird ‘*lheuk*’ which is cunning (‘*jago*’) in fighting and engaging (‘*meuleut*’) its adversaries” and ‘*tulak jalo watèe ie paseung*,’ that translates as “push the boat when the tide is high” or in practical terms “learning to watch for the right political moment” (Siapno 2002, pp. 16, 18).

Siapno uses *muslihat* to construct a very different narrative than what is often reported in the local or international media. She presents women in Aceh as being influential, intelligent, and actively engaged in navigating through multiple sites of coercive power from the military (TNI), to the separatist movement (GAM), to the religious authorities (*ulama*), to an emerging civil society during the 1990s and early 2000s. One example Siapno uses to illustrate women’s agency in Aceh is with *pemeriksaan jalan* (road checkpoints) that were part of daily life during the conflict (Siapno 2002, pp. 21-22).

She describes how at these military checkpoints the men were asked to step down from the bus to be inspected while the women remained on the bus. Instead of this signaling to Siapno that women were thought to be less likely to be *GPK* (security disturbance troublemakers), Siapno concluded that women were, in actuality, more vocal in challenging the

military. Whenever there was a problem with someone's national ID card (*KTP*), it was normally a woman who spoke up and negotiated the situation with the military (p. 22). In contrast, men tended to remain silent throughout the process. One such exchange between a military officer and a female passenger on a bus went as follows: the officer said, "Sorry ladies, we're going to have to check you too. We have to open your bags. You never know, all Acehese are GPK" and the female passenger responded, "Look, don't be so obnoxious calling all Acehese troublemakers. You are the ones who have been making trouble here all this time" (Siapno 2002, p. 22). The implication from Siapno's assessment was that if a man had said something similar in the same situation he would likely have been beaten or possibly worse. Siapno argues that a woman was better positioned in Acehese society to push the boundaries in these day to day interactions despite the very real potential for assault, rape, or torture by the military or the Free Aceh Movement during this period. However, women were often the first targets of violence when the military or separatist forces were targeting a particular village or the general population of a village. In another instance, Siapno challenges the common portrayal of "suffering stoic women" in Aceh by discussing an interview she conducted with the wife of a man serving a 13 year sentence for providing financial support for the Free Aceh Movement (Siapno 2002, p. 22). The women's response to being asked if she missed her husband was,

No, it is better when he's in prison because I have freedom. I have freedom to do whatever I want – to see my friends, go mengaji (reading the Qur'an) – without having to worry about being home before he gets home. When he gets out of prison, I go back to my old life. I won't be able to go out much. He never took me with him when he went out (pp. 22-23).

Siapno interprets her response as not only a challenge to the conventional norm of a dutiful wife struggling for her husband's release, but also as part of a wider distrust of male leadership in an independence movement that seemed unable to translate claims of egalitarian

ideals into practices in the home (p. 23). A benefit of Siapno's approach to agency is that it provides a nuanced analysis of how multiple nexuses of power operated during the conflict and it encourages the reader to re-conceptualize the constitution of a matrifocal community and the concept of a feminist/womanist subject. The prevailing discourses function to restrain agency to coincide with localized conceptions of power that Siapno found most relevant to the conditions she encountered during her fieldwork. Since the publication of her manuscript in 2002, several changes have occurred across the province, requiring a fresh approach to account for the ending of hostilities, the expansion of Syariah laws, the rebuilding after the tsunami, and the lifting of restrictions on national and international investment in Aceh. The next section considers the significance of religious traditions, specifically Islam, in understanding and interpreting agency given the historical developments of secularism and liberalism in the context of the piety movement in Egypt and the Acehnese separatist movements in Indonesia. Following this discussion, I will make a broader argument for a shift from an Islamic/secular feminist conception of women's agency to a post-secular discourse of Muslim feminisms.

2.3 Religious Agency and Agency in Islam

Siapno uses three central religious concepts to explain Muslim women's agency in Aceh. They are based on the comparison she draws between someone thought of as being *alim* (indication of piety/knowledge of Islam) or *fanatik* (uncommonly pious) versus being *kafir* (non-believer in the message of Islam), the performance of different forms of prayers, and the meanings behind the phrase *jihad fi sabilillah* (striving for God) (Siapno 2002, pp. 119-25, 130-36, 142-49). Each of these adds to the complexity and at times contradictory nature of piety and agency in Aceh.

According to Siapno, the term *alim* holds a slightly different meaning in Aceh than its Arabic definition, serving as a sign of being intelligent and possessing a high level of knowledge of the Qur'an and Hadith (Siapno 2002, p. 120). In Aceh, it implies a type of communal piety that supersedes other social or political commitments to a secular nation-state, such as the Republic of Indonesia. An example of this is with *ulama* (religious leaders) in Aceh who were accused of being bought off by the government at times. They would not be considered *alim* despite being accepted as *ulama*. Siapno describes one prominent *ulama* who ran a *pesantren* (Islamic boarding school) and decided to join *Golkar* (Suharto's state supported political party) as a member of the national parliament (p. 120). Reports began to circulate that he was no longer *alim* and had become '*kafir*', which resulted in his *pesantren* losing many students. In another case, an Acehense man recounted his mother's reactions when he told her that he was going to become a soldier in the Darul Islam movement (in the 1950s) and years later that he was going to join the Indonesian army (ABRI) (p. 120). In the first instance, Siapno describes his mother's reaction as follows: "she herself prepared his clothes and food for him to take to camp" (p. 120). In the second instance, "his mother reacted differently: she chased after him to the camp, begging the Panglima ABRI *not* to take him, fearing that the Indonesian army would turn him into a *kafir*" (p. 120). In this context, *kafir* refers to a situation in which someone is no longer guided by the moral principles of the local Muslim community. Instead, they are being guided by the interests of a secular government. This story illustrates how being accepted as *alim*, being a pious Muslim, is often contingent on the socio-political environment rather than simply following an accepted set of rituals or beliefs. The example of *alim/kafir* in Aceh adds to

an understanding of agency by demonstrating how ethical and political responsibilities are often brought together within a pragmatic religious subjectivity.

Piety in Aceh is also inhabited through the practice of a plurality of different types of prayers beyond the required five daily prayers. According to Siapno, in some rural areas of Aceh indigenous beliefs have been combined with Islamic beliefs, as exemplified by *rajah*, prayers recited over medicine to increase its effectiveness, *ilmu kebal*, prayers recited to give a person supernatural powers, and *ilmu tasawwuf*, a Sufi ideal of renouncing material possessions and passions (pp. 132-35). Each of these practices involves a more expansive understanding of piety than what many Muslims in Banda Aceh and other urban centers are willing to accept. One example is from when Siapno was asked to carry with her medicine that had *rajah* from an Acehnese man living in Malaysia and she was asked to deliver it to his daughter. She describes the daughter's response as, "I gave her the bottle and told her that it has been '*dirajahkan*' at which she gave me a knowing smile and said to me, 'Now you have your introduction to Acehnese Islam'" (Siapno 2002, p. 132). This story illustrates the incorporation of local customs and beliefs into traditional Islamic forms of prayer, forming an integral part of an Aceh identity. *Ilmu kebal* is a more general term for the supernatural that can range from prayers to incapacitate one's enemy or of invulnerability to protecting one's self from harm. An example of *ilmu tasawwuf* can be found in the practice of *suluk* in which a novice who wants to join a Sufi order such as *Tarekat Naqsyabandiyah* in Aceh, is required to pray and fast for forty days before being admitted to the order (Siapno 2002, p. 134). According to Siapno, piety in Aceh places a greater emphasis on the merits of collective prayer rather than fulfilling an individual's obligations (p. 130). Prayer is one of the primary ways of expressing a religious subjectivity in

Aceh. It adds to an understanding of agency by demonstrating that the practice of Islam in Aceh is primarily communal and able to adapt to a variety of indigenous customs and norms.

A third crucial concept for Siapno's analysis of the connections between expressions of piety and agency in Aceh is the Arabic term *jihad fi sabilillah* (striving in the way of God) or in Acehnese *prang sabil* (pp. 142-43). *Jihad fi sabilillah* encompasses a range of meanings from a conservative understanding as a holy war against non-Muslims to a more contemporary understanding as a war against social injustices, social inequalities, and state perpetrated violence (pp. 142-43). Siapno suggest that *jihad fi sabilillah* helps to explain two common stereotypes within and outside of Aceh that Acehnese are uncommonly pious and uncommonly militant. While Siapno is quick to point out that there is no racial, cultural, or religious basis for the claim of uncommon militancy, there are several social and political factors that she suggests have contributed to this assertion, such as the Dutch-Aceh war, Dutch colonial rule, Japanese occupation, and the current period of economic and environmental exploitation (p. 142). An example of how *jihad fi sabilillah* permeates everyday life can be found in the Acehnese expression "*daripada singet, got meutunggeng,*" which translates as "rather than stand crooked, it is better for the whole thing to fall down" (Siapno 2002, p. 143). The explanation from Siapno of this proverb is that it is always better to be honest and poor in a fight against social injustices than to become complacent and wealthy (p. 143). The importance of *jihad fi sabilillah* for understanding agency is that during periods of conflict in Aceh, discourses of piety often become linked to militancy.

One of the questions this research project aims to address is to consider if this linkage Siapno describes during the 1990s and early 2000s has had an impact on women's involvement

in politics, especially after the signing of the peace agreement (MoU-Helsinki) in 2005. In addition to Siapno's analysis of piety and women's agency in Aceh during the 1990s, Mahmood provides a related account of how an 'embodied' Islamic piety can inform a theory of agency based on the women's mosque movement in Egypt.

The connection between Islamic piety and women's agency in Mahmood's study of agency is best understood through the examination of two central moral principles within the piety movement. They are the virtue of *al-ḥayā'*, feminine shyness or modesty, and the virtue of *Ṣabr*, perseverance in spite of adversity (Mahmood 2005, pp. 155-61, 171-72). *Al-ḥayā'* is described by Mahmood as being associated with the external act of veiling for women and is commonly thought of as a prerequisite for a woman to achieve a state of piety within the mosque movement (p. 155). The story of Amal provides an example of the nuances involved in interpreting the meaning of *al-ḥayā'* and the potential of imposing preconceived notions of agency onto a seemingly straightforward case.

Amal is depicted by Mahmood as being assertive and having an extroverted personality, while at the same time she recounts the importance of practicing *istiḥyā'*, actively pursuing shyness or modesty, in her daily life (p. 156). In the following passage, Amal describes how she had to teach her body to become *al-ḥayā'* in order for her to mediate the natural tendencies of her personality.

I used to think that even though shyness [al-ḥyā'] was required of us by God, if I acted shyly it would be hypocritical [*nifāq*] because I didn't actually feel it inside me. Then one day, in reading verse 25 in Surat al-Qaṣaṣ ['The Story'] I realized that *al-ḥayā'* was among the good deeds [*huwwa min al-a'māl a-ṣaliḥa*], and given my natural lack of shyness [al-ḥyā'], I had to make or create it first. I realized that making [*ṣana'*] it in yourself is not hypocrisy, and that eventually your inside learns to have al-ḥyā' too. (quoted from Mahmood 2005, p. 156)

Mahmood notes that this passage could be used by some liberal feminists as a textbook case of how objectifying women's bodies can become internalized and reproduced within a matrix of oppression (p. 158). Post-structuralist feminists could argue this passage demonstrates the inherent violence within a hegemonic voice-over of masculine discourses onto a 'subaltern' woman's body (p. 159). Mahmood rejects both approaches as illustrations of how preconceived notions of agency often obscure otherwise well researched and analyzed accounts of women's subjectivity (pp. 159-61). She rejects the liberal conception of agency because it equates agency with resistance and denying the possibility of alternative forms of agency. Mahmood rejects a post-structuralist conception of agency because it privileges a disembodied model of signification. Instead, Mahmood puts forward the view that Amal's embrace of *al-ḥayā'* is a 'mutually constitutive relationship' between learned responses through the body and mind (pp. 157-59). In sum, Mahmood argues that the practice of *al-ḥayā'* is better viewed as a "positive and imminent discourse of being in the world," in which women's agency can be articulated within the subject's modality of understanding (pp. 159-61).

The related virtue of *Ṣabr* or patience among women in the mosque movement affords additional insights into what may otherwise have been categorized as practices of subordination. *Ṣabr* is described by Mahmood as the habitual practice of preserving faith in God and practicing patience with others irrespective of the environmental conditions surrounding the individual (pp. 170-71). The example Mahmood provides is from conversations she has with two women who had to deal with the social stigma that women past their early twenties face if they are not already married. Nadia is in her thirties and married later in life, her friend Iman is in her late twenties and single, and Sana is a single woman in her thirties that is critical of the

mosque movement (pp. 168-74). Mahmood describes overhearing a conversation between Nadia and Iman in which Nadia advises Iman to consider the proposal of a coworker whom she knows is already married despite Nadia's disapproval of polygamy under normal circumstances.

When questioned about the advice she gave later on, Nadia describes the difficulties women face surrounding marriage in Egypt (Mahmood 2005, pp. 169-71). She appeals to the virtue of *Ṣabr* to explain how someone can endure the positive and negative effects of marriage while remaining pious. Nadia explains, "You must be patient in the face of difficulty [*lāzim tikūni ṣābira*], trust in God [*tawwakali 'ala allah*], and accept the fact that this is what He has willed as your fate [*qaḍā'*]" (p. 170). Mahmood argues that conventional liberal feminist scholars would likely interpret this response as evidence of the double standards embedded in a deterministic religious ethic that is inimical to the assertion of agency (pp. 173-74). Instead, Mahmood interprets *Ṣabr* in the mosque movement to be a manifestation of women's agency based on 'divine causality' and an 'individual's responsibility' as a member of the group for their actions in everyday life, as opposed to the familiar aims of reducing suffering or achieving one's self-interests (p. 173). Nadia sums up the importance of *Ṣabr* in the following passage:

You don't learn to become patient [*ṣābira*] or trust in God [*mutawakkila*] only when you face difficulties. There are many people who face difficulties, and may not even complain, but they are not *ṣabirīn* [patient, enduring]. You practice the virtue of patience [*Ṣabr*] because it is a good deed [*al-'amal al-ṣāliḥ*] regardless of your situation: whether your life is difficult or happy. In fact, practicing patience in the face of happiness is even more difficult. (Mahmood 2005, p. 170)

Sana, on the other hand, is critical of the efficacy of appealing to *Ṣabr* as a catchall method for enduring the problems Muslim women face, such as the stigma associated with being a single older woman. She identifies herself as a 'secular Muslim' and advocates fostering a "'strong personality' (*shakhṣiyya qawiyya*)" and "acquiring self-esteem or self-confidence (*thiqa fil-naḥs wal-dhāt*)" rather than practicing *Ṣabr* (Mahmood 2005, p. 172). Mahmood

identifies both Sana and Nadia as being opposed to the unequal pressures that the marriage dilemma places on women in Egypt and as being active proponents of social change in their communities despite the incongruity of their methods for achieving their goals (p. 174). I find Mahmood's example to be a useful illustration of how patience or perseverance (*Ṣabr*) can act as a constitutive project of agency, despite my own cultural and methodological biases against what I may perceive to be systems of patriarchy or enduring unnecessary suffering.

The benefit of incorporating Mahmood's approach to avoid pre-determining agency is that it provides a model for conducting a cross-cultural analysis in Aceh that acknowledges the potential problems of scholars from other cultures imposing external norms and values.

Additionally, Mahmood's discussion of *al-ḥayā'* and *Ṣabr* support the need to conceptualize agency as being constitutively performative and moral in nature. This is consistent with Siapno's account of women's agency in Aceh during the 1990s/early 2000s. Siapno's analysis at the beginning of this section offers support for an embodied (performative) articulation of agency that incorporates local customs (*adat*), Islamic practices, and historical milieus of matrilocality into an analysis of the current post-conflict context. One dimension of theorizing Muslim women's agency that needs further attention is that of the problematic relationship between women and the state. The next section addresses the question of how this analysis of women's agency fits into broader feminist discourses and whether it is appropriate to apply the label of Islamic feminism to this study.

2.4 Feminism, Religion, and the State

In her epilogue, Mahmood reminds the reader that it is impossible to study women's agency in Muslim societies without addressing the epistemic impact that 'secular-liberal

assumptions' have on value judgments made about women and Islam (Mahmood 2005, p. 189).

An example Mahmood raises is the commonplace usage of 'Islamism,' which denotes an "eruption of religion outside the supposedly 'normal' domain of private worship" and carries with it the negative connotation of an anomalous political ideology camouflaged by religious language (pp. 189-90). The presumption being made is that it is natural and therefore good to separate a secular public sphere of politics from a private religious sphere of personal beliefs.

Talal Asad, a prominent anthropologist and religious studies scholar, reminds us that the modern assumption of a split between the secular and the religious did not emerge within a historical vacuum and it should not be naturalized into academic discourses (Asad 2003, 2012).

Asad explains that over time,

the idea [of religion] gradually crystalized among European thinkers that in every society people believed in supernatural beings and told stories about the origin of the world and about what happens to the individual after death; that in every society people instituted rituals of worship and deferred to experts in these matters; and that therefore religion was not something only Christians had (Asad 2012, p. 37).

The way seventeenth and eighteenth century Europeans understood their own relationship to Christianity became the lens through which Western academia began to view the rest of the world. An individual's 'true belief' was thought to demarcate what is religious from the profane in the 'natural' world (Asad 2012, p. 40). Asad explains,

In the past, colonial administrations used definitions of religion to classify, control, and regulate the practices and identities of subjects. Today, liberal democracy is required to pronounce on the legal status of such definitions and thus to spell out civil immunities and obligations. When definitions of religion are produced, they endorse or reject certain uses of a vocabulary that have profound implications for the organization of social life and the possibilities of personal experience. For this very reason, academic expertise is often invoked in the process of arriving at legal decisions about religious matters. In all these legal functions, liberal democracy (whether at home or abroad in its colonies) not only works through secularity, it requires that *belief* be taken as the essence of religiosity (Asad 2012, pp. 39-40 emphasis original).

The passage above speaks to the, often overlooked, history of European colonial administrations using religion as a tool of subjugation and control over the indigenous peoples

of the colony. The Dutch colonial administration controlled the people of Aceh, by codifying and recording *adat* in order to isolate what the Dutch viewed as the primary political threat of Islamic doctrine from the seemingly more benign local communal norms. Prior to the Dutch codification, these two were not separated and *adat*, as well as Islam, was orally transmitted within each local community in Aceh with minimal outside interference. By restricting non-Christian religious traditions to psychological manifestations of belief, the actual lived-experience of religious practices are deemed irrational, uncivilized, and in need of saving. Religious practices become unintelligible as anything more than enactments of superstitious beliefs or 'myths' in the modern sense of the word as false beliefs. Asad continues by arguing that,

Although the insistence that beliefs cannot be changed from outside appeared to be saying something empirical about 'personal belief' (its singular, autonomous, and inaccessible-to-others location), it was really part of a political discourse about 'privacy,' a claim to civil immunity with regard to religious faith that reinforced the idea of a secular state and a particular conception of religion (Asad 2012, p. 44).

In other words, the study of non-Christian religious traditions, in this case Islam, is being preemptively defined in relation to a liberal-secular state. I argue that this often results in the spread of an antagonistic and negative perception of women's position in Islam and in Muslim women's relationship to the state. In the case of Women's and Gender Studies, this manifests itself in the debates over whether feminist theory and praxis should allow such a divide along secular/religious lines and which side should be privileged.

In her article 'Islamic Feminism and its Discontents: Towards a Resolution of the Debate,' Valentine Moghadam attempts to answer this question by analyzing recent trends in Iranian politics between religious reformists who support the concept of 'Islamic feminism' and conservatives who reject the possibility of Islam and feminism being compatible (2002).

Although Moghadam identifies herself as a feminist and as Muslim, she remains reluctant to endorse 'Islamic feminism' on the grounds that it implies a higher level of theological agreement than currently exists among its proponents and that restricting feminist discourse to a particular religious tradition is antithetical to the feminist project (Moghadam 2000; 2001, pp. 42-45; 2002, pp. 1137-55). Islamic feminism is not sufficient, according to Moghadam, because "women's rights and human rights are best promoted and protected in an environment of secular thought and secular institutions" (Moghadam 2002, p. 1160). Moghadam views Islamic feminism as a reductionist approach to gender equality and considers secular values and norms as a universal basis for developing an egalitarian society. While I agree with Moghadam's assessment that the framing of the term Islamic feminism poses many challenges to fostering inclusivity and solidarity, I disagree with her conclusion that religion should be excluded as a constitutive factor when considering feminist theory and praxis.

In contrast to Moghadam's assessment, the scholar Margaret Badran finds it beneficial to employ an Islamic/secular terminology to distinguish between feminist projects in Muslim societies that are predominantly religious in orientation from those that are predominantly secular in orientation (Badran 2009). She defines 'Islamic feminism' as a "feminist discourse and practice articulated within an Islamic paradigm" in contrast to 'secular feminism' which she views as "located within the context of a secular territorial nation-state composed of equal citizens, irrespective of religious affiliation and a state protective of religion while not officially organized around religion" (pp. 3-5, 242-45). According to Badran, Islamic feminism emerged in the late twentieth century with a primary focus on developing egalitarian interpretations of Islamic jurisprudence through *ijtihad*, independent judgment, and *tafsir*, interpreting the

Qur'an (pp. 247-9). In contrast, she views secular feminism in Muslim societies as emerging earlier in the nineteenth century and potentially "constituted by multiple discourses, including secular nationalists, Islamic modernist, humanitarian/human rights, and democratic" (Badran 2009, p. 300). Despite her stated objection to portraying Islamic feminism in monolithic terms, I find Badran's account to be ultimately privileging secular feminisms as the natural predecessors to Islamic feminism. Badran presents secular feminisms as being more flexible and adaptable than religious alternatives and as being inherently more inclusive than religious feminisms. Based on my reading of Badran's extensive work on this topic, Islamic and other variations of religious feminism are conceptually restricted to adhering to a theocratic legitimacy based on scripture and prophetic traditions consistent with liberal feminist movements in Christianity. The possibility of non-prophetic and non-scriptural based local/Indigenous knowledge holding equal or at times greater weight is inconsistent with Badran's conception of an Islamic/religious feminism. One example of how indigenous values are often incorporated into Acehnese Islam is the local inheritance and ownership practices along parts of the East Coast of Aceh. According to the local *adat*, the inheritance and ownership of the family home should be matrilineal (centering around the wife's family) and often result in daughters inheriting the family home or having a new house built in 'matrilineal clusters' in the village (Schröter 2010, pp. 160-63).

In addition to privileging secular manifestations of feminism, Badran's positionality as a Western scholar educated in Middle Eastern Studies has potentially affected her analysis of Islam by equating Islamic Studies with Middle Eastern Studies and overemphasizing the prominence of contemporary events, practices, and movements in the Middle East for all Muslim societies. This issue becomes even more problematic given the question of women's

agency in the context of Aceh. Anthony Reid notes that “in terms of the emphasis of western scholarship they [Southeast Asian Muslims] appear to suffer from a double marginality” in Islamic Studies: “they are portrayed as peripheral to Islamic civilization,” while Area Studies programs tend to be “hostile to extra-regional identities” such as an Islamic identity (Reid 1993, pp. 3-4). Despite Badran and Moghadam’s attempts to take Islamic feminism seriously in its own right, the disparities between their categorizations of secular feminism and Islamic feminism ultimately appear to be privileging secular feminism as the underlying basis for feminist thought in Muslim societies.

Amina Wadud is another well-known figure in the public and academic discourses surrounding the relationship between feminism, Islam, and women’s subjectivity. She is best known for leading several mixed-gender prayer services in the mid-1990s/early-2000s and for the swarm of backlash that followed from religious authorities and commentators in many Muslim majority countries. Wadud is also a widely read scholar of Islam. She argues that Islamic traditions and practices are consistent with the cultivation of an egalitarian (non-patriarchal) conception of women’s agency in Islam, despite her initial rejection to being labeled a feminist (Wadud 1999, 2006). Wadud responds to feminist scholars and activists that argue Islam is in need of a secular foundation by stating “others have rushed to conclude that gender justice is impossible in Islam itself” without giving full consideration to an “indigenous Islamic worldview” that is equally pro-faith and pro-feminist (Wadud 2006, p. 2, 10, 39). An ‘indigenous Islamic worldview’ is based on an evolving collection of personal and social practices that are “continually [being] re-evaluated from the perspective of the time of their specific embodiment throughout the challenges, changes, and limitations of history” (Wadud 2006, p. 43). Wadud

identifies a key principle to formulating an indigenous-egalitarian Islamic ethics and politics to engage with what she calls a '*tawhidic paradigm*.' A '*tawhidic paradigm*' relies on the Qur'anic concepts of *taqwa* (moral consciousness) as the volitional cultivation of moral character in order to nurture and fulfill *khilafah* (human agency/social harmony) that holds "the unity of all human creatures beneath one Creator" within the overarching concept of *tawhid* (unity/oneness of God) (Wadud 2006, pp. 28, 24-48). Wadud is arguing for a kind of 'spiritual activism' or, as she describes it, enacting a '*gender jihad*' as a struggle/striving for an egalitarian future across diverse Muslim communities. I find Wadud's argument represents a divergence from many of the other accounts of an Islamic/Muslim feminism discussed above and provides a more adequate representation of the diversity of feminist perspectives in Muslim communities.

In an article on the rhetoric of Islamic Feminism, mariam cooke presents what I consider to be a representative account of how scholars often impose a liberal-secular model of agency onto to the discourse of Islamic feminism (cooke 2002). According to cooke, the analysis of agency in "Islamic feminist performances and practices" is relegated to what she labels a "continuum between the ascribed identity of 'Muslim' [by a secular state] and the achieved identity of 'Islamists'" (cooke 2002, p. 145). On one end of the spectrum, cooke recognizes an Islamic feminist agent as someone who "carries an identity card that fills in *Muslim* next to the category of 'religious identity,'" and on the other end of the spectrum, Islamic feminist agents are recognized as 'Islamists' who "achieve their sometimes militant identity by devoting their lives to the establishment of an Islamic state" (cooke 2002, p. 145). As noted at the beginning of this section, the reference to 'Islamism' denotes the "eruption of religion outside the

supposedly ‘normal’ domain of private worship” within a secular state (Mahmood 2005, pp. 189-190). In other words, cooke’s articulation of an Islamic feminist agency ranges from the “ascribed identity” of ‘Muslim’ as ethnic-nationalist identity to the “achieved identity” of ‘Islamists’ as a violent political ideology (cooke 2002, p. 145). Kwok Pui-Lan, a postcolonial feminist, warns scholars in the Global North to avoid the temptation of conceptualizing a ‘feminist religious discourse’ of agency in a liberal-secular typology that allows for the re-inscription of ‘colonialist representations’ of women from the Global South (Pui-lan 2002, p. 63).

Fatima Mernissi is probably one the best known and most prolific Islamic feminist scholars of the 20th century (Mernissi 1975/1987, 1992, 1995). Her personal account of growing up in Morocco under French occupation and her personal engagement with feminist movements in France, the US, and Morocco greatly impacted how she conceptualizes the relationship between feminism/womanism and women in Islam. Like many other postcolonial writers of the 1970s and 1980s, Mernissi endorses a liberal-secular conception of a democratic state and argues against having an individual’s religiosity, in her case Islam, enter the public sphere of politics. She describes the relationship between Islam and democracy in the following passage:

We are in fact talking about an eminently legal conflict. If the basic reference for Islam is the Koran, for democracy it is effectively the United Nations Charter, which is above all a superlaw. The majority of Muslim states have signed this covenant, and thus find themselves ruled by two contradictory laws. One law gives citizens freedom of thought, while *shari’a*, in its official interpretation based on *ta’a* (obedience), condemns it (Mernissi 1992, p. 60).

Mernissi’s conception of an Islamic feminist agency is centered on a liberal-secular state and restricts religious agency to the realm of personal belief. Anouar Majid is critical of Mernissi’s approach to an Islamic feminist agency because “by associating capitalist

individualism with women's liberation: Mernissi privileges an economic system that creates precarious social spaces and imbalances that only exacerbate intellectual rigidities" (Majid 2000, p. 108). Majid argues that ultimately Mernissi "is clearly in favor of a bourgeois definition of human rights and democracy" to the extent that "she repeats the familiar Orientalist thesis that only a secular modernity can free Arabs [read: Muslims] from their long and deadly paralysis" (Majid 2000, p. 105). The point of this line of argumentation is not to vilify Fatima Mernissi, but rather to illustrate the difficulty of separating the usage of Islamic feminism, as purported by Mernissi and others, from a liberal-secular conception of agency and the related support for a liberal-secular state.

Nayereh Tohidi proposes a middle ground as an alternative to the approaches above by arguing for abandoning the term 'Islamic feminism' altogether because of its tendency to reinforce a common misinterpretation that there is only one underlying Islam or that there is only one essential (secular) feminist perspective (Tohidi 2003, pp. 135-7). Instead, Tohidi suggests using 'Muslim feminist/s' because it implies 'a Muslim who is a feminist' rather than polarizing oneself by taking a 'faith based position' or a 'secular based position' (Tohidi 2003, pp. 137-138). In practical terms, many Muslim women are not willing to disavow their religious or non-religious values (*adat* in the case of Aceh), nor are they necessarily willing to ascribe to a generic (non-indigenous) secular feminism even if it may appear from an outsider's perspective to serve their short-term or long-term interests.

An advantage to adopting the pluralistic language of Muslim feminisms is that it allows more flexibility to conceptualize and potentially realize anti-patriarchal, non-dogmatic, and non-liberal modalities of being. In other words, by moving away from *a priori* commitments to a

liberal-secular model of citizenship and away from commitments to a theocratic (Islamic) model of citizenship, alternative (i.e. non-state centric) political formations of agency become increasingly plausible. Muslim feminisms provide one such avenue for the conceptualization of 'new political imaginaries' through a politics of 'place-based globalism' and through an expressive-collaborative approach to a localized conception of agency (Gibson-Graham 2006, p. xxi; Walker 2007). A common thread among these emerging political imaginaries is an acknowledgement of the failure of the present civilizing discourse of global capitalism to care for marginalized groups across the globe and the violence indicative of state-building/state-craft towards the very people it claims to represent. However, the scholarship on agency in Women's and Gender Studies/Feminist Studies continues to have a tendency to assume a Western liberal-secular modality in agency that is in need of reform.

One further example is a recent volume on new movements in feminist theory, *New Femininities: Postfeminism, Neoliberalism, and Subjectivity*, that aims to "advance our understanding of current developments and permutations in the conditions of (mostly young) womanhood, the production of gendered subjectivities, and the various requirements to perform a kind of sexuality which will be compliant with the changing needs of a global economy" (McRobbie 2009 in Gill & Scharff, 2011). I had anticipated that the contents would include some discussion of a feminist religious subjectivity and at least mention the relevance of secularism or modernity to feminist theorizations of agency. Of the twenty articles in the volume, only one remotely addresses formulating a feminist religious subjectivity. The article compares the significance of Muslim women 'veiling' to 'Western fashion and beauty practices' and offers an analysis of "whether 'the veil' is more oppressive than 'Western fashion trends' ...

[and] beauty practices” (Pedwell 2011, p. 188). While the article’s aim is to examine the “limitations of cross-cultural analogy as a feminist tool for addressing cultural essentialism,” in actuality, the analysis relies on and reinforces a liberal-secular model of agency despite the numerous references to critical and performative theory (Pedwell 2011, p. 197). The otherwise informative analysis reduces religion (Islam) to a political ideology (set of beliefs). As a result, I argue, the article misses the point as to why “imposing gendered metrics to make these practices [Muslim women ‘veiling’ and Western (non-Muslim/white/Christian?) fashion/beauty trends] commensurable” is misguided (Pedwell 2011, p. 190). While this volume does not claim to be representative of recent trends in feminist scholarship, it does provide one instance in which the terminology of Muslim feminisms, rather than Islamic/secular feminisms, would be beneficial. As Talal Asad so eloquently reminds us, “the modern *idea* of religious belief (protected as a right in the individual and regulated institutionally) is a critical function of the liberal-democratic nation-state but not of democratic [or feminist] sensibility” (Asad 2012, p. 56-57 emphasis original). It is important that the historical-material manifestation of liberal-secularism in the modern state is not conflated with the democratic or egalitarian ideals that it (rightfully or wrongly) may claim to uphold. In the next chapter, I analyze the historiography of Aceh through an anarchist historical lens as a vehicle for re-imagining Muslim feminisms within an Acehnese context.

2.5 Conclusion

Chapter two provides a synthesis of the work of Saba Mahmood, Judith Butler, Margaret Walker, Chandra Mohanty, and Jacqueline Siapno who have tackled this issue head-on by deconstructing the assumptions built into liberal-secular theories of agency that dominate in

each of their respective fields. My analysis of Mahmood's work on the piety movement in Egypt proved to be crucial in articulating four objections to a liberal-secular subjectivity. In short, the objections are aimed at the romanticization of agency as resistance, the fetishization of resistance as power, adherence to a universal notion of normative freedom, to a disembodied model of agency, and to an artificial split between the political and the moral dimensions of agency.

I drew from Mohanty's work to extend these objections by shedding light on the civilizing linkages between capitalist and humanist subjectivities that position women and Islam on the periphery to humanity. Siapno's study of women's agency during the 1990s provides a springboard for contextualizing Acehese women's experiences since the end of the conflict and the expansion of the state implementation of syariah in the province. Despite her overemphasis on militancy as a constitutive part of Acehese women's agency, Siapno lays the groundwork for the study with her informative account of *muslihat* from Acehese folktales and her critique of the common portrayal of women in Aceh as passive 'suffering stoic women.' Siapno highlights *jihad fi sabilillah* (striving for God) as an important concept for understanding the meshing between *adat* (local customs) and Islam in shared Acehese identity. While I drew from Mahmood's analysis of *Ṣabr* (patience) and *al-ḥayā'* (modesty), I offer an alternative conceptualization of agency as being constitutively performative and morally culpable for women in the piety movement. Despite her personal moral objections, Mahmood finds a distinct sense of feminist agency within these women's narratives. It is from this synthesis of alternative approaches to conceptualizing agency that to which I am appealing in chapters

three, four, and five when analyzing the interviews I conducted with women in Aceh between 2009 and 2010.

In the final sections of chapter two, I argue for a shift in terminology among feminist scholars and activists regarding how religion, or more specifically religious agency, is often conceptualized as falling somewhere between two extremes along a spectrum of religious feminism and secular feminisms. Talal Asad's work is used to draw out this linkage between liberal-secular conceptualization of religious agency and contemporary feminist discourses surrounding Muslim women's agency. Asad argues for reconsidering the modernist preconceptions that religious practices are reducible to expressions of personal belief and that a 'democratic sensibility' is dependent exclusively on the 'liberal-democratic nation-state' (Asad 2012, p. 56-57). My objection is not to where along the continuum a particular feminist moment should be positioned; rather, it is an objection to its epistemic assumptions of a liberal-secular subjectivity and the normativity of a liberal-secular state that, I argue, distort an understanding of practices and engagement in religious traditions. To be clear, I am not arguing that a religious feminism, such as Muslim feminisms, exists in some alternate reality that is untouched by liberal-secular norms and values. On the contrary, I am arguing for a more inclusive understanding of religious agency that is not restricted by an exclusivistic understanding of religion as 'personal belief.' I analyze several prominent works by Islamic feminists and commentators on Islamic feminism in order to show how the terminology of Muslim feminisms could potentially add to feminist scholarship on Muslim women's agency. In the next chapter, I connect the present discussion of a feminist religious agency (Muslim feminisms) to a postcolonial approach of an anarchist history that is critical of 'state-centric'

discourses in Acehese history.

3. A Postcolonial Feminist Approach to Acehese History

In this chapter, I argue for adopting an indigenous-localized understanding of agency for women in Aceh that is both egalitarian and communally-centered in nature in order to overcome the legacies of a hegemonic discourse of patriarchal state-centrism that continues to inform how the history of Aceh is conceptualized. Patriarchal state-centrism refers to the assumption that it is natural to measure human history in terms of a society's progress towards developing, cultivating, and perfecting the modern state. It assumes that a male-centered society is natural, even preferable in some ways, to alternative political formations. Scholars usually divide Aceh's history along the lines of increasing and decreasing levels of urbanization, territorial expansion, and centralization in political power (see Aspinall 2009; Graf et al 2010; Reid 2005, 2010; Salim 2008). This creates the illusion that the history of Aceh naturally progresses towards forming a modern state and that modern states are preferable to other forms of governance. A typography of Acehese history typically includes the following periods: the rise and fall of the Aceh Sultanate (1514-1903), the rise and fall of the Portuguese, French, Dutch, and British influence in the archipelago (1511-1975), the rise and fall of Dutch colonization of Aceh (1873-1949), the brief interlude of Japanese occupation of Aceh (1942-1945), and the current period of the unitary state of the Republic of Indonesia (1945-present) augmented by increasing influence by the US since the 1950s. The narratives that are formed based on this typography are critically examined in this chapter through specific cases that relate to the wider project of understanding women's agency in Aceh. The primary narratives under consideration are modern historical writings beginning with scholars across disciplinary divides in the social and human sciences. These writings emerged alongside and in conjunction

with the colonial scramble for control of the last remaining independent territories in Southeast Asia during the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

The aim of this chapter is to argue that adopting a postcolonial feminist approach to the history of Aceh that is informed by anarchist theory is needed in order to develop an indigenous-localized conception of women's agency in Aceh that is egalitarian and non-state-centric. I analyze two case studies in order to demonstrate how a postcolonial feminist approach can aid in uncovering patriarchal and state-centric discourses surrounding women's agency in Acehnese historiography. The first case is the historical legacies surrounding two of Indonesia's national heroines, Raden Adjeng Kartini and Cut Nyak Dhien. The second case is the competing explanations of the expansion of the state's implementation of Syariah in Aceh. Each of these cases demonstrates the need for what Norman Denzin and Michael Giardina have aptly identified as a 'decolonization of the politics of knowledge,' in this case the decolonization of the politics of the Acehnese history (Denzin and Giardina 2007, pp. 12-23). I argue that a postcolonial feminist approach provides a richer account of agency in the history of Aceh on a theoretical and a political level.

In the previous chapter, I argued that secular-liberal formations of subjectivity produce a particular *a priori* conception of agency that is antagonistic and detrimental to the present study of women's agency in Aceh. A secular-liberal conception of agency encompasses the following characteristics: a) a romanticization of agency as 'resistance' and a fetishization of 'resistance' as 'power'; b) the presumption that 'freedom' is universal, innate, and normative at all times, in all places, and for all peoples; c) the presumption that agency is separable and ultimately disconnected from material bodies; and d) the presumption of an artificial split

between the political and the moral dimensions of agency. This particular secular-liberal conception of agency as the basic building block of society has a far reaching impact on what an ideal society should look like and on what concessions are regarded as necessary to achieve a morally agreeable level of social harmony. I argue that just as it was necessary to deconstruct a secular-liberal conception of agency, a radical shift is needed among scholars who maintain the centrality of the state in historiography in order to move beyond the lingering effects of colonialist narratives embedded in Acehese history. The legacies of European and Javanese colonialism continue to influence how the history of Aceh is perceived both outside and inside of Aceh. In the course of the interviews with women in Aceh, historical narratives of Acehese heroines and narratives of the prominence of women in the past in Aceh acted as commonplaces across the participants. At times, these narratives were presented in support of and in opposition to state-centric patriarchy as a way for the interviewees to position themselves within wider national, regional, and global contexts.

In the first section of the chapter, I provide an overview of Acehese history and explain how disciplinary rifts developed between the study of Islam and the study of Southeast Asia in academia. These divisions lay the foundation for elaborating on two theoretical insights drawn from James C. Scott's recent work on 'deliberate statelessness' and the development of a postcolonial method of historiography that is non-state-centric (Scott 2009). Scott argues that the global spread of European colonialism during the past 500 years resulted in the formation of modern states that from the beginning embody the greatest sources of violence and destabilization to the lives of local peoples. As competing models of colonialism progressed into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, a common pattern of internal colonization within the

region emerged along the peripheries and between centers of state power that often happened to be rich in natural resources and were geographically, linguistically, or culturally cut off from the rest of the state. The impact of colonialism on people living on the peripheries of state control has led some groups to engage in a politics of 'deliberate statelessness,' which presents a direct challenge to the dominant historiographical myths that assert a Western European model of 'civilization' is inevitable and normative through growth in urban populations, increases in state bureaucratization, and technological progress through scientific innovation. Critical theorists such as Horkheimer, Adorno, and Foucault have written extensively on the negative effects in unquestioningly embracing Enlightenment rationality and provide further theoretical grounding for explaining this discourse of global development, a euphemism for the continuation of the 'civilizing' project of European colonialism.

An anarchist approach to historiography elaborates and extends a postcolonial feminist approach by allowing for the possibility of theorizing agency outside of the constraints of state-centrism, the privileging of urban life, and the constraints of liberal-secular conceptions of social equality and freedom. To be clear, I am not arguing that all forms of engagement with state-centered politics must be abandoned in order to adopt a non-state-centric perspective to history. Rather, I argue for the inclusion of ways of knowing and being in Acehnese history that do not privilege an individual's or groups of individuals' relationship to a state. While a postcolonial feminist approach challenges the conceptual boundaries imposed by a liberal-secular subjectivity onto Muslim women in Aceh, an anarchist history extends this critique by providing a counter-narrative to deterministic civilizational discourses that have the effect of

producing a 'hegemonic voice-over' for alternative (non-patriarchal and non-state-centric) lived-experiences (Tuck & Fine 2007, pp. 147-153).

Section two of this chapter applies a postcolonial feminist approach to the historiography of Aceh by analyzing two cases from Acehnese history that were raised by several Acehnese women during the interviews. The first case is a comparison between the nationalist heroine Raden Adjeng Kartini from Java, who is revered annually with her own national holiday in Indonesia, and the Acehnese heroine Cut Nyak Dien, who is still very alive in Acehnese social memory while being regarded as only a minor heroine within the larger Indonesian nationalist narratives. In the third section, a second case is presented of the recent state implementation of Syariah in Aceh and the competing discourses surrounding who initiated it and what Syariah represents to the people of Aceh. Each example provides support for my argument, namely, the use of a non-state centric approach to understanding Acehnese history and the rationale for conceptualizing agency outside of a secular-liberal and state-centered model. Both cases aid in demonstrating the colonial, patriarchal, and state-centric legacies that continue to plague the history of Aceh. In the final section, I argue that acknowledging patriarchal state-centrism within Acehnese historical narratives allows for scholars and activists to gain a richer understanding of agency and what it means to be political that will be expanded on further in chapter four.

3.1 State-Centrality and the History of Aceh

The historiography of Aceh by academics in the Global North has been, as one historian puts it, "poorly served by the literature" because "serious fieldwork on Aceh's ethnography, archeology and linguistic pattern has been severely discouraged by the unstable conditions"

during the conflict between the Indonesian central government and the Free Aceh Movement (*Gerakan Aceh Merdeka*, or GAM) that came to an end in 2005 (Reid 2006, pp. 2-3). It was only when Aceh was perceived as a threat to a European colonial power that Aceh was lifted to the status of a focal point of study (Reid 2005, pp. 11-14, 236-242, 335-354; 2006, pp. 2-3). In the case of Sumatra, it was primarily the Dutch and the British who in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries were vying for access and control over the island (Missbach 2010, pp. 40-42). After the signing of the Anglo-Dutch treaty of 1824, the British renounced their claims to Sumatra and left the Dutch in control of the island except for the northern tip that remained independent under the Aceh Sultanate. Aceh was the last self-ruling territory in the archipelago (Reid 2005). By 1872, a series of new treaties were ratified between Britain and the Netherlands that granted the Dutch dominion over the entire island of Sumatra including the Aceh Sultanate as part of the sale of Dutch Gold Coast in West Africa and providing the British trading rights to ports in Sumatra. Within a year, the Dutch launched one of the longest and costliest wars that they had ever undertaken to incorporate Aceh into the Dutch East Indies. It would be another three decades before the Dutch defeated the Sultanate and another decade after that before they were able to contain the remaining clusters of resistance in Aceh (Reid 1979, pp. 7-31).

The Dutch East Indies maintained control over Aceh until a brief interlude in 1942 when the Japanese 'liberated/occupied' the East Indies from the Dutch and established a pro-Japanese government until Japan's surrender in 1945 (Schulze 2010, pp. 63-77). Scholars describe the Japanese occupation as both excessively brutal and yet influential in fostering the spread of an Indonesian nationalist movement. The end of WWII marked the beginning of the

Indonesian nationalist's revolution from 1945-1949, during which the Dutch did not attempt to retake Aceh. The post-independence unity was short lived with the revolutionary leader Daud Bereueh initiating a second revolution this time from the newly created Republic of Indonesia with the aim of increasing autonomy for Aceh within a new Islamic state, *Darul Islam* (Basri 2010, p. 271). The Dural Islam movement was eventually suppressed by the early 1960s. After natural gas deposits were discovered in 1971 on the East Coast of Aceh, a second separatist movement began to materialize and by 1976, Hasan Trio had sparked a secessionist movement for an independent Acehnese state (Reid 2005, pp.; 346-349). The rebellion continued through several periods of escalating violence and open rebellion followed by extended episodes of repression from the state until a peace agreement was reached in 2005 between GAM (Free Aceh Movement) and the central government in Jakarta (Ziegenhain 2010, pp. 120-134). Since 2005, GAM began transitioning from a paramilitary organization to a political and civil organization by taking an active role in local politics.

In the post-WWII era, historians from around the globe whose primary geographic focus was on Southeast Asia were confronted with a shift in the political, social, and economic landscape of the post-Japanese occupation (1941/2-1945) of the region (Legge 1992, pp. 3-15; Reid 2005, pp. 335-354). A return to the pre-1940s European and North American colonial arrangements was no longer possible and this had an impact on the historiography of the region (Legge 1992, pp. 14-50; Reid 2006, pp. 334-354, 2010, pp. 1-23). There was a new emphasis by historians from outside of the region on moving away from reproducing the 'Orientalist' histories of the past towards a renewed interest in the historical events prior to European/North American colonialism, "as part of the creation of their [peoples of Southeast

Asia] identity, new perceptions of their past, perceptions going back beyond the intrusion of the Western powers and finding earlier roots in older patterns of culture and polity” (Legge 1992, p. 14). Despite the many changes in how scholars of the post-WWII period approach the history of Southeast Asia, a lingering problem is the often unintentional but no less harmful operational assumption of a patriarchal and state-centered conception of territoriality (Reid 2006, pp. 335-343; 2010, pp. 1-5, 210-218).

Territoriality is significant in that much of the scholarship in the United States, Western Europe, and Australia was being conducted in newly formed ‘area studies’ programs aimed at tackling contemporary security and policy concerns surrounding the protracted ‘Cold War issues’ of the 1950s through the 1980s under a shared belief in the territorial integrity of Southeast Asia (Legge 1992, p. 15). Since the end of the Cold War, the significance of area studies programs such as Southeast Asian Studies are in decline. However, I argue that the legacy of presuming a patriarchal and state-centered conception of territoriality (as an underlying belief in a liberal-secular conception of human nature that purports that in every society people want and need a centralized state(s) authority in order to live happy, prosperous, and meaningful lives) persists through *a priori* assumptions of state-centrality, and the normalization of patriarchal hierarchies in society continues to be found in recent academic scholarship on Aceh, in reports and recommendations from non-governmental actors, and in governmental reports and policy statements (see Aspinall 2009; Avonius 2007; Blackburn 2004; Human Rights Watch 2010; Ichwan 2007, 2011; International Crisis Group 2006; Robinson 2009; Salim 2008). In other words, I am arguing that patriarchal state-centrism, as a hegemonic

discourse, remains influential in how scholars, activists, and government officials conceptualize women's agency in Aceh.

The impact of European colonial legacies in Aceh stretches beyond the historical-material imposition and subjection of Acehnese people; it extends into the academic study and classification of Acehnese culture, languages, and sacred sites through disciplinary knowledge formations and discourses that emerged alongside and in support of the legitimation of European empire building in the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries. Academic scholarship on Islam in Southeast Asia in general and Aceh more specifically was largely underdeveloped until the last few decades of the 20th century in terms of positioning Southeast Asia on the periphery of Islamic history, politics, and culture, and in terms of a tendency to generalize the historical, political, and cultural norms found in West Asia onto Muslim communities in Southeast Asia (Ernst and Martin 2010, pp. 2-8; Laffan 2011; Reid 1993; Roff 1985; Shamsul 2007). William Roff described this process in the early 1980s:

There seems to have been an extraordinary desire on the part of Western social science observers to diminish, conceptually, the place and role of the religion and culture of Islam, now and in the past, in Southeast Asian societies (Roff 1985, p. 7).

One prominent historian of the pre-modern period, Anthony Reid, suggests two possible explanations for this past marginalization of Southeast Asian Muslims within the study of Islam. The first possible explanation is that it could have occurred because of the slow growth of a large scale adoption of Islam in Southeast Asia before the 1500s. Reid describes the spread of Islam in Southeast Asia as possibly being, "too late to play a part in the shaping of either its doctrines or its civilization" (Reid 1993, p. 5-6). A second explanation, or potential contributing factor, is the great distance between the heart of the pre-modern Muslim world in the

Mediterranean, Central Asia, and North Africa and the Southeast Asian archipelago. Reid explains that Muslims in Southeast Asia were “‘below the winds’ of Indian Ocean trade” that meant that they were geographically disconnected from the historical and political developments in continental Islam (Reid 1993, pp. 5-6). The earliest records of direct trade between West Asia and Muslims in Aceh was in the 1530s in Aden and Jiddah and by the 1570s many of the Muslim rulers in the region sent scholars to study in Mecca (Reid 1993, pp. 6-7). This cultural exchange of Islamic thought was stifled with the rise of European powers in the region and became more disconnected. By the late 1800s, Southeast Asian Muslims were able to re-establish links with the development of Islamic thought in West Asia because of the increased trade through steam-powered ships, which drastically shortened the time it took to reach West Asia (Reid 1993, pp. 8-9). To demonstrate the scale of this increased exchange, Anthony Reid remarked that by the mid-1920s one third of all Muslims on *hajj* (pilgrimage) originated from Southeast Asia, with many of them coming from Aceh (1993, p. 9). Reid notes that, “it must be said that each generation of western observers appear to repeat the astonishment of its predecessors that Southeast Asians can be fully Muslims while capable of tolerance, openness” beyond the stereotypes and false dichotomization between Islam and all other religious traditions (Reid 1993, p. 10-11). While several scholars within Southeast Asian Studies have expanded their engagement with Islam since Reid’s comments were written in the early 1990s, scholarship that places Islam or religious traditions more generally at the center of analysis is more commonly found in Religious Studies.

The study of Islam and Muslim societies within Religious Studies had tumultuous beginnings when Religious Studies as an academic discipline began to emerge in North America

in the early 1960s (Ernst and Martin 2010, pp. 1-3). Originally classified under the 'History of Christianity,' it was not until 1986 that Religious Studies scholars formed 'The Study of Islam' as a separate section of the American Academy of Religion (Ernst and Martin 2010; Martin 2010, p. 897). The contemporary scholarship on Islam has its roots in Orientalism or Oriental Studies that has come to be closely associated with 19th and 20th century European/North American colonialism. Since the 1970s, scholars have begun shifting to a post-orientalist study of Islam or simply Islamic Studies as a sub-discipline within Religious Studies. A post-orientalist study of Islam is "a cluster of approaches that includes the study of foundational texts but that insists upon connecting them to the questions and debates of contemporary scholarship across disciplines and religions" such as Southeast Asia (Ernst and Martin 2010, p. 8). One of the reasons for this late emergence of a post-orientalist approach to Islamic Studies is, in part, the colonial legacies of the parallel development of academic and colonialist narratives of 'progress' and 'humanism' that presume the centrality of a secular-liberal state and the banality of patriarchal structures in society. Scholars have begun to deconstruct this link between colonialism and knowledge production starting from its foundations in Enlightenment rationality.

Enlightenment thought can be described as the mastery of nature by the human intellect such that *mana* (force of nature) is subjugated to the mind, myths are replaced by rationalized discourse, and what is unknown becomes subjugated to a technological rationality, 'a mathematical apparatus,' that categorized and codifies intelligibility (Horkheimer & Adorno 2002, pp. 15-17, 20). Enlightenment rationality offers a new kind of freedom to the individual by way of removing their consciousness from public gaze, through promises of civilizational and

moral progress, and through a release from fear of the unknown disguised as mythology. However, Enlightenment rationality also demands a new form of restraint on the individual's consciousness of what can be intelligible, "reduced to position and arrangement, history to fact, things to matter" such that the subject becomes an empty black box, subordinate to a universality of society (pp. 4, 16). As discussed previously in chapter two, Asad points toward how the colonial roots of a liberal-secular model of agency emerging from Enlightenment rationality are connected to the boundaries of how religiosity or religious agency of a colonized subject can be defined. Asad explains the relationship in the following passage:

Colonial administrations used definitions of religion to classify, control, and regulate the practices and identities of subjects. Today, liberal democracy is required to pronounce on the legal status of such definitions and thus to spell out civil immunities and obligations. When definitions of religion are produced, they endorse or reject certain uses of a vocabulary that have profound implications for the organization of social life and the possibilities of personal experience. For this very reason, academic expertise is often invoked in the process of arriving at legal decisions about religious matters. In all these legal functions, liberal democracy (whether at home or abroad in its colonies) not only works through secularity, it requires that *belief* be taken as the essence of religiosity (Asad 2012, pp. 39-40 emphasis original).

According to early critical theorists, Enlightenment rationality subsequently regresses, "into a new kind of barbarism" in a return to a mythology of 'social progress' from an anarchic primitivism to a civilized governance (Horkheimer & Adorno 2002, pp. xiv, xvii). The scientific method is applied as both a tool of liberation and of oppression, in that through its limitations it offers technological progress and innovation while it is regressive in bracketing out what is not reducible to categorization by separating out the individual pieces from their original social construct. For the social sciences and humanities, a clear example can be seen in the artificial demarcation of the modern from the pre-modern across core disciplinary curriculums. The implication here is that technological progress (read: urbanization) is presented as universally normative and measured by the authority (monopoly on violence) and legitimacy (populous

consent) encapsulated in modern states. In the neighboring region of South Asia, a growing number of scholars within the emerging field of Subaltern Studies have applied a similar critique to the preponderance of academicians trained in the Global North that conceive of subjectivity in South Asia through the lens of Enlightenment rationality as always judged in relation to Western European norms and values (see Bhattacharyya 2008; Chakrabarty 1989/2000, 2000/2008; Narayan 1997; Shohat 2006; Spivak 1988/1994, 1999).

For the purposes of this chapter, a postcolonial feminist approach to an anarchist history refers to the writing of history from a people's perspective that is not committed to state-centered modes of governance and one that recognizes the flaws in constructing linear narratives from points in the past that arch towards an ever-expanding future of civilizational progress. Scholars, such as Michel Foucault, criticized these trends towards positivist historiography for privileging the proverbial 'document' as the basis for constructing, transforming, and compiling "*monuments of the past*" into linear chains of controllable and recognizable 'memories' in the present as part of a "building up of coherent and homogenous *corpora*" of self-replicating grand narratives fixated on the state (Foucault 1972, p. 7, 10). Foucault is criticizing contemporary historians for only allowing for unities or grand narratives as sources of knowledge, and asks the reader to consider all possible forms, "of discontinuity, break, threshold, or limit" that are present outside of the document (p.31). In other words, an anarchist historiography requires the rejection of a state-centric worldview that assumes discourses of civilizational progress are normative and unproblematic. To illustrate this point I draw on a recent debate over how modern scholars interpret the reign of the four Sultanas

(Islamic queens) within the history of the Aceh Sultanate from 1641-1699 (Khan 2010; Siapno 2002; Reid 1988, 1992; Ricklefs 2008).

Modern historians until recently have interpreted the reign of the four Sultanas (Sultanah Tajul Alam Safiatuddin Syah, Sultanah Nur Alam Naqiatuddin Syah, Sultanah Inayat Zakiatuddin Syah, and Sultanah Kamalat Zainatuddin Syah) as a period of decline and indirect rule by the *orang kaya* (merchant oligarchs) in Aceh (Khan 2010; Reid 1988, 1992; Siapno 2002). In the *Cambridge History of Southeast Asia*, Anthony Reid frames the Aceh Sultanate in seventeenth century Southeast Asia as vacillating between “a clear trend towards state absolutism” epitomized by the reign of Iskandar Muda from 1607-1636 and Aceh leading towards one of “those pluralistic societies most congenial to competitive trade” during the reign of the four Sultanas (Reid 1992, pp. 486-87). In the following passage, Reid summarizes the economic and social legacies of the four Sultanas,

Iskandar Muda had kept the foreign threat at bay, but only by cowing his subjects and concentrating trade in his own hands. Consequently, after his death and that of his short-lived successor and son-in-law, the surviving *orang kaya* opted for a female ruler. Not once but four times in succession, between 1641 and 1699, this 'verandah of Mecca', as the sultanate liked to call itself, put a woman on the throne, as effective power passed progressively to an oligarchy of merchant-officials. Their regime was relatively benign, orderly and encouraging to commerce, but it lost the contest with the Dutch for the control of those former dependencies which produced the pepper and tin on which Acehnese prosperity had been based. In the long run, neither approach was able to prevent a gradual decline. (Reid 1992, p. 487)

In contrast to Reid’s position, a recent article by Khan argues that the four Sultanas employed a model of ‘collaborative rule’ that was advantageous for Aceh because it aided in avoiding conflicts and supported trade with European colonial powers (Khan 2010, pp. 7-21). Khan states that during the reign of the four Sultanas, “the devolution of power, an emphasis on a rule of law rather than military might, wariness of increasing powerful external enemies, and an economical use of state resources provided for a different form of government but not

necessarily a weaker one” (Khan 2010, pp. 7-8). Khan supports her assessment with a detailed analysis of firsthand accounts from Dutch and English merchants who visited the Aceh Sultanate during this period (Khan 2010, pp. 8-21). An earlier work by Jacqueline Siapno made a similar argument based on a feminist critique of how scholars translate Acehnese manuscripts and identifying a patriarchal bias in the secondary literature that naturalizes an association between female rule and societal decline (Siapno 2002, pp. 50-71; see Mernissi 1993 for a broader discussion of the link between female rule and societal decline).

The evidence presented by Khan and Siapno supports their conclusion that the four Sultanas were not under the control of the *orang kaya* and that 1641-1699 was not necessarily a period of decline for the Acehnese Sultanate. While Khan and Siapno do challenge patriarchal conceptions of governance and call for a more egalitarian approach to interpreting Aceh’s past, they do not directly confront the role of state-centrality. I argue that Khan and Siapno’s argument should be linked to the question of the extent to which the people living in Aceh benefit or not from centralized states. In other words, Reid’s earlier assessment is consistent with Khan and Siapno’s appraisal of the four Sultanas if Khan and Siapno’s analysis is framed within a non-patriarchal and non-state-centric approach to history and it is understood that Reid’s analysis in his earlier work is working from a patriarchal and state-centric conception of Aceh’s past.

In contrast to Reid’s analysis above, James Scott argues in his 2009 *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia* for the existence of a new conceptualization of territoriality, one that flips the prevailing model of state-centric history of civilizational progress on its head. In short, Scott is arguing that throughout history, states have

been the primary driving forces of destabilization and violence for the majority of people and non-state spaces or 'zones of refuge' have been created to escape the exploitation and violence associated with being a subject in a state. Scott writes,

The huge literature on state-making, contemporary and historic, pays virtually no attention to its obverse: the history of deliberate and reactive statelessness. This is a history of those who got away, and state-making cannot be understood apart from it. This also what makes this an anarchist history (Scott 2009, p. x).

To be clear, Scott is not suggesting that states never really existed or that they have not had a significant impact on shaping the course of events in world history. Rather, he is arguing that there is an equally important history of peoples who have deliberately engaged in state-unmaking and the creation of non-state spaces. Until the post-WWII era of technologically advanced modern states, people lived and interacted in both state and non-state spaces. In many cases, people would flee from state spaces to non-state spaces to avoid forced labor/enslavement, conscription in an army, paying taxes, or simply the violent conflict that surrounds resources valued by competing states. The main characteristic of non-state spaces is their inaccessibility by the state, which allows for a level of autonomy and self-governance that would be impossible in state space (Scott 2009, p. 31-32).

Non-state spaces and state spaces were never completely isolated from one another; however, trade as well as people often migrated between the two. Scott describes state spaces in terms of 'valley states' and non-state peoples as 'hill peoples' (Scott 2009, p. 28). According to Scott, the distinction between state and non-state spaces is not rigid or fixed:

valley states and hill peoples are, instead, constituted in each other's shadow, both reciprocal and contemporaneous ... Valley states, by the same token, have always been in touch with the nonstate periphery – what Deleuze and Guattari call 'the local mechanisms of bands, margins, minorities, which continue to affirm the rights of segmentary societies in opposition to the organs of state power' (Scott 2009, p. 28-29; Deleuze and Guattari 1987, p. 360 quoted above).

The relevance for the present study is that the modern historiography of Aceh has been written from the perspective of conquering European colonial empires as part of epistemic and ontological projects that have come to be understood in some scholarly circles as Orientalism. Edward Said writes of Orientalism as being a symbiotic relationship between a) a historical-material project of exploitation through domination and b) a social-psychological project of creating exaggerated and prejudicial narratives of a not well known exotic Other, which in its most basic form referred to peoples of non-Western European decent (Said 1978). One of the components of this academic discourse of orientalism is the fascination with the “trope of the ‘oppressed Muslim woman’ ... in order to justify colonial and neo-colonial incursions into Muslim societies ... Westerners attack Muslims by belittling the very notion that they could generate a feminism of their own” (Badran 2009, p. 1). This obsession with the ‘position of women’ in Islam is one that extends through the European colonial development of a modern history of Aceh.

Within Orientalism, an imaginary construct of Aceh and the people living in Aceh was fostered by scholars working for colonial administrations such as Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje to validate the supremacy of European norms and values, as well as to simultaneously undermine and invalidate the norms and values of people living in Aceh (Laffan 2011; Missbach 2010; Roff 1985, pp. 7-11; Hurgronje 1906). In a recent article, Antje Missbach provides a detailed account of how Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje studied Acehnese society in the 1890s by posing as a Muslim convert under the name Abd al-Ghaffar (Missbach 2010, pp. 49-59). Hurgronje’s insights into the political significance of winning over the loyalty of individual *uleebalang* (aristocracy) instead of focusing on the sultan had a significant impact on shortening

the war in favor of the Dutch. His two volume work *De Atjehers* (1893/4) and the later English translation, *The Atjehnese*, continue to be cited by scholars as an authoritative work on Acehnese history despite the blatant disdain Hurgronje expressed for the Acehnese and the acknowledgement within the academic community of several inaccuracies in his work (Missbach 2010, pp. 55-57; Hurgronje 1906). In the broader study of Islam in Indonesia, Hurgronje is credited as one of the most influential modern Indonesianists and with shaping how scholars today think of Islam in the region (Laffan 2011).

Within this Orientalist imaginary of Aceh, the state is presented as the only legitimate force for achieving progress towards enlightenment, which promises to save the people from themselves. External state powers appealed to Orientalist narratives of a perceived statelessness and inability to self-govern as the primary justification for invading and occupying Aceh over the past century and a half, beginning with the Dutch and followed by the Japanese and today by the state of Indonesia. For many Acehnese, the suggestion that the state represents an illegitimate authority based on the exploitation and wanton violence against the people of Aceh is one that still resonates today.

Scott refers to the term 'Zomia' to encapsulate a geographic zone that stretches from the mountainous parts of Southeast Asia through China and parts of Central Asia, which he describes as a disconnected territory inhabited by peoples whose primary commonality is their historical patterns of being ungovernable and disconnected from surrounding states (Scott 2009, pp. ix-xi). The territory of Aceh fits remarkably well into Scott's concept of Zomia if it is extended, as Scott suggests that it could be, to include parts of the Austronesian archipelago. Being located at the Eastern tip of Indonesia, Aceh is geographically remote and in critical ways

socially disconnected from the central government based in Java. Similar to the way Scott describes the peoples of Zomia, Acehnese have a long history of resilience towards being incorporated into a centralized state, especially as a European colony. The Acehnese language is distinct from nearby languages spoken on the islands of Sumatra and Java, as it is thought to be closer to the Chamic languages spoken on mainland Southeast Asia. The significance of thinking of Aceh as sharing characteristics with Scott's Zomia is that the presence of opposition to the Indonesian state should not be automatically regarded as an indication of the desire for the formation of a new Acehnese state or a radical redistribution of power within the existing Indonesian state. Rather, it could be interpreted as a challenge to the perceived inequality within a wider global capitalist framework of modern states. Scott's usage of Zomia represents an alternative vision of world history that allows for the possibility of a politics of 'deliberate statelessness' that I argue, as have others, develops out of a postcolonial approach to understanding and subverting the legacies of European colonialism (Fanon 1952/2008, 1961/1963; Roberts 2011). Scott's theoretical contribution to the present project of understanding the history of Aceh is in the amalgamation of anarchist and postcolonial critiques of European colonial legacies that form a 'non-state-centric' understanding of world history (Scott 2011, p. 59).

The postcolonial feminist perspective that I adopt expands the anarchist historical approach described above by suggesting a linkage between the legacies of colonial historical narratives and the patriarchal assumptions ingrained in state-centric models of liberal-secular citizenship. In other words, I argue that the legacies of European colonialism can still be found in the way Acehnese history is being produced and reproduced by scholars, activists, and

government officials with the same underlying narratives of civilizational progress, patriarchal state-centrism, and liberal-secular values of governance. In the next section, I approach the history of Aceh from the perspective of the legacies of two Indonesian folk heroines, one from Java and one from Aceh.

3.2 Indonesian folk heroines

On April 21st Kartini Day is celebrated by the state across Indonesia by retelling the life and aspirations of Raden Ajeng Kartini and by young girls lining up in beauty pageants in primary and secondary schools to see who has the best Kartini costume for that year. *Hari Kartini*, Kartini Day, celebrates her opposition to polygamy and arranged marriage and emphasizes her support for the education of young girls as a path to development and prosperity in Indonesia. In contrast, the legacy of Cut Nyak Dhien is not celebrated at any point during the year and remains a footnote to Indonesia's government sanctioned history. In this section, I argue that Cut Nyak Dhien's life and legacy provide an alternative to the indigenous legacy of Raden Ajeng Kartini who continues to be privileged by the Indonesian government and by scholars working on theorizing feminism across Indonesia.

Kartini was born on April 21st 1879 into an aristocratic family, or *priyayi*, in central Java in what was the Netherlands East Indies (NEI) (Blackburn 2004, pp. 18, 36-38). She was one of the first Javanese women to attend one of the Dutch primary schools and began corresponding in Dutch with prominent figures in the NEI as well as in the Netherlands. Her letters discussed the need for social reforms, including providing education for girls, the abolition of oppressive customs and traditions for women in *priyayi* families, women's suffrage, and the liberation of the Javanese from the Dutch. Parts of her letters were published after her death in 1904 and

became influential in the growing women's rights movement in Java as well as the emerging Indonesian nationalist movement. At the same time, the expansionist war in Aceh was a constant throughout Kartini's life and illustrates the other side of the brutal policies of the NEI during this period.

The controversy surrounding the memory of Kartini and her life is one that has not been fully resolved in academic circles. Kartini's legacy during the second half of the twentieth century can be distinguished between an 'Old Order' narrative of Kartini as the anti-colonialist revolutionary heroine during Sukarno's Guided Democracy era (1957-1965) and a 'New Order' narrative of Kartini as the dutiful Javanese wife and mother during Suharto's New Order era (1965/6-1998) (Rutherford 1993, pp. 25-40). The Old Order narrative is most compellingly depicted in Pramoedya Ananta Toer's *Panggil Aku Kartini Saja (Just Call me Kartini)*, which portrays Kartini's life as a constant struggle against overwhelming odds from Dutch colonial rule and repressive local traditions (Rutherford 1993, p. 24-26; Toer 1962). In contrast, Sitisoesmandari Soeroto's *Kartini, Sebuah Biografi (Kartini, a Biography)* exemplifies the New Order account of Kartini's life by emphasizing her patriotism in support of an independent Indonesian-nationalist state and her devotion to fulfilling her familial role as a mother (Rutherford 1993, p. 24-26; Soeroto 1977). When Suharto came to power in 1965, Pramoedya Ananta Toer was imprisoned, his books were banned, and his revolutionary account of Kartini was replaced by a docile nationalistic Kartini that embraced the Indonesian state. The current post-Suharto or Reformation era (1998-present) has seen little change from the New Order period in terms of how Kartini is represented and how *Hari Kartini* is celebrated.

In Kathryn Robinson's most recent book on women's movements and gender inequality in Indonesia, she is critical of how the memory of Kartini continues to be used by the Indonesian central government to promote a 'domesticated femininity' when it has the potential to promote a stronger liberal feminist subjectivity (Robinson 2009, pp. 36-40). Robinson laments over the public memory of Kartini as an underappreciated "Indonesian Mary Wollstonecraft," whose legacy was co-opted first by the NEI government and then by Sukarno's Guided Democracy and finally by Suharto's New Order (Robinson 2009, pp. 38-39).

Several other scholars writing about gender and the women's movement in Indonesia have echoed Robinson's assertion that Kartini should be the starting point for studying the women's movement in Indonesia (Blackburn 2004; van Doorn-Harder 2006). Each of these texts devote several pages describing Kartini's influence on Indonesian women and Indonesian society in general; while during this same period another prominent figure, Cut Nyak Dhien, is mentioned in one or two sentences in passing. In each of these volumes, there is great emphasis placed on distinguishing between the 'true' story of Kartini's life from how it has been used and manipulated since her death. However, it is still assumed by these scholars that feminism in what is now Indonesia emerged only in interaction with and under the tutelage of a broader European feminist movement. The possibility that an Indigenous feminism could emerge or already exists in an alternative form is never considered. Robinson and Blackburn have done an excellent job of reconstructing Kartini's life from an anti-sexist and anti-traditionalist perspective; however, they have done so without sufficiently addressing the question, why Kartini? Why demarcate the beginning of feminism across the Indonesian archipelago, or even the island of Java for that matter, at the point European feminist ideas

gained traction instead of with the cases of women's resistance to colonial exploitation that organically emerged within local traditions?

A second figure from the same period in history but living under very different circumstances is Cut Nyak Dhien (1848-1908). She was an active supporter of the Acehese resistance to the Dutch and took up arms against the Dutch after her first husband was killed in an early battle between the fledgling Acehese Sultanate and the Dutch NEI (Siapno 2002, pp. 25-26). Upon the death of her more famous second husband Teuku Umar in 1899, Cut Nyak Dhien began leading guerrilla attacks against Dutch forces until her poor health and diminishing numbers led to her capture on November 4th 1905. She was added to the list of the national heroes/heroines of Indonesia in 1964, but her legacy as a national heroine has remained largely marginalized during the thirty-years of civil war in Aceh beginning in the 1970s. Despite the official marginalization of her life story, Cut Nyak Dhien is widely known to Acehese people as part of a social memory of prolonged struggle against foreign occupation.

The life and legacy of Cut Nyak Dhien poses a challenge to scholars who conceive of feminism as necessarily: a) emerging from the Western European intellectual tradition, b) being nationalistic and supportive of a centralized government in the form of a modern liberal state, c) being the antithesis to indigenous religious beliefs and values, and d) being an advocate of universal beliefs and values consistent with a secular-liberal feminist subjectivity. While the life and writings of Raden Adjeng Kartini excel at each of these criteria, Cut Nyak Dhien fails on almost every account. It is no wonder that early 19th century social democrats in the Netherlands and contemporary feminists in the Global North today would find it easier to relate to Kartini than Cut Nyak Dhien. I argue that this has contributed to the persistence of an anti-

feminist sentiment in Aceh despite the presence of matrifocal traditions interwoven into local Islamic traditions. Anti-feminist sentiment refers to a general distrust of the intentions behind foreign aid workers or government officials referring to *feminisme* (feminism) as a European/North American construct that appears foreign to many of the participants I interviewed and a sentiment I observed when participating in public discussions held at universities and non-government organizations.

An additional insight into this phenomenon stems from the Indonesian state's long history of restricting and guiding social movements promoting *keadaan kewanitaan* ('feminism/womanism,' or literally translated as 'state femininity') as opposed to the more common usage since 1998 of the direct import from English of *feminisme*. Younger men and women in Aceh were more receptive to *feminisme* being a positive concept, while women I interviewed from older generations seemed more comfortable with the term *pemberdayaan perempuan/wanita* (feminine/women empowerment), *perempuan* being the more common term used today as a replacement for *wanita* as being associated with the pre-1998 government. Many women I interviewed expressed what could be interpreted as an anti-feminist sentiment or skepticism aimed primarily at NGOs and government sponsored programs attempting to impose what they see as a secular or anti-Islamic norms and values under the guise of economic development, pro-nationalist education, or democracy building projects. I argue that the legacy of Cut Nyak Dhien provides an alternative representation of an Indigenous feminism to Kartini's because she exemplifies a non-liberal (matrifocal), anti-colonialist, and non-state centric feminist values that remain relevant for many Acehnese today.

Just as Cut Nyak Dhien's legacy is largely incomprehensible to the dominant secular-liberal feminist discourse, it is also problematic from a religious perspective for those who have adopted a conservative-modernist understanding of Islam, such as the one expressed in the *qanuns syariah* described in more detail in the next section. The meaning of *syariah* (the path/way) in Aceh is hotly contested and changes depending upon the context of the conversation and whom you are asking. Based on interviews I conducted in Aceh, the usage of *syariah* in Aceh generally refers to one of three basic definitions: 1) an individual's ethical guide/personal belief for daily life separate from the state and public responsibilities, 2) a judicial set of legal codes based on Shafi'i *fiqh* (body of legal codes and commentaries) that cover all aspects of daily life and should be enforced through the state, or 3) a 'relational' and 'other-regarding' ethical guide for living within a community based on shared norms and values.²¹ An indigenous-localized understanding of agency is closely tied to the third definition of *syariah* list above.

While most people that I interviewed or observed in Aceh used *syariah* in one of the three ways described above, these definitions are not intended to be used as fixed categories. Several participants described *syariah* as an amalgamation of the three definitions. Their usage sometimes shifted as the conversation progressed. The first definition of *syariah* is closest to what I consider a secular-liberal understanding of religious traditions in society and is consistent

²¹ In this context, 'relational' refers to the idea that ethics is fundamentally about social interactions beyond the scope of any one individual and emphasizes the role of social actions. This is in contrast to approaching ethical dilemmas in search of universal and impartial moral axioms based on an individual's rationality, such as in utilitarian and deontological ethical theories. According to one strand of feminist philosophers and ethicists, one of the central problems with 20th century Moral Philosophy is its over-emphasis on the individual and its tendency to whitewash over differences in power relations and social inequalities (For a more complete discussion of this concept see Margaret Walker's (2007) *Moral understandings: a feminist study in ethics*, Carol Gilligan's (1982) *In a different voice*, or Michele Le Doeuff's (1998/2003) *The sex of knowing*).

with international Human Rights discourses and national secular laws in Indonesia. The second definition appeals to a similar rationality as the first but with a very different result in that *syariah* is being equated to Shafi'i *fiqh* as a universal and fixed set of laws in a similar way to the international Human Rights discourse. While there is still a great deal of debate in Indonesia and other parts of the world over how to interpret *fiqh* and its appropriate role within *syariah*, the second definition is premised on the idea that an authoritative body of jurisprudence is accessible and it is directly transferable to civil and criminal laws within a state. The third definition differs the most from the first two by shifting the locus of authority away from both the individual and the state; rather, *syariah* becomes something that exists within *masyarakat* (community) or a group of people that possesses a set of shared norms and values grounded in ethical teachings from Islam and *adat Aceh* (local customs). It is in this last usage of *syariah* that Cut Nyak Dhien's legacy acts as a catalyst for an indigenous-localized feminism in Aceh that is non-liberal (matrifocal), anti-colonialist, and non-state centric. In the next section, I provide an analysis of discourses surrounding the state's implementation of *syariah* in order to illustrate the differences between a community-based *syariah* that serves as a relational and other-regarding ethical guide from *syariah* as a judicial set of legal codes grounded in Shafi'i *fiqh* that are fixed within a state.

3.3 Representations of *Syariah*

The expansion of the scope and aims behind the implementation of *syariah* in Aceh remains a controversial issue for many Acehnese, the Indonesian government, and international commentators. The national call for the growth in the implementation of *syariah* in Aceh began in 1999 with the announcement from interim president Habibie, who proclaimed

that the province of Aceh would be granted the right to implement *syariah* for all Muslims residing within the province. The peculiarity of this statement lies in its various assumptions: 1) that the majority of people in Aceh wanted the government to expand the implementation of *syariah* through the predominantly secular state; 2) that there is a coherent and agreed upon body of laws called *syariah* that is ready and waiting to be applied anywhere in Indonesia; and 3) that the only way *syariah* can be applied is through the secular state of the Republic of Indonesia (RI). Whether the people of Aceh wanted to expand the state's implementation of *syariah* and whether *syariah* must be implemented through the central government are key questions to address when coming from a postcolonial feminist approach.

The most direct way to understand the reasoning behind the implementation of *syariah* in Aceh is first to analyze the content of the *qanun syariah* (provincial bylaws relating to *syariah*) from the local parliament (*Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat*, DRPA) in Aceh. In order to pave the way for *qanun syariah* in Aceh, national law no. 44/1999 granted special status to the province of Aceh and included increased autonomy for the province by allowing the "implementation of Islamic Shari'a for its adherents in social life" (Law no. 44/1999 quoted in Aspinall 2009, p. 209; Miller 2006, pp. 297-299). When pressed on how the government defines *syariah*, one officer explained *syariah* as "*tuntunan ajaran Islam dalam semua aspek kehidupan* – guidelines of Islamic teachings in all aspects of life" (Al-Yasa' Abubakar cited in International Crisis Group 2006, p. 4). A second national law no. 18/2001 solidified the operational mechanisms for implementing *syariah* by reopening the *Mahkamah Syariah* (Syariah Courts) at the district level in Aceh and leaving it up to the provincial parliament, DPRA, to decide how to interpret *qanun syariah* for Aceh. The first qanuns no. 10/2002 addressed a broad range of

topics including increasing the jurisdiction of *Mahkamah Syariah* and outlining the potential types of offenses (such as *hudud* – obligatory from the Qur'an, *qisas/diyat* – retribution/compensation for a death, and *ta'zīr* – left to the discretion of the court) (Salim 2008, p. 157; International Crisis Group 2006, p. 6). The next qanun no. 11/2002 dealt with aspects of everyday life including following an Islamic dress code²² (covering the knees to the navel for men and all of the body except the hands and face for women) through enforcing the practice of *'aqīda* (the right belief), *'ibāda* (the right way to worship), and *syiar Islam* (the right symbols of Islam) (Ichwan 2011, p. 199; Lindsey and Hooker 2007, p. 232). The Governor of Aceh announced the official beginning of *syariah* implementation on March 4th 2003 after the Supreme Court of Indonesia ruled in favor of allowing provinces and local districts to enforce customary laws, including *syariah* (Ichwan 2011, p. 199).

Within a few months, three additional *qanuns* were passed prohibiting the consumption of *khamar* (alcoholic beverages) in no. 12/2003, prohibiting *maysir* (gambling) in no. 12/2003, and prohibiting *khalwat* (illicit relationships between men and women) in no. 14/2003 (Salim 2008, p. 158). The following year, the *Wilayatul Hisbah* (Syariah Police, WH)²³ were established and by 2005, *Wilayatul Hisbah* officers began enforcing the implementation of *syariah* across parts of Aceh. On December 26th 2004, a devastating tsunami hit the coastal regions of Aceh and killed an estimated 167,000 people in Aceh, or about 4% of the population (Hyndman 2011, p. 107). The immediate impact on the implementation of *syariah* and on negotiations for a

²² In practice, the implementation of regulating women's dress had already begun sporadically across Aceh since 1999 through a mixture of what many Acehnese claim to be state sponsored vigilantism (Siapno 2002, pp. 36-39).

²³ The translation of *wilayatul hisbah* as 'syariah police' is based on its usage in the Indonesian language and the common reference to its interchangeable usage with *polisi syariah*, which is the literal translation of 'syariah police.' Its usage is a departure from the original Arabic meaning of 'provincial/governance in accordance with Islam.'

permanent peace accord was enormous (Salim 2008, pp. 163-67). By the spring of the following year, *syariah* courts across Aceh began handing out sentences for violations of *syariah* including *maysir* (gambling), *khalwat* (illicit relationships between men and women), and the consumption of *khamar* (alcoholic beverages). Peace negotiations began making substantial progress in 2004 and on August 15th 2005 a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU-Helsinki) was signed in Finland drawing 30 years of conflict to a close (Graf 2010, pp. 287-97).

National law no. 11/2006 on the governance of Aceh (LoGA) intended to ratify the main provisions of the MoU-Helsinki agreement and in part, LoGA reinforced the province's autonomy from the central government regarding how *syariah* should be implemented in Aceh (Aspinall 2009, p. 237). In 2009, the outgoing parliament passed a controversial *qanun jinayat* (criminal legal procedures) two weeks before the session ended out of fear the new *qanun* would not pass in the new parliament (Ichwan 2011, pp. 210-12). The *qanun jinayat* included detailed sentencing recommendations including fines, public caning, lashes, and *rajam* (stoning) based on an expanded and more comprehensive list of *syariah* violations. These violations include *liwāt* (illicit sexual relationships among men), *musāhaqa* (illicit sexual relationships among women), *zinā* (illicit sexual relationships between men and women), and *qadhf* (wrongful accusations of adultery) in addition to the offenses already mentioned in previous *qanuns* (Ichwan 2011, p. 210). Public outcry grew both for and against the *qanun jinayat* with local NGOs calling for Jakarta to intervene and Islamic political parties praising the legislation as a positive step towards an Islamic government. Public support began to wane after a well-publicized scandal in which three *Wilayatul Hisbah* officers were accused of raping a young woman in a *Wilayatul Hisbah* office. The debate came to a head with the Governor of Aceh

Irwandi Yusuf refusing to sign-off on the *qanun jinayat*, effectively killing the legislation (Ichwan 2011, pp. 211-14).

The development of the recent expansion of *syariah* in Aceh through *qanuns* is an example of how patriarchal state-centrism can work to shape the social and political landscape in which women's agency is constructed and deconstructed in Aceh. There are three primary aspects of the formation of *syariah* through *qanuns* that aid in supporting one of the main arguments of this chapter. The first point stems from observations by scholars and from the Acehnese women I interviewed that prior to 1999 women's bodies did not hold the same significance in Aceh as they have since 1999. Since the expansion of the implementation of *syariah*, women's bodies in Aceh appear to represent a common site for the demarcation between what is Islamic from what is non-Islamic or as a marker of those who are observant of *syariah* from those who are not. *Wilayatul Hisbah* officers appear to be emphasizing the prevention of *khalwat* and *zinā* as well as the targeting of women's clothing (see Chapter Five for an extended discussion). While this is not new in predominantly Muslim societies that are attempting to implement *syariah*, it does appear to represent a shift in how Islam is being practiced and interpreted in Aceh. Leila Ahmed describes a similar phenomenon in her analysis of colonialism in Egypt during the 19th and 20th centuries, where women's bodies and dress became a focal point of the colonization of Egyptian culture and the Islamic backlash that continues into the present (Ahmed 1992, chapters 7-8). In the following passage, one woman in her late 40s describes how life was different in Aceh before 1999 and the backlash she received when she told her story to a local reporter:

My mom went to the river washing clothes and I went with her and I'm (*apa ya*, what's that) swimming in the river, I saw so many women -- they didn't wear [long skirts and loose fitting

long-sleeve shirts] clothes, just sarongs. And, then because it's wet - it really shows women's bodies and so many men [were] very close to the river taking care of tobacco. When she [her mother] wanted to go to the river with clothes and she just wears sarong, no one complained. But, I saw in my village and other villages [that they] are what I think are very good Muslims. They help each other. They support others who are poor. They pray, they fast, they went to Haj. So, yeah so I talk about that, and so many people [got] angry with me. I just shared my experience. But because what I say is like I [am] against Syariah Islam, people say I am against [syariah]. I said "I [am] never against sharia Islam; I [am] against people who [are] implementing Sharia Islam just with what they think is the correct one. (090116_000 2009, pp. 30-31)

In the passage above, an Acehnese woman describes how the discourse over syariah in Aceh has changed since she was a child and the increasing importance of women's dress in syariah discourses. Earlier that year, she was heavily criticized in the media when part of her story that she e-mailed to a friend was published on a blog. However, I found several women that I interviewed who relayed similar accounts that prior to the late 1990s it was not considered un-Islamic if a woman did not wear a *jilbab* and long loose fitting clothes. One participant recounted that in fact the traditional Acehnese dress for women is short loose fitting trousers called *luweu tham asee* (dog-chasing pants) in Acehense and it goes against Acehense customs to import Arab style dress (100624_000 2010; see Siapno 2002, p. 152 for a discussion of the term). Even the traditional wedding outfit for a woman in Aceh was altered, a long skirt replaced women's pants and a *jilbab* became required attire underneath the traditional headdress made from strands of jasmine for wedding ceremonies in the Baiturrahman Mosque in Banda Aceh. Based on my observations and interviews with women in Aceh, the public discourse over the implementation of *syariah* in Aceh has shifted from a heterogeneity of perspectives grounded in the diverse religious practices of particular local communities to one that is dominated by a homogenous and fixed understanding of *syariah* emanating from the state that appears to be fixating on women's bodies as the primary signifier of the presence or absence of *syariah* in communities across Aceh.

The second observation is that from a postcolonial feminist perspective, the discourse surrounding syariah through the vehicle of *qanuns* is being conceived, presented, and enforced from the perspective of a state. While scholars researching syariah in Aceh such as Arskal Salim, Moch Nur Ichwan, and Edward Aspinall have written extensively on the interplay between factions within the *ulama* in Aceh, local NGOs, provincial politicians, and politicians back in Jakarta, their analyses do not take into consideration a non-patriarchal non-state-centric perspective (Aspinall 2009; Ichwan 2007, 2009; Salim 2004, 2008). The state remains sacrosanct for each of these scholars whether sympathetic to the idea of an independent Aceh or to maintaining a unitary Indonesia and regardless of whether they are sympathetic to the implementation of syariah, in the case of Ichwan and Salim, or ultimately critical of it, as with Aspinall. Syariah remains fixed within a state. It is one of the aims of this chapter to dislodge this artifice in order to be able to adequately grasp the intersectional nature of women's agency in the remaining chapters of this dissertation. By presuming the supremacy of the state, community-based and other collaborative manifestations of syariah are being left out of the equation. The next chapter will take on this challenge by analyzing alternative non-patriarchal and non-state-centric modes of political agency.

The final observation is that syariah as presented through *qanuns* presumes a secular-legalistic framework of syariah that is fundamentally counter to a postcolonial feminist understanding of syariah in Aceh. I have found a recent article on 'morality and Islam in post-conflict Aceh,' by Leena Avonius, to be useful in explaining this point, insofar as it expounds on how a postcolonial feminist approach adds to our understanding of syariah in Aceh (Avonius 2007). In this article, the author criticizes the current implementation of syariah in Aceh as a

form of 'legal moralism' and advocates for rethinking syariah in terms of 'civility' (Avonius 2007, pp. 75-89). She argues for increased participation by human rights NGOs in the political process, the acceptance of appeals to *ijtihad* (human reasoning) by more liberal *ulama*, the acceptance of civility as "tolerance of others and their ways," and the de-politicization of syariah as an individual's personal code (pp. 84, 82-86).

While I agree with Avonius' critique of the implementation of syariah for being constructed in a secular-legalistic and state-centered framework, I disagree with her conclusions on several grounds. The first is the presumption that the secular-liberal orientation of human rights NGOs in Aceh are unproblematic and not biased against the implementation of syariah in any form (see chapter five for a more detailed explanation). The second disagreement I have is with the presumption that it is advisable for liberal *ulama* to use concepts such as *ijtihad* as a way to disenfranchise the more conservative *ulama* in Aceh and replace the current body of *qanuns* with a secular-liberal alternative based on civility. From a postcolonial feminist perspective, Avonius' suggestion to reformulate syariah in terms of civility and tolerance is essentially advocating for the continuation of an earlier Dutch colonial project of expelling Islam (including syariah) from all forms of public life and reducing Islam to an individual's choice. Avonius was correct in identifying the *qanuns syariah* as unnecessarily legalistic and state-centric. However, she prematurely dismissed the possibility of an alternative formation of syariah present in Aceh that is both political, yet not state-centric, and public, yet not patriarchal, within smaller communities across Aceh.

3.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I argued for adopting an indigenous-localized understanding of agency for women in Aceh that is both egalitarian and communally-centered in nature in order to overcome the legacies of a hegemonic discourse of patriarchal state-centrism that continues to inform how the history of Aceh is conceptualized. Historians and other scholars specializing in Southeast Asia have typically divided Aceh's history along the lines of increasing and decreasing levels of urbanization, territorial expansion, and centralization in political power (see Aspinall 2009; Graf et al 2010; Reid 2005, 2010; Salim 2008). This creates the illusion that the history of Aceh is naturally progressing towards the formation of a modern state and that a modern state is preferable to other forms of governance. Section one introduced patriarchal state-centrality within the historiography of Aceh and argued for adopting a postcolonial feminist approach to Aceh's history as a necessary step towards the larger project of developing an egalitarian and non-state-centric conception of women's agency in Aceh.

The second and third sections presented cases from the history of Aceh that show how the state constructs and deconstructs women's agency in the historiography of Aceh, using as a case study of the lives of Raden Adjeng Kartini and Cut Nyak Dhein. Section three considered a second case of how historical narratives have been used to justify the state implementation of *syariah* and the competing discourses that surround *syariah* in Aceh. In each case, I argued that a postcolonial feminist approach aids in the development of an account of agency in the history of Aceh. Both cases aid in illuminating the colonial, patriarchal, and state-centric legacies that continue to be influential in understanding Acehnese history. The aim of this chapter was to introduce the reader to the history of Aceh from a postcolonial feminist perspective and

provide a historical grounding for developing a localized-indigenous approach to Muslim feminism(s) in Aceh. In the next chapter, I consider women's political engagement in Aceh by analyzing interviews with Acehnese women who are actively participating and inhabiting informal/communal political spaces as part of their lived-experience of daily life in Aceh.

4. Rethinking Politics in Aceh

One of the central questions of this dissertation is to ask what it means for women to be politically engaged in Aceh. Several events occurring during the last decade have sparked discussions in academic circles and in the international media over the level of women's participation in predominantly Muslim societies such as in Aceh, Indonesia. These events include the devastation caused along Aceh's coasts by the tsunami on December 26th 2004, the end of three decades of conflict between separatist movements (primarily *GAM*, Free Aceh Movement) and the central government in 2005, and the increased expansion of the implementation of syariah law in Aceh by the state since 2004. The aim of this chapter is to develop a localized-indigenous understanding of political engagement that is explicitly non-patriarchal and non-state-centric based on interviews I conducted in January 2009 and May to August of 2010 in regencies across the East and West coast of Aceh.

The first section introduces the political process in Indonesia with an emphasis placed on provincial politics in Aceh and the role of women within formal politics. My initial research on women candidates in the run up to the 2009 provincial elections resulted in unanticipated findings that shifted my research focus from formal political parties and institutions in Aceh to informal or communal forms of political engagement that are non-patriarchal and non-state-centric. Sections two and three consider the cases of two women²⁴ who are engaged in politics within the community and are able to fulfill a significant function within the community that is

²⁴ These two participants were selected based primarily on the availability of relevant data collected during the interview and that I was able to gain extended access to both participants that resulted in richer data collection from both participants. I conducted two separate interviews with one of the participants over a two-day period and spent an entire day with the other participant while traveling in rural Aceh. I believe these interviews are generally representative of the other interviews that I conducted in Aceh. However, some participants in this study were only available to be interviewed for very short periods of time (as short as 10-15 minutes). It is difficult to draw many insights or conclusions for comparison from such short interviews.

not formally recognized by the state. The first case centers on the experiences of a woman, Participant 1, from *Pidie Jaya* (Greater Pidie) who became an influential figure in her village by working her way through school and becoming an advocate in her village for encouraging other women to do the same. The second focuses on a woman, Participant 2, in the mountainous region of *Aceh Jaya* (Greater Aceh) who has become an informal arbitrator and advocate for women in her community. In one instance, she was able to keep a man from her village from being falsely convicted of forging a deed to his land that he was unable to read and advocating on his behalf with the police and the courts. Participant 2's case demonstrates the influence that *adat* (local customs) and Islam have on informal politics by illustrating how the two overlap within the community. The '*Meunasah*' (a small mosque that does not hold Friday services) in the village is used by Participant 2 as a space for a women's support group to meet and collaborate on dealing with problems they face in the community (100701_001 2010, p. 13). These problems include handling abuses by the *TNI* (Indonesian Armed Forces) during the conflict, overcoming financial difficulties by making and selling homeopathic medicines or by pooling resources, and handling cases of domestic violence (100701_001 2010, p. 13). On two occasions, she described how she worked with two women to resolve cases of domestic violence and with one of them to cope with the social stigma of a woman getting a divorce. The differences among these cases illustrate how women's political agency often extends beyond a formal engagement with the state to encompass a myriad of informal tactics for achieving their goals within the community grounded in communal relationships, shared interests, and a common religious identity.

4.1 Beyond a Patriarchal State-Centric Model of Politics

In chapters two and three, I argued against the adoption of a secular-liberal construction of Acehnese women's agency on the grounds that secular-liberal models of agency privilege particular types of political engagement that have the effect of a 'hegemonic voice-over' of alternative formations of agency. A secular-liberal model of agency refers to a hegemonic conception of human nature that has come to dominate how many scholars and activists approach women's agency in predominantly Muslim societies. In the second chapter, I provided a detailed explanation of what a secular-liberal model of agency is and why I argue against adopting it in the present research project. In summary, my objections range from the rejection of the romanticization of agency as resistance and the fetishization of resistance as power, to a critique of subscribing to a universal notion of normative freedom of a disembodied model of agency, and of an artificial split between the political and the moral dimensions of agency. Hallmarks of a secular-liberal model of agency are the privileging of procedural over substantive rationality, hyper-individualism, privileging intentionality over actions, and disconnecting ethics from politics.

The recent scholarship of Jacqueline Siapno and Saba Mahmood illustrate this point through their analyses of the women's mosque movement in Egypt during the 1990s and women's participation in the Free Aceh Movement (GAM) in Aceh during the late 1990s and early 2000s (Mahmood 2005; Siapno 2002). In each case, they conclude that agency is far more nuanced than originally thought and that it does not always manifest itself as a secular-liberal subjectivity. While Siapno appealed to the concept of *muslihat*, Mahmood relied on concepts such as *Ṣabr* and *al-ḥayā'* to capture women's agency as it emerged organically from the

localized norms and values of that particular moment in time and place. It is at this point that I pick up where Siapno and Mahmood left off in order to extend their groundbreaking work into a postcolonial feminist conception of agency, using the present case of women's political engagement in post-conflict Aceh.

I arrived in Banda Aceh for the first time in January of 2009 with the goal of finding out why there were so few women candidates running for office as members of one of the newly formed local political parties in Aceh. I had previously travelled across other parts of Sumatra and Java, but I was always discouraged from visiting Aceh until after the conflict ended in 2005. In 2002, I lived briefly in the capital city Medan of the province *Sumatera Utara* (North Sumatra) that borders Aceh. One of the stipulations of the 2005 peace agreement, which became part of the 2006 law governing Aceh, called for the people of Aceh to be able to form local political parties that would field candidates in elections for the provincial parliament (*Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat Aceh, DPRA*) and other provincial-level political offices up to the level of the governor.

The April 2009 elections were slated to be the first provincial elections in which the newly formed local political parties were allowed to field candidates for the DPR Aceh (Hillman 2009, p. 33). The formation of local parties was considered a success, with five local parties meeting the requirements to field candidates in the April 2009 elections. However, there was one problem that each of these parties was unable to overcome: fulfilling the national electoral requirement that at least 30% of every party's candidates are women. The previous year a new election law was passed in Indonesia (10/2008) that requires political parties to field a minimum quota of 30% women candidates for all levels of political office (ANFREL 2009, p. 11).

While 10/2008 received significant media attention and the election commission (*Komisi Pemilihan Umum*, KPU) published a list of which parties complied with the law, the law does not specify any consequences for failing to meet the quota. All of the 44 national political parties were able to meet this criterion, yet none of the local parties in Aceh were even close to meeting this requirement.

The spring of 2009 was an exciting time to be in Aceh and people's aspirations for truly democratic representation were palpable in the air. On the day of my arrival, there were peaceful protests in the street against the Israeli incursion in Lebanon and men and women were equally involved in the protest. In Banda Aceh, I interviewed the heads of two of the political parties and candidates or officials from four of the five local parties. One of the questions that I asked both party officials and woman candidates was 'why are there so few women running under local parties when Acehnese women are commonly thought to hold a higher status in Acehnese society than their counter parts in other parts of Indonesia?' It seemed unusual to me that there were not more women taking an active role in the formal political process since women in Aceh are famous for fighting the Dutch in the late 19th century, for fighting the Indonesian government during the separatist conflict, and for having a high status according to local customs and traditions in parts of Aceh.

The response I received from party officials, candidates, and NGO workers was women in Aceh are, in Indonesian, *masih belum cukup kapasitas* ('lacking the capacity,' or 'still not enough capacity') or that women need to *meningkatkan kapasitas mereka sendiri* (increase/enhance their personal capacity) to effectively run for political office (090117_000 2009, pp. 4-5, 7). Participants described this problem of women 'lacking capacity' as unique to

women's circumstances in Aceh, as something that is not a problem for men running for political office. I was informed by party officials and by the candidates that each of the local parties tried enthusiastically to recruit women candidates but found it difficult to attract women who were both qualified and interested in running for office. The phrase that I heard repeated again and again in Indonesian was *tidak cukup kapasitas* ('lacking capacity,' or 'not enough capacity'), even from women candidates. It became clear to me that a pattern was emerging from the interviews that there was a public narrative circulating in Aceh that women were unqualified, unwilling, or somehow lacking in the right skills required to run for office.

I interviewed two women who were identified by a local NGO as highly influential and well-educated Acehnese women and that had a reasonable chance of winning support from the Acehnese public if they decided to run for office. When I asked each of them why they are not running for office or if they might run in the future, the responses were the same. They both politely explained that it was not the right time for them to run; they were both already actively working in advocacy roles through local NGOs, and they felt they would be more effective outside of formal political institutions in Aceh. Neither of them mentioned the phrase 'lacking capacity' to explain why there were so few women candidates. Instead, they described a potential lack of adequate financial resources for many women, a high level of corruption and androcentrism within both the political parties and the formal political institutions, and a general mistrust of women in positions of authority by the Acehnese public. While I found these answers compelling, I was left asking myself: then just exactly how are women engaging in politics in Aceh or in what ways are they engaging outside of the state's political institutions? Worded differently my question became: what does political agency mean for women in Aceh?

The data collected from the initial seven interviews in early 2009 supported a shift in my research focus from examining women's engagement within formal politics to informal politics. Feminist scholarship on the question of the coalescence of gender and power provides a possible explanation for the lack of Acehnese women's engagement in formal politics. In a recent article considering women's political engagement in Aceh, Kristina Grossmann concludes that "Acehnese women activists still exert little power in the political realm, as women were mostly excluded in the official peace negotiations and the following political reconfiguration of Aceh" (Grossmann 2012, p. 98). Grossmann argues for increased international support for promoting structural change in the Acehnese government to become more gender inclusive and identifies state political institutions as the primary vehicle for instituting political change (Grossman 2012, pp. 98-99).

In contrast to Grossmann's emphasis on formal politics, Susan Rogers argues that historically women are not deficient or lacking in their engagement with politics; rather, what counts as political has traditionally been limited by "a definition of the political system which focuses on the structural features of the authority system, rather than on the nature of the political act ... in most societies, males evidently tend to monopolize positions of authority" (Rogers 1975, p. 728). However in what Rogers identifies as peasant societies, male dominance in formal politics acts as a 'myth' or grand-narrative in order to reinforce the "non-hierarchical power relationships between the categories of 'male' and 'female'" (Rogers 1975, p. 729). While this still could be evaluated negatively by women in Aceh as an instance of patriarchal norms within a society, it also has the potential to be perceived positively from the perspective of women currently living in the society.

In a recent work on theorizing women's political participation, Martha Ackelsberg argues for re-conceptualizing politics to include 'collective behavior' outside of a state-centered political arena and the recognition that political "practices are neither *simply* emancipatory nor simply oppressive" (Ackelsberg 2010, pp. 131, 134, 131-144 emphasis original). She argues for reimagining the socio-spatial sites in which women engage in politics and draws on feminist 'communalist anarchist' scholarship to illustrate the need for, what I identify as, a non-state-centric and non-patriarchal approach to political engagement (Ackelsberg 2010, pp. 65-68, 98-100, 102-114). For the purposes of this chapter, politics refers to a collective process of engaging in and inhabiting a shared vision of a community, in which political power in terms of authority and legitimacy are vertically integrated across a community rather than hierarchically staggered within a central state. Political engagement is expanded to include what is commonly thought of as informal politics of the community, including kinship networks, as the central basis for a shared identity as opposed to a modern state. In other words, I interpret Rogers and Ackelsberg to be arguing that it is possible that women are just as engaged in politics as men but they may do so in more community-based, relational-based, and often indirect ways.

To introduce what this might look like, I am going to use an example of an event in Aceh in which I was a participant observer and witnessed what I believe to be an instance of this type of agency in practice. I was invited to attend a one-day conference for a newly formed philanthropic organization of Acehnese students who have studied abroad and want to use their skills and knowledge to improve Aceh. There were over a hundred attendees who had graduated from universities in Europe, West Asia, East Asia, South Asia, North America, and Australia. I was the only non-Acehnese visible in attendance. So I sat with the group of

Acehnese students who had studied in the US and tried to keep a low profile. Part of the proceedings was for each geographic region represented to nominate a representative to be on the main organizing committee going forward. Although at least half of the attendees were women and I personally knew several of them were familiar with the feminist movement in the US, not a single woman was selected from the dozen or so geographic subgroups. I did not say anything at the time and waited until I was in my friend's car on the way home to ask about this seemingly un-egalitarian outcome at the conference.

Both my friend and his wife recently completed graduate degrees in the US and I would characterize them as being well-informed in terms of their awareness of theories of gender inequality in society. When I asked them about what had happened, my friend responded that he had not noticed the overt gender segregation at all and agreed it was very strange that there was not a single woman on the committee.²⁵ His wife explained to both of us that of course there were not any women on the committee because they have better things to do than sit around and gossip all day on a committee that does not really make decisions anyway. She explained that when the time comes for decisions to be made, women will have their say because most of the important decisions are made during informal social gatherings in a space women control rather than formal committee meetings. She added that the all-male committee only thinks that they have the power to guide the organization. In reality, women will make many of the decisions but they are smart enough to know not to join the committee. My friend started laughing and agreed with her explanation of what happened at the conference.

²⁵ Unfortunately, I did not formally interview my friend and his wife about this experience and I am relying on my field notes of observations from that day.

This story provides an illustration of how formal positions of authority that are often framed within hierarchical and state-centric systems of power can be deceptively ineffective and disconnected from the actual workings of power in a community.²⁶ At the same time, I am not arguing that formal positions of authority have zero significance or that there is not a negative aspect to having a committee of only men. It is worth considering for a moment whether similar non-egalitarian outcomes occurring in the US or in Europe would also go largely unnoticed. If this is the case then it raises the question as to what extent my initial assumptions of inequality based on my limitations, as an outsider in the community, at interpreting social cues and stemming from a potential predisposition to associate gender inequality with societies other than my own were accurate. To this end, the outward appearance of gender inequality should not be assumed to be the dominant mode of social-exchange before looking deeper into how participants within the group comprehend and respond to the situation.

The results of the April 2009 provincial elections in Aceh were dismal for women. There were very low numbers of women candidates compared to other provinces in Indonesia and very few of those who did run were successful. The Aceh Party was the only local political party to meet the minimum threshold to continue running in future elections with 33 out of the 69 seats in the *DPRA* (Hillman 2009, p. 34). Not a single woman was elected to the provincial

²⁶ It is important to note that this example of informal/communal political engagement is far more complex than a straightforward dichotomy between indigenous/non-indigenous, state-centric/non-state-centric, and female rule/male rule. As it will become clear in the next few pages, formal positions of authority at the sub-district/village level at times overlap with the informal networks within a community. A person holding a formal position of authority does not necessarily mean that they are engaging in politics from a purely state-centric perspective. At the same time, persons in informal positions of authority may very well at times engage in politics from a state-centric perspective. The significance here is that it is beneficial to consider the presence of both approaches to political engagement and to keep the possibility open that the outward appearance of gender inequality may not be the dominant mode of social exchange.

parliament (*DPRA*) from one of the newly formed local parties. The local parties were created with the intent of providing representation that is more effective for the people of Aceh. While it is important for women to be able to participate in all levels of formal and informal politics, the reality of the situation in Aceh in 2009-2010 is that Acehnese women in positions of authority were primarily at the regent, district, and municipal levels.

One older woman who I interviewed explained that she wanted to run for *Bupati* (Regent) and was turned down from her political party, the Aceh Party. The explanation that she was given was that it was because she is a woman and the party was not willing to support her candidacy. She disagreed with their decision and explained that she will continue to work towards eventually running for *Bupati*. Despite this experience, she remains an active member and supporter of the Aceh Party and believes the party will eventually support her candidacy. Her story is important in illustrating that political engagement for women in Aceh is not simply a clear shift from formal to informal politics, but that women face challenges from multiple directions and not all Acehnese women can be lumped into a single category.

It is also the case that obstacles can emerge from otherwise supportive elements within the community and support can come from otherwise hostile elements in society. In the example above, she found resistance from within her community and was looking for assistance from NGOs and government sponsored programs that help women prepare for candidacy. In contrast to the hostile environment of formal politics for women in Aceh, at the informal or communal level, I found several examples of women who were actively engaged in politics in non-patriarchal and non-state-centric ways. The remainder of this chapter focuses on two cases

in which women are engaged in informal politics in Aceh in order to demonstrate the reality of alternatives to a liberal-secular formation of agency.

In order to understand the context of the two cases, it is necessary to briefly review the formal and informal social structures present in communities in Aceh.²⁷ In Aceh, there is a central provincial government located in the provincial capital of Banda Aceh. There are currently 18 regencies (*Kabupaten*) and 5 cities (*Kota*) within the province. However, the provincial government, the individual regencies, and the individual cities are largely integrated horizontally under the central government in Jakarta. A series of reforms in the early 2000s introduced some vertical integration of the provincial and local governments as part of a gradual transition to increased provincial autonomy in the republic. Each city in Aceh is administered by a mayor (*Walikota*) and each regency is administered by a regent (*Bupati*). Each city or regency is divided into districts (*Kecamatan*) and each district is further divided into villages/sub-districts (in Indonesian *Desa* refers to a rural village / *Kelurahan* refers to an urban sub-district; in Acehnese *Gampong* refers to a village) or a small groups of villages (*Mukim*). The Head of the District is the *Camat*. The *Camat* is responsible for maintaining and keeping track of the official records for the district. The head of the sub-district is the *Kepala Kelurahan* and the head of the village is the *Kapala Desa* in Indonesian or *Geuchik* in Acehnese. The sub-district heads and village heads are the lowest level of the Indonesian government that can receive a salary from the government.

Beneath the *Camat* is the head of the neighborhood (*Rukun Tetangga*) commonly referred to as the RT. The *Rukun Tetangga* is not paid and is usually elected by the

²⁷ The research questions in this study did not directly cover formal and informal social structures in Acehnese communities. Therefore, only a brief outline is provided for reference purposes (see Appendix 1).

neighborhood for life. The RT is the person with whom you are required to do a check-in when you move to a new neighborhood and the person who maintains records of everyone's national identity cards (*Kartu Tanda Penduduk*). The person who oversees several neighborhoods in a district is the *Rukun Warga* or commonly referred to as the RW. The RW is also an unpaid position and is elected by the RTs from the surrounding neighborhoods. The RT and RW are important figures in the community and are responsible for organizing the basic security of the area. They are usually older men who are widely respected in the community and are generally knowledgeable in the local *adat* (customs or traditions). However, there are cases of a woman being the RT/RW or at times the wife of the RT/RW has taken over the duties of the RT/RW for the community.²⁸

Based on my observations and data collected from interviews in Aceh, the formal political structures at the district level and lower do at times overlap with the informal structures of political power in the form of village elders who are knowledgeable in *adat* and Islam, and who are the primary individuals consulted when a problems arises in the community. However, this did not appear to be the case in many poorer rural villages. Many of the social services provided by the government in more affluent urban areas did not extend into the rural areas. I found that women in rural areas often described their primary interaction with the state in terms of interactions with the national police (*Kepolisian Negara Republik Indonesia*), the non-organic military forces (*TNI*), and increasingly the syariah police (*Wilayatul Hisbah*). The following two cases provide an illustration of how many of the formal social structures have

²⁸ I spoke to the wife of one RT who performed all of the functions of the RT but without the official recognition from the state.

become disconnected from the daily lives of women in rural communities and the basis for an alternative to a liberal-secular formulation of Muslim women's agency in Aceh.

4.2 Case One: Informal Politics alongside the State

In the summer of 2010, I travelled to a small rural village (*gampung*) in Pidie along the East Coast of Aceh to interview a woman, we will call her Participant 1, who is well respected within the community. I was slightly taken aback when I began the interview with several demographic questions. When I asked her age, her response was "Roughly, I am about his age [pointing at someone nearby], I think he's two years older than I am" (100701_007 2010, p. 1). After some discussion, she determined that she was probably born in 1963. She described how when she was a child in this village, the usual practice was for girls to be married immediately after finishing elementary school or around the age of 12. However, in her case she described her family situation in Acehnese as "*payah tablo ile*" or 'I need to buy them' meaning that she is still single and has not been married (100701_007 2010, p. 1). She also managed to complete both junior high school and high school and eventually go on to university to complete her undergraduate degree. This was an impressive achievement given that the other five women I interviewed from her village had only graduated from elementary or junior high school before getting married. When I asked her how this was possible for her to continue her secondary education when all of the other girls were unable to do, she said:

First, I organized myself. After I managed to organize myself, I then befriended those having higher education, especially highly educated men ... I was asked to get married as soon as I graduated from my elementary school but I refused such a proposal ... My family did not support me. All I had was my internal motivation ... I tried to make my parents understand or make them aware. Even though I was a child to them, I had to have a strategy and made them understand ... We [young girls like her] had to fight against such an act of duping and it was also a kind of violence that we had to fight against; we have to struggle to achieve what we want. (100701_007 2010, pp. 3-4)

She describes how she became friends with older boys in the village who had continued their education as a way to learn how to convince her extended family to allow her to postpone marriage and continue her education. She could not simply demand to keep going to school; instead, she had to '*pengaruh*' (influence/persuade) '*masyarakat*' (the community) because as a young girl she did not have the authority in the community to directly make such a decision (100701_007 2010, p. 7). She described this as coming from '*ada motivasi intern*' (having an internal drive/motivation) to continue her education (100701_007 2010, pp. 3). While she did not use *tipèe-muslihat* or *peungeut* (Acehnese's cognates of *muslihat*) in the conversation, I interpret her response as being consistent with the Old Malay concept of *muslihat* (an indirect approach to reaching your goal) that is commonly used in Acehnese folktales (Siapno 2002, pp. 10-19). She was able to manipulate the conversation from being about just her education, of a young girl, to being about the future generations of whole village and eventually persuaded her family and the village elders that it was in their interest to allow her to continue her education past elementary school in order to benefit future generations. While she does not cite passages from the Qur'an or from hadith when telling her life's story, she does frame her actions and her attempt to persuade the community as being consistent with the customary norms or *adat* of the village, including following Islamic teachings.

The next major hurdle for her to overcome was the renewed insistence that she get married as soon as she graduated from high school. She explained that this was far more difficult because it is a poor village and it was not common for anyone to leave the village to attend university in the capital city, Banda Aceh, especially for a woman. Other women in the village who I interviewed confirmed that at that time a woman who continued her education

beyond elementary school was considered [*se*]*bagaikan PSK*²⁹ (like a prostitute) by the community(100701_007 2010, pp. 7). Participant 1 described the situation thusly:

First, I had to face my family, then I had to face the community ... When I faced my family, I at least didn't betray my parents' trust. 'I really went to school and I would fund my own education.' ... I had life skill. Then, I didn't respond to any negative symbols being displayed by the people around me as I wanted to change ... I had a life skill; I could make cakes and sold the cakes so that I could attend classes at university. (100701_007 2010, p. 5)

She was able to pay her own way by selling cakes and with the help of a small government scholarship that she first received for junior high school and continued through university. A legacy from the Dutch educational system was that university students have to defend a thesis as part of their *S1* or undergraduate degree. Participant 1 wrote her thesis on the challenges that women face in rural villages in Aceh. After completing her degree, she returned to the village and became an informal advocate for people in the village. I then asked her about women in the community more generally and whether she knew of any examples of women taking on leadership roles in the community. She answered in the following manner:

There are some women possessing leadership characteristics, which they inherited. For instance, during the conflict most men had to flee the village and women had to take over the leadership in the village and this woman acted as a mediator for both TNI [the Indonesian military] and GAM [the separatist movement]. At the same time, she served as the leader in the village ... Actually, there are a lot more women doing the same thing, but they were not adequately exposed by the media. (100701_007 2010, pp. 10-11)

She is describing a misconception that if women are not visible in formal positions of authority, then it is reasonable to assume that women lack agency in the community or that men are oppressing them. However, this does raise concerns over the longevity of the gains women are described as having achieved during the conflict period. While some villages do have a woman as the *geuchik* (village chief/leader) after the conflict, this was not the case for

²⁹ *Pekerja seks komersial (PSK)* is the formal way to refer to a prostitute or 'commercial sex worker' in Indonesian.

this particular village. While Participant 1 was telling her story of how she came to be an unofficial advocate in the surrounding community, she made a side comment:

As a matter of fact, many women in the village are illiterate; they can't read or write roman alphabet [used for the Indonesian language] but they are able to read Arabic [used for reading the Qur'an]. (100701007 2010, p. 13)

Participant-1 points to basic literacy or illiteracy in the Indonesian language as a problem for many women in her village and one that she is trying to change by supporting education for the next generation of girls. However, she follows up this point by reiterating that these women can read the Qur'an in Arabic and suggesting that regardless of their literacy in Indonesian, their piety as Muslims is not in question. I interpret her response as suggesting that it is more important that women in her village are competent in their knowledge of Islam than it is for them to be literate in the Indonesian language. From the perspective of someone in search of a liberal-secular subjectivity, there is a potential contradiction in describing women in a village as being both illiterate in the national language (Indonesian) and at the same time as being knowledgeable in Islam and able to be active participants positively engaged in shaping the future of their community. Acehnese is primarily an oral language originally written in Arabic script and it is only recently that it is being adapted to the Roman alphabet. During the conflict, being literate in Indonesian was used primarily when engaging with the state and in many cases for rural communities engaging with the state, it meant dealing with the military or police.

She explained how it was illegal during the conflict to hold meetings without the authorization of the local police or the military. During the conflict, she had to find new ways to organize people and discuss pressing issues that the community faced:

I often conducted community-based visits to organize people, organizing them for discussions ... As long as we have the strategies and techniques, we were able to adapt ourselves to the local community ... For example, if we visited a place that produces durians [a large fruit], we would approach durian traders to buy the fruit and talk to the traders; unconsciously, the traders would tell us things ... This is important in order to avoid a misunderstanding. If we continuously assisted them without limitations, they would become spoiled. In the end, they would not be able to stand on their own feet. We only gave suggestions. It is they who can change their situation, not us. (100701_007 2010, pp. 11-13)

She is describing the significance of the role that women held within rural communities when dealing with and mitigating the grim conditions that they faced during the conflict. Pidie and Greater Pidie (*Pidie Jaya*) were considered one of the hot zones during the conflict and this made it more difficult for non-combatants who have to tread carefully not to be seen offering too much support for either side. Since the conflict ended in 2005, many of the conditions in the village have not changed because the area was not directly hit by the tsunami and did not receive aid for reconstruction. Participant 1 describes being able to collaborate with others despite the fact that she is not in a formal position of authority. She describes being able to positively influence not only her village but also many of the surrounding communities in her area by holding women's discussion groups and partnering with local NGOs when it was advantageous. She explains that it is now common for young girls in her village to continue on to junior high school and high school before getting married. She did not find it problematic to work with NGOs or the government as long as she was able to have a positive effect in the community. She expressed the hope that the relationship between rural communities in Aceh and the central government would improve over time. She went so far as to describe her future plans as follows: "I will build networks or establish a partnership with the government as the state is responsible for empowering its citizens" (100701_007 2010, p. 18). I believe Participant 1's convictions are sincere in that she is keenly aware that the Indonesian government is not going to leave Aceh anytime soon and that a pragmatic approach to dealing with central

government in Jakarta is necessary for her community's survival. In the next case, we will shift away from the coastal region and hear from a woman in a rural mountain village in Greater Aceh (*Aceh Besar*) who is more skeptical of the potential of working with or alongside the state.

4.3 Case Two: Informal Politics from the Periphery

Participant 2's village is located in Greater Aceh and is in a mountainous area where most people use motorcycles to navigate the uneven dirt roads. She is in her late 30s and has not been married. She graduated from high school, but she has not had any formal legal training or other formal education beyond attending a workshop in Banda Aceh organized by a local NGO concerning women's rights during the conflict. In this section, I present three events from her life in order to illustrate how informal politics can work in rural area of Aceh. Additionally, I interpret several of her responses as being consistent with Siapno and Mahmood's concepts of *muslihat* (achieving one's goals through ancillary or indirect means), *Ṣabr* (perseverance in spite of adversity), and *al-ḥayā'* (reticence or modesty) as insightful when analyzing her political engagement in the community. The first instance is when she helped an illiterate man in her village deal with the police over a land dispute with the neighboring village. The second and third cases involve two women who came to Participant 2 for help in getting a divorce from their abusive husbands.

4.3.1 Tanah Adat and the State

In the first event, Participant 2 described how the local police had arrested Pria (a pseudonym for a man from her village) over a land dispute with a neighboring village. The neighboring village claimed that the land was part of their *tanah adat* (communal land) and that Pria had no claim to the land. While any villager can use *tanah adat* for small-scale

communal farming, it is not allowed for it to be fenced in or partitioned off by any one family, especially by someone who is not a member of that particular community. When the neighboring villagers saw that Pria had built a fence around part of the land, the villagers tore down his fence and uprooted some of his crops. Pria went to the *Geuchik* (village chief) to report the destruction of his fence; but the *Geuchik* did not want to get involved in the dispute and advised him to go to the police to report the fence being torn down. Participant 2 explained:

Because his fence was forcibly broken down, the landowner reported the case to the police. However, the police instead arrested him ... He was detained for about 15 days and he was badly treated there ... Pak Camat [the head of sub-district] was also detained. (transcript 100630_000 2010, p. 9-10)

The police were suspicious of Pria because someone from the neighboring village had already presented a land deed that clearly showed the land was part of their *tanah adat*. The document that Pria brought with him was prepared by the local *Camat* (sub-district officer) and showed that he did in fact own the land. The police assumed that Pria and the *Camat* must have falsified the deed and threw them in jail. This incident took place shortly after the 2005 peace agreement, when the police were still suspicious of villagers being *GPK-teroris* (Security rabble – terrorist). Participant 2 found out about what had happened and decided she would try to help Pria and the *Camat* get out of jail. She knew that Pria was very poor and could not afford a lawyer. She knew it was going to be difficult for him to get a fair hearing because he could not read and the police are known for coercing people into signing an admission of guilt. The Indonesian government prides itself on having largely eliminated illiteracy across the archipelago and it is taken for granted by many in the government that everyone can read the Indonesian language. However, this is not the reality on the ground once you leave Java and the

larger cities of Sumatra. There is also a social stigma attached to illiteracy in Aceh and she knew that Pria was unlikely to bring it to the attention of the police or the court.

Participant 2 went to the police station and pretended to be one of Pria's relatives. She described what happened next:

I came there and I was interviewed by a police officer ... he was sort of, how to say, very arrogant and cruel ... the police officer was somehow suspicious of me. I said I was only a relative of the detainee. I then told him [Pria] that we needed a lawyer because the case would be taken to court in Jantho [the capital of the regency] ... After the detention period, the case was finally brought to Jantho ... He was heavily guarded by armed police officers; [Pria] was being treated like a top criminal. (100630_000 2010, pp. 10-15)

She eventually found a lawyer willing to help with Pria's case, but the lawyer was unable to go to Jantho that day for court. So Participant 2 went on her own to Jantho armed only with the lawyer's business card and a note on the back explaining that she was there to assist in Pria's legal defense. She was allowed into the Attorney General's Office after showing the secretary the business card from the lawyer. When she was shown into the hearing room, the local police officer from the village was there and he was "angry about this [her showing up] and it seemed that he wanted to hit me" (100630_000 2010, p. 17). The official in charge of the proceeding began to question her about why she was there if she is not a lawyer and he tried to intimidate her into leaving. She replied, "I am not a lawyer, I am just a usual citizen. I don't believe you must be a lawyer! No sir, I am not a lawyer. I am only assisting Pak [Mr.] Pria" (100630_000 2010, p. 17). In the end, she was allowed to stay for the proceedings. Participant 2 told the court about Pria being illiterate and requested that he be allowed out of jail until the trial. The official asked her if she would be willing to take his place in jail if he did not show up on the court date. She explained to me her feelings and response: "I really wanted to help Pria. 'I will be held responsible for him. I will be willing to be imprisoned if he does not come,' I said.

'I am not afraid,' I said" (100630_000 2010, p. 19). Pria was released until the court date and at first he was angry at Participant 2 for telling the court that he is illiterate. At this point, the lawyer took on the case and was able to win the case based on testimony from others in the community. Pria's land deed was shown to predate the documents from the neighboring village by two decades.

In this example, Participant 2 is able to avoid a direct confrontation with figures of authority while still achieving her goal of helping Pria from her village. The official chain of command in the village broke down from the very beginning with the *Geuchik* (village chief) refusing to get involved. While the *Geuchik* is the recognized authority by the state that is supposedly looking out for everyone in the village, it was Participant 2 who came to Pria's aid and likely prevented him from being sentenced to several years in jail. I interpret her actions as being consistent with what Siapno identified as *muslihat* (achieving one's goals through indirect means), a concept commonly found in Acehnese folktales (Siapno 2002, pp. 10-19). I do not interpret Participant 2's actions as being primarily reacting against or in opposition to a broken social system within the Indonesian state. Participant 2 might have been in a better position to help Pria than the *Geuchik* because if the *Geuchik* had made the mistake of accompanying Pria to the police station then he might have been arrested as well, just as the *Camat* (sub-district officer) was arrested for allegedly collaborating with Pria in the fabrication of the land deed. On the other hand, if the *Geuchik* would have gone to the neighboring village and negotiated a resolution without involving the police or courts, the entire episode with the police could have been avoided. Instead, I interpret her actions as being consistent with a functioning communal network grounded in a particular site and on shared-values as expressed in *adat Aceh* (local

customs) and Islam. Participate 2 describes her role as follows: “I work for the community, to empower the community but I have no contract ... it can be said that if we get involved in the community, we are indeed carrying out social works” based on her community’s *adat* (100630_000 2010, p. 3). At the same time, she describes her identity and her role in the community as an informal advocate for others as a requirement for all Muslims in her community:

For me, religion is very important ... Islam teaches us to do good things for others. Islam encourages us to assist whenever we see others suffering and oppressed and we should not stay quiet; Islam indeed encourages its followers to do good things and we will be rewarded for these good deeds. If we know something, for example, a verse [of the Qur’an], we have to tell others about it because this is a social work and we have been called for this. I feel that I was called to do it; if we are Muslims, we will feel such a feeling. (100701_001 2010, pp. 2-4)

In the next two sections, Participant 2 describes how she worked with women in informal groups at the ‘*Meunasah*’ (a small prayer room or building in the village) to deal with problems they face in the community, including abuses by the *TNI* (Indonesian Armed Forces) during the conflict and cases of domestic violence (100701_001 2010, p. 13).

4.3.2 *Meunasah* and the Community

In almost every village or neighborhood in Aceh, you will find at least one Mosque at the center of the community and a *Meunasah* somewhere along the periphery. On Fridays, men gather at the Mosque for Friday services and afterwards head towards a coffee shop. Since women usually do not attend Friday services at the Mosque, they would meet instead at the *Meunasah* to study and recite the Qur’an and about once a month Participant 2 describes:

we would discuss any problems and find solutions to such problems. In the group, we once made medicine, we made massage oil and something like that ... we also made traditional herbal medicine for headache because we are far from [the city], we do not want to be dependent on medicine supplied by the hospitals. (100701_001 2010, p. 12-13)

It is through these informal gatherings that much of Participant 2's advocacy originates in the community. However, during the conflict they had to find 'strategies' or 'tricks' to cover for the meetings because no one was allowed to meet in groups without first clearing it with the military. Participant 2 describes the situation thusly:

We could not meet. There were three *TNI* (Indonesian Armed Forces) posts in the village. We had to report everything that we did to the *TNI* posts. We were sort of playing tricks when we wanted to hold meeting at the *Meunasah*. If *TNI* soldiers asked about what we are doing, we would just say that we were meeting to learn how to prepare traditional medicine ... we used this as camouflage to secretly talk about *TNI* wrong doings or make reports against *TNI*. Sometimes I went to Banda Aceh [to give reports to NGOs] only by wearing simple clothes and flip-flops. This strategy would not make the *TNI* soldiers in the village suspicious. (100701_001 2010, p. 14)

Unfortunately, the meetings did not always go unnoticed and Participant 2 describes how when the group was involved in *gotong royong* (mutual/communal aid) for a *proyek krueng* (irrigation project) several of the women in the group were "beaten up by the *TNI* soldiers because they had distributed brochures containing messages that the *TNI* found threatening" (100701_001 2010, p. 15). *Gotong royong* (mutual/communal aid) is part of the *adat* (local customs) in Aceh and it is one the primary mechanisms for assisting community members with larger projects that cannot be completed alone. As part of the strategy for hiding the group's activities from the *TNI*, they had to bury the group's bank account records kept in a small book used to access the account at the Bank because, "the *TNI* would simply think that we [the women's support group] were connected to *Inong Balee* (women combatants)" (100701_001 2010, p. 17). During the conflict, Participant 2 described how it did not matter if you supported *GAM* or *TNI* because at some point both of them would accuse you of supporting the other side and threaten you. She recounted how late one evening she came face to face in her backyard with a *TNI* unit of soldiers:

Upon hearing noise around my house, I woke up and went out of the house as I thought it was the cattle that went around the house. As I walked toward the back of my house, I was shocked by the realization that some 50 heavily armed soldiers had surrounded me. I screamed upon knowing that all guns were pointed at me. I was afraid to death and I was very much traumatized. I think I had peed and defecated there as I was in such fear. One of the soldiers asked 'are you a *GAM* member?' I said, 'no sir, I am not a *GAM* member.' I had to apologize three times and said I was going out of the house because I heard a noise that I thought had been made by some cattle.

'With whom do you live here?' I was asked. I said, 'I live here with my mother.' The soldiers also asked about my older and younger brother. They didn't seem to believe me [that they were not there]. The soldiers demanded that I hand them my flashlight, but I refused such a demand. All I thought was that they would rape me that night.

She recalls how at the time she was reminded of a training session she attended about what to do in case you are about to be raped that you should "always learn about the rapists' identity. If they are soldiers, we should get their names and ranks (100701_001 2010, p. 19). After she remembered this advice, she handed over her flashlight to the *TNI* officer in charge. They immediately turned the flashlight towards her and luckily, she "was wearing white" because she would have been "in trouble if [she] had worn black that night. Usually, *Inong Balee* forces would wear black" (100701_001 2010, p. 20). Participant 2 recounts how the ordeal ended as abruptly as it had begun:

Again, I told the soldiers that I was not a *GAM* member. It was impossible for me, with my small body, to fight alongside the freedom fighters. I would not be able to hike the mountains.

Finally, I was allowed to return home. I was however shoved on the back and I stumbled almost falling to the ground. I then walked back to my house and I did not dare to look back as I would be shot if I do so.

Participant 2's ordeal was a common experience for the people in her village during the conflict and she describes how at different times she "was then accused of being an informant by both *TNI* and *GAM*" (100701_001 2010, p. 21). While *GAM* was regarded by many Acehense I interviewed as being a positive movement for social change in Aceh, Participant 2 did not receive any support from them. At one point, she recalled how "GAM accused me [Participant 2] of being an informant who often reported to the *TNI* in Banda Aceh. It was only because I

reported to an NGO. They said that I could not be trusted and they threatened to kidnap me” (100701_001 2010, p. 21). Since the conflict ended in 2005, she continues to be actively involved in the women’s group at the village’s *Meunasah*. However, she is no longer serving as the chairwoman of the group because she explains, “there should be replacement and regeneration” within the group’s leadership (100701_001 2010, p. 13). She describes this as not a matter of “seniority [within the group] but I want others to learn what I have learned” and to perpetuate the group (100701_001 2010, p. 13). In the next section, I discuss how Participant 2 describes how she dealt with two cases of domestic violence when she was still the chairwoman of the *Meunasah* group.

4.3.3 Women in the *Meunasah* and Domestic Violence

In both these cases, Participant 2 began by advising the women to join one of her women’s discussion groups at the *Meunasah* as a way to gently approach a sensitive topic of domestic violence. She described her experience with cases of domestic violence thusly:

If we think about cases, I have dealt with many cases. *KDRT* [Domestic-based violence] was the worst. I was nearly beaten up. My family even suggested that I should not deal with *KDRT* cases anymore ... This first case happened during the conflict. There is one lady who often got beaten up and had her arm broken ... because she couldn’t stand it anymore, she wanted to file for a divorce ... first, she went to see the *Geuchik* (the head of village) and then the village secretary ... She asked for the necessary documents. She was financially incapable. She was really poor and didn’t know how to read and write ... Then she came over to my house ... She told me everything and she indicated that she wanted to get a divorce. I said, ‘why did you want to get divorced? *Allah* (God) does not like those who get divorced.’ ‘*Allah* really hates this.’ ‘You don’t want to regret you decision later on,’ I repeated (100630_000 2010, p. 21-22).

An older woman named Sita (a pseudonym) came to Participant 2 seeking for help in getting a divorce because she faced increasing physical abuse from her husband and recently he had broken her arm. Instead of immediately offering to help her obtain a divorce or encouraging her to leave her husband, Participant 2 advised her not to get a divorce if there were any possibility of reconciliation because, “people usually think that it is the woman’s

fault” (100630_000 2010, p. 23). Participant 2 expressed her anxieties over helping Sita obtain a divorce:

I further said [to Sita], ‘You need to consider both the positive and the negative effects of getting divorced.’ ‘The good things about getting divorced are that you will be free from burdens and you will no longer be beaten up by your husband but there are also negative effects.’ People will think that it is you who does not want a husband anymore; people tend to think that women are usually on the wrong side ... you will have to endure this, as people will not know the problems that you are facing in your family. (100630_000 2010, p. 23)

Eventually, Participant 2 agreed to help Sita begin the legal process of obtaining a divorce through the *Mahkamah Syariah* (Syariah Court). Sita had no idea where to go to get a divorce and did not have enough money to pay for the legal proceedings (400.000IDR, roughly equivalent to 45USD). Both Sita and her husband are illiterate in Indonesian, so it was going to be a challenge for her to obtain all of the required forms signed by the appropriate officials without assistance when she is unable to read the forms. Sita was faced with both the taboos of having to admit to public officials that she is illiterate and being a woman who wants to get a divorce against the wishes of her husband. Once all of the documents were complete, Participant 2 accompanied Sita to the *Mahkamah Syariah* office in the capital of the regency. She admits “that was my first time taking someone to the Syariah Court.” When they arrived she “didn’t know where to report. People at the Sharia Court thought that it was I [Participant 2] who wanted to get divorced” (100630_000 2010, p. 25). When she arrived at the entrance to the *Mahkamah Syariah* building, they asked her:

‘Is it you who want to get divorced?’ ‘No, I am not married yet,’ I said. ‘Then, who?’ The woman who wanted to get divorced did not know anything. I took her to the Syariah Court but she instead sat outside the building. I was the one who was busy going in and out (laughing)

I then told the Sharia Court officials, ‘this is the woman who wants to get divorced.’ After I told them about her case, we told them that she wanted to file for a divorce ... I then submitted all of the required documents. However, the *surat miskin* (the letter stating that [Sita] is indeed financially incapable) was not yet endorsed by the local Camat (sub-district officer) ... we couldn’t register the case because of the missing signature. (100630_000 2010, pp. 25-26)

Participant 2 and Sita had to return to their village and meet with the *Camat*. When they arrived at the *Camat's* office to ask for his signature their good fortunes started to turn sour:

The *Camat* said, 'I can't do that! Who wants to get divorced?' 'This woman,' I said. While pointing at me, the *Camat* then asked, 'Why do you want to assist her?' I answered, 'My apology sir, I am assisting this woman because she can't neither read nor write.' 'Oh, I can't do that,' the *Camat* insisted. I then replied, 'Pak, I really want to help her. This is serious and is not a lie.' 'Oh I can't do that as I don't want to ruin her family,' said Pak *Camat*. He did not want to sign it.

Pak *Camat* continued scolding me. The *Camat* believed that I was lying. He then called the *Geuchik* (Head of Village) ... [and] the village secretary. When the village secretary arrived at *Camat's* Office, the *Camat* finally agreed to sign the form. (100630_000 2010, pp. 26-27)

During the lengthy process of finalizing the divorce in the *Mahkamah Syariah*, the husband threatened to assault Participant 2 several times. Eventually, she had to have her brother stay at her house with her for protection. Participant 2 described the community's reaction against her due to her role in Sita's divorce proceedings: "some even accused me of ruining their family," while a small number of others in community who knew her well "supported me and were not acting as my critics" (100630_000 2010, p. 34). After several months, Sita's husband came to accept that his wife was serious about getting a divorce and he moved out of their house. Based on the local *adat* (customs) of the village, Sita retained ownership of the house once they were divorced since the house was hers before they were married.

The second case deals with a woman in her late 40s named Sarah (a pseudonym) who came to Participant 2 for help, "because she had been beaten repeatedly by her husband" (100701_001 2010, p. 9). Participant 2 describes her first meeting with Sarah about the situation:

I told her that she could join our group. She was afraid of doing so. I firstly came to her house and asked for her husband's permission. After getting her husband's permission, she finally joined the group. She also participated in our monthly meetings. (100701_001 2010, p. 10)

Eventually, Participant 2 was able to persuade Sarah's husband that the group could help Sarah obtain a loan for starting a small business from a local NGO. She recalls:

her [Sarah's] husband was interested in this. He didn't ban his wife from attending our monthly meetings any longer because he saw possible incomes there. *Previously, the husband would easily beat up his wife ... if his wife did not cook on time, he would simply smack her up. I was then looking for ways to end the torture; one of the ways was inviting the wife to join the group.* (100701_001 2010, p. 10)

Throughout the process of working with Sarah so that she could deal with domestic violence, Participant 2 describes how she would always, "ask for her [Sarah's] husband's permission if we did anything together" because she does not want to be "blamed for the marriage failures" (100701_001 2010, p. 10-11). Sarah's husband was willing to discuss the situation with Participant 2 and she was able to convince him to stop beating his wife and to allow her to go out of the house more often. Participant 2 was able to help Sarah start a small business raising chickens and the additional income seemed to alleviate most of the tension with her husband.

In this second example, Participant 2 illustrates the significance of perseverance for women within the community with Sarah's resolve to stay in the marriage until her husband was persuaded to stop using physical violence against her. From the standpoint of a liberal-secular conception of agency, Sarah as well as Participant 2 potentially would be criticized for accepting Sarah's choice to stay with her husband in the hopes that her husband would change his behavior. While he stopped physically abusing her in the end, this was not the only possible outcome of the situation. Participant 2 described it as an achievement that she was able to convey the problem to Sarah's husband effectively without offending him or making the situation worse. I interpret Participant 2 as working within the established communal norms of *adat* while still encouraging Sarah and Sita to modify the power relationships within their

marriages. I argue that the roles that Participant 1 and Participant 2 serve within the community are representations of non-liberal, yet not illiberal, manifestations of a religious (Muslim feminist) women's political agency in Aceh.

4.4 Conclusion

This chapter addresses one of the central questions of this dissertation, what does 'political engagement' mean for women in Aceh? In addition, how are women participating in and inhabiting political spaces in communities in post-conflict Aceh? The lived-experiences of two women from different parts of Aceh are presented as a catalyst for reimagining the way in which women in Aceh are actively engaged in politics outside of traditional positions of authority found in formal political institutions within the state. To be clear, I am not suggesting that they abstain from interacting with representatives of the state completely. Rather, these women work in informal networks within their communities while keeping the reach of the state at arm's length whenever possible.

The first section analyzes the run up to the April 2009 provincial elections in Aceh and suggests that formal politics in Aceh is not the primary location of political space where many women are engaging in politics. I argue that it is in the informal/communal political spaces in Aceh that many of the women I interviewed are having the greatest impact in their communities. In sections two and three, several instances of members of the community holding traditional positions of authority legitimized by the state are shown to be often times incapable of exercising power effectively within the community.

The second and third sections analyze the lived experiences of two women who have been actively engaged in informal/communal politics and contribute to the wellbeing of the

community without any formal recognition from the state. The first case deals with the experiences of a woman, Participant 1, from *Pidie Jaya* (Greater Pidie) who became an influential figure in her village by working her way through school and becoming an advocate for social and economic change in her community. The second case is of a woman, Participant 2, from the mountainous region of *Aceh Jaya* (Greater Aceh) who out of necessity became an informal arbitrator and advocate for women in her community. The differences among these cases illustrate how women's political agency often extends beyond state-centric political engagements and encompasses a myriad of informal tactics for women to achieve their goals within the community based on communal relationships, shared interests and values expressed through *adat*, and a common religious identity of Islam. I argue that a secular-liberal model of agency is inadequate for encompassing the ways that women are engaging in informal/communal politics which appear to be a necessary component of daily life for many women in Aceh.

The aim of this chapter is to extrapolate a localized-indigenous understanding of political engagement that is explicitly non-patriarchal and non-state-centric based on interviews conducted between January 2009 and August 2010 in regencies across the East and West coasts of Aceh (see Figure 1). This chapter contributes to the wider project of conceptualizing localized-indigenous Muslim Feminism(s) in Aceh that are not grounded in a liberal-secular conception of subjectivity. One of the aims of this chapter is to aid in challenging broader exclusivist discourses that purport a secular/religious divide in feminist analyses that rely on patriarchal and state-centric models of women's agency. In this chapter, I argue for bridging the artificial liberal-secular divide between political agency and moral agency such that the

concepts of politics and political engagement are broadened to include informal/communal practices. In the next chapter, I consider the discourses surrounding the implementation of *syariah* in Aceh in terms of representing a utopian/dystopian future and whether *syariah* is potentially functioning as a socio-spatial 'heterotopia' for women in Aceh.

5. Mixed responses by women to *Syariah*: Moving beyond utopian/dystopian discourses

During my interviews with women in Aceh, many of them expressed a reverence for *syariah* (the path or the way in Islam) as a significant component in guiding how they relate to others. As discussed in chapter three, what *syariah* means for women in Aceh can range from a) an individual's ethical guide for daily life separate from the state to, b) a judicial set of legal codes based on Shafi'i *fiqh* (body of legal rulings and commentaries) that should be enforced through the state to, c) a 'relational'³⁰ and 'other-regarding' ethical guide for living in a community separate from the state.³¹ The aim of this chapter is to further our understanding of how *syariah* in Aceh is inhabited, transformed, constructed, and deconstructed by women. I argue that the concept of a 'socio-spatial dialectic' and thinking of *syariah* as a 'heterotopia' provide a richer explanation of Acehnese women's lived experience of *syariah* because it moves beyond the dominant explanations of *syariah* as representing either a utopia or a dystopia. Furthermore, I argue that while Acehnese women have been characterized in NGO reports and in the media as appealing to or describing *syariah* in reductionist utopian or dystopian terminology, the majority of women I interviewed responded with a more nuanced view of *syariah* that cannot be clearly placed in either of these categories. Conceptualizing these women's engagement with *syariah* in terms of Muslim feminisms provides a much-needed element of flexibility in moving beyond secular/religious binaries that the current discourse of

³⁰ In this context, 'relational' refers to the idea that ethics is fundamentally about social interactions beyond the scope of anyone individual and emphasizes social action. This is in contrast to approaching ethical dilemmas in search of universal and impartial moral axioms based on an individual's rationality, such as in utilitarian and deontological ethical theories. According to feminist ethicists, one of the central problems with twentieth century Moral Philosophy is its over-emphasis on the individual and its tendency to whitewash over differences in power relations and social inequalities (For a more complete discussion of this concept see Margaret Walker's (2007) *Moral understandings: a feminist study in ethics* or Carol Gilligan's (1982) *In a different voice*).

³¹ A state may still be influential within the community in many other ways, but, according to this perspective, it remains distinct from *syariah Islam*.

Islamic feminism is unable to provide. Regarding *syariah* in Aceh, this distinction between Muslim feminisms and Islamic feminism is relevant because public discussions over *syariah* are often presented as if *syariah* is a single agreed upon body of legal codes, such as Shafi'i *fiqh* (the dominant school of legal thought in Aceh). In practice, a plurality of interpretations of what constitutes *syariah* exists in Aceh among government representatives, *ulama* (religious scholars in the community), and laypeople.

Based on interviews conducted between 2009 and 2010, I found that *syariah* was often described by women in Aceh as encompassing more than an individual's responsibility to follow a set of legal codes or personal beliefs. They would often draw a distinction between the government's implementation of *syariah* in Aceh and their lived experience of *syariah* within a Muslim community. However, this perspective has been marginalized in national and international commentaries by governments, NGOs, and in the media. I argue that understanding and acknowledging these marginalized voices can contribute to an attempt to re-imagine the way we think of *syariah* not only in Aceh or in Southeast Asia, but also in wider intra-faith religious debates over the compatibility of religious values and norms co-existing or at times superseding secular models of democratic governance.

In section one of this chapter, I problematize the binary distinction of utopia/dystopia between iconoclastic and blueprint approaches to utopian thought through the work of Russell Jacoby. An iconoclastic approach to utopian thought refers to being flexible, less defined, and not providing predetermined solutions, while a blueprint approach to utopian thought refers to being structured, well defined, and providing predetermined solutions for how to change society (Jacoby 2005). The aim of employing utopian theory is to provide a rubric for analyzing

interviews regarding *syariah* in Aceh in such a way that is not explicitly biased for or against *syariah* at the onset of the study. An additional concept of 'heterotopia' (multiple places at once) is introduced from the works of Michel Foucault and Edward Soja as a way to re-imagine how utopias are thought of, in general, and, more specifically, the multiplicity of possibilities inherent in *syariah* in Aceh.

The first step in allowing for the possibility of heterotopias is to recognize the inadequacy of limiting religious ethical norms, such as *syariah* in Aceh, to explanations of hegemonic or counter-hegemonic discourses. Hegemony refers to an indirect dominance in society of a set of values or norms through an implied consent without specifically acknowledging their predominance. In this case, the hegemonic discourse surrounding *syariah* in Aceh refers to equating *syariah* to a fixed codified system of judicial thought based on Shafi'i *fiqh* that is perceived as a legitimate source of divine law. The counter-hegemonic discourse refers to equating *syariah* to an illegitimate fixed legal code that is in conflict with an agreed upon set of universal Human Rights. Both hegemonic/counter-hegemonic discourses can be found in some of the interviews with respondents, in public discussions in the media, in governmental and non-governmental reports, and in recent academic debates.

In a December 2010 report on *syariah* in Aceh, Human Rights Watch frames the implementation of *syariah* in terms of essentialized hegemonic/counter-hegemonic discourses that bracket-off more viable particular explanations from Acehnese women by privileging universal explanations of state-centered Human Rights laws (Human Rights Watch 2010). In other words, the problem is that essentialism assumes the existence of overarching, universal ways of understanding social phenomena while discounting multiple simultaneous ways of

understanding. Therefore, conceptualizing *syariah* as a potential manifestation of heterotopias provides an alternative basis for analyzing social phenomena to the dominant Human Rights discourses in terms of what Russell Jacoby label's as iconoclastic utopian thought (2005).

In order to draw out the distinction between a flexible open-ended conception of *syariah* as an iconoclastic utopia and rigid closed-ended conceptions of *syariah* as a blueprint utopia/dystopia, it is beneficial to begin with a few clarifying remarks on the relationship between history, space, and time. In order to explain how *syariah* functions and is inhabited in Aceh, I argue that it is necessary to rethink the ontological assertions built into the prevailing paradigm within the social sciences of historical materialism that privileges the intersection of time and material locations in physical space over recognizing the existence of social phenomena forming equally real socio-spatial relationships. I argue that *syariah* in Aceh should be thought of as existing not only in historical material moments across time, but also in terms of a socio-spatial materialism that is constructed, deconstructed, and perpetuated through the production of social space. Therefore, *syariah* is better understood in terms of what Edward Soja identifies as a 'triple dialectic' between 'space, time and social being' (1989, p. 11). The explanatory power of using a triple dialectic approach is that it allows for increased flexibility and malleability of social phenomena that is otherwise implausible. Thinking of *syariah* as being formed, broken-down, and re-formed again by a dialectical relationship between space, time, and social being means that it cannot be reduced to a set of top-down government regulations or a set of agreed-upon social regulations that individuals choose to abide by or not. Instead, *syariah* ought to be conceived of ontologically in terms of a living, constantly evolving, malleable place that exists within the space of human relations.

In the second section of this chapter, I apply the concept of a social-spatial dialectic as elaborated in the first section to the stories and narratives of women I interviewed across different regencies in Aceh. In the interviews, I asked women in Aceh to explain how they understand *syariah* and whether their understanding of *syariah* is different from the way it is being implemented by the state. The expansion of the state's implementation of *syariah* from family law to civil and criminal law originated with the passing of the national law no. 44 in 1999 that provided the province of Aceh increased autonomy, including allowing the provincial government to administer *syariah* in all aspects of daily life (Aspinall 2009, p. 209). While individual districts in other parts of Indonesia have been granted permission since 1999 to expand their enforcement of *syariah* through the current legal system, Aceh is the first province in Indonesia that has been given the autonomy to create a separate court system, a separate police force, and enforce *syariah* across an entire province. The Indonesian state's expansion of *syariah* in Aceh was done through the following steps: enacting a series of *qanuns syariah*³² (provincial bylaws) covering a range of prohibited social behaviors beginning in 2002, establishing *Mahkamah Syariah* (local Syariah Courts) in 2003, establishing the *Wilayatul*

³² The first qanun no. 10/2002 addressed a broad range of topics including increasing the jurisdiction of *Mahkamah Syariah* (the local Syariah Courts) and outlining the potential types of offenses (such as *hudud* – obligatory from the Qur'an, *qisas/diyat* – retribution/compensation for a death, and *ta'zir* – left to the discretion of the court) (Salim 2008, p. 157; International Crisis Group 2006, p. 6). The next qanun no. 11/2002 dealt with aspects of everyday life including following an Islamic dress code (covering the knees to the navel for men and all of the body except the hands and face for women) through enforcing the practice of *'aqida* (the right belief), *'ibada* (the right way to worship), and *syiar Islam* (the right symbols of Islam) (Ichwan 2011, p. 199; Lindsey and Hooker 2007, p. 232). The governor of Aceh announced the official beginning of syariah implementation on March 4th 2003 after the supreme court ruled in favor of allowing provincial enforcement of syariah (Ichwan 2011, p. 199). Within a few months, three additional qanuns were passed prohibiting the consumption of *khamar* (alcoholic beverages) in no. 12/2003, prohibiting *maysir* (gambling) in no. 12/2003, and prohibiting *khalwat* (illicit relationships between men and women) in no. 14/2003 (Salim 2008, p. 158).

Hisbah (Syariah Police)³³ in 2005, and the widespread implementation of *syariah* through the newly created courts and an auxiliary police force beginning in 2006 (Aspinall 2009; Ichwan 2011; Salim 2008).

Based on interviews conducted in the summer of 2010 with Acehense women, I identified three main perspectives on *syariah*: first, those who find the current state implementation of *syariah* to be consistent with their understanding (*syariah* as a blueprint utopia); second, those who find the current implementation to be inconsistent or antagonistic to their understanding (*syariah* as an state-centered iconoclastic utopia); and third, those who find the current implementation to be largely irrelevant but not necessarily inconsistent or antagonistic to their understanding (*syariah* as an communally-centered iconoclastic utopia). In regard to the third perspective, the question of whether the state is correctly or incorrectly implementing *syariah* appeared to be negligible in terms of its impact in their lives. According to this third group, the question is largely irrelevant because they view *syariah* as something that exists within the social space of the community rather than in disassociated relationships among autonomous individuals or between individuals and the state. I was unable to find a homogenous perspective based on demographics of the respondents (age, rural/urban, or level of education) except for the only demographic group in which some of the participants think of *syariah* in terms of a blueprint utopia were urban well-educated women under 27 years-old.

I argue that the usage of the concept of Muslim feminisms rather than Islamic feminism is supported by the heterogeneity of perspectives across demographic indicators. The concept

³³ The translation of *wilayatul hisbah* as 'syariah police' is based on its usage in the Indonesian language and the common reference to its interchangeable usage with *polisi syariah*, which literally translates as syariah police. Its usage is a departure from the original Arabic meaning of 'provincial/governance in accordance with Islam.'

of heterotopia aids in explaining the plurality of meanings and functions of *syariah* for women in Aceh. Heterotopia allows for thinking of *syariah* as something more than a dead space of juristic legal code and arbitrary violence that is so readily adopted in academic circles, by NGO reports, and by the news media. In conclusion, I argue that understanding *syariah* as a heterotopia through a socio-spatial dialectic allows for a Muslim feminist model of women's agency to emerge, and opens the possibility of a localized-indigenous Muslim feminist politics to emerge in some rural communities of Aceh.

5.1 Heterotopia and Dystopia in Postcolonial Space

Since 1999, there have been heated debates on the national and international stages surrounding the legality and efficacy of the Acehese provincial government's implementation of *syariah*. These debates are often formulated as if *syariah* is either a hegemonic or a counter-hegemonic socio-political force in Acehese society. This binary logic expressed through human rights reports from NGOs, statements from government officials, and media outlets presumes that *syariah* represents an appeal to a distant utopian future, but in reality *syariah* creates a dystopian reality in the present. This is usually framed in terms of a divide between insider (Muslim) and outsider (non-Muslim) perspectives; the former supposedly believe with certainty that *syariah* represents a utopian future that society is progressing toward and the latter believes with certainty that *syariah* represents a dystopia that society must avoid at all cost. A cogent example can be found in the December 2010 report entitled 'Policing Morality: Abuses in the Application of Sharia in Aceh, Indonesia,' in which Human Rights Watch describes the situation in Aceh in the following manner:

In its ideal form, supporters say, Sharia is a complete system of guidance on all matters in life, one that promotes charity, social welfare, and communal harmony. As applied in Aceh, however, two Sharia-

inspired laws are denying many people—predominantly the poor, women, and youths—the right to make personal decisions central to the conduct of their lives and the expression of their faith, identity, and morals (Human Rights Watch 2010, p. 10).

Human Rights Watch focuses on two particular *qanun syariah* (criminal legal codes in Aceh) no. 11/2002 covering *aqidah* (right belief), *ibadah* (ritual observance), and *syiar* (festivals), which is interpreted as including dress codes for men and women, and no. 14/2003 covering *khalwat* (illicit relationships between members of the opposite sex). The report emphasizes at several points that it “takes no position on Sharia law or on provisions that regulate the internal workings of Islam” while at the same time asserting that human rights law supersede all others (Human Rights Watch 2010, p. 11). The Human Rights Watch report does not specifically state that *syariah* is incompatible with international human rights laws; however, it does challenge the legality and morality of the current enforcement of *syariah* in Aceh. One of the primary criticisms emerging from the report is when it states the following:

communities are encouraged to implement the prohibition against seclusion [*khalwat*] and to resolve allegations of seclusion in *adat* (customary law) dispute resolution mechanisms (Human Rights Watch 2010, pp. 32)

The explanation provided by Human Rights Watch is that it poses a direct challenge to the authority of the national secular laws that are in accordance with international human rights laws and treaties (pp. 32, 50-60). The report goes on to cite grievous cases of physical and mental abuse, instances of torture, public humiliation, and a widespread denial of adequate protection or representation from government officials. I argue that the underlying claim being made in this report is best interpreted that *syariah* is being appealed to in Aceh as a utopian future of a virtuous society; however, because it is based outside of the authority and legitimacy of the state, this utopian future becomes a dystopian reality in the present unless the state is willing to intervene through an accepted discourse of human rights. The Human

Rights Watch report is portraying *syariah* in Aceh as being inherently misguided and illegitimate because of its religious (non-secular) foundations and because it poses a direct challenge to the authority and legitimacy of national and international legal theory. The problem with the Human Rights Watch's claim is that it presumes the authority and legitimacy of the Indonesian state in advance rather than investigating the actual relationship between the Indonesian state and the Acehense people. It presumes that the only legitimate form of political and moral agency is in the form of a secular-liberal subjectivity bounded within a nation-state. A purposefully stateless and non-liberal (but not necessarily illiberal) formation of political and moral agency is silenced within this universal claim to a Human Rights legal framework.

According to one prominent legal scholar and anthropologist, *syariah* has a long history of demonstrating adaptability and flexibility when applied across divergent cultural localities (Rosen 2000, 2008). Rosen is quick to point out that "characterizations of justice in other cultures often reveal more about the analyst than the society under consideration" such as the preoccupation of many academics and practitioners in the Global North with supposedly universal concepts of "impartiality, fittingness, dialogue, efficiency, and rights" (Rosen 2000, p. 153). In contrast, Rosen divides the essence of ethical norms and practices in *syariah* along three levels of meaning:

[one,] relationships among men [and women] toward God are reciprocal in nature, and justice exists where this reciprocity guides all interactions; [two,] justice is both a process and a result of equating otherwise dissimilar entities; and [three,] because relationships are highly contextual, justice is to be grasped through its multifarious enactments rather than as a single abstract principle ... according to balanced, reciprocal obligations that reduce social chaos and facilitate even greater networks of indebtedness among those who develop their God-given reason to understand the divine word and the mundane world alike." (Rosen 2000, p. 155)

It is along this third level of 'highly contextual relationships' that it becomes possible to draw a connection between Rosen's discussion of an Islamic conception of divine justice (*'adl*),

as found in *syariah*, with Margaret Walker's 'expressive collaborative approach' to ethical norms and practices as an alternative to the dominant liberal-secular (theoretical-judicial model of) ethics (Rosen 2000; Walker 2007). As discussed previously in chapter two, an expressive-collaborative approach to ethical norms and practices refers to an "investigation of morality as a socially embedded medium of mutual understanding and negotiation between people over their responsibility for things open to human care and response" (Walker 2007, p. 9). In contrast, a liberal-secular (theoretical-judicial approach to) ethics situates ethical theorizing along the level of an abstract space of pure 'moral knowledge' of logical and systematic unity that can be verified and regulated through the application of the scientific method (Walker 2007, pp. 43-45). It is based on the pervasiveness of this 'theoretical-judicial approach' to ethics that I am critical of claims to universality in a human rights legal framework. I argue that this approach to ethics limits justice (*'adl*) in Islam, as located in *syariah*, to what Walker describes as a "set of law-like moral principles or procedures for decision that is intended to yield by deduction or instantiation ... some determinate judgment for an agent in a given situation about what it is right, or at least morally justifiable, to do" (pp. 42-43).

The origins of this marginalization within human rights law as a state-centered legal discourse emerged in the late 18th century as a key component in the Declaration of Independence during the American Revolution and thirteen years later in the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen during the French Revolution (Hunt 2007, pp. 15-19). There are three basic requirements for human rights laws: they have to be "*natural* (inherent in human beings); *equal* (the same for everyone); and *universal* (applicable everywhere)" (Hunt 2007, p. 20). This can lead to the perception that Acehnese *adat*, which includes Acehnese interpretations of

Islam, is illegitimate or unfit to be the basis for a shared morality because it does not meet these basic requirements by only applying to particular communities in Aceh, by being flexible and adaptable to local traditions, and by existing largely outside of the domain of a modern nation-state. In other words, human rights as a legal and moral discourse is dependent on what Talal Asad describes as:

a distinctive relation between state law and personal morality, such that religion became essentially a matter of (private) belief ... the idea of religious toleration that helps to define a state as secular begins with the premise that because belief cannot be coerced, religion should be regarded by the political authorities with indifference as long as it remains within the private domain. (Asad 2003, p. 205)

It is this requirement of human rights to be enacted and legitimated within the framework of a state that is in conflict with localized and communal formations of *adat* and *syariah* in Aceh. While I personally agree with Human Rights Watch's assertion that the documented instances of physical and mental abuse, torture, and sexual assault are immoral and detrimental to the people of Aceh, the methodological problem that I have with this report is its implicit claim that human rights through a state apparatus is the only path worth considering to justify this conclusion. Talal Asad explains the problem that I am describing more eloquently when he states:

My concern is not with cruelty as such but with how, in a secular system like human rights, responsibility is assigned for it. I point to the basic assumption about 'the human' on which human rights stand: Nothing essential to a person's human essence is violated if he or she suffers as a consequence of military action or of market manipulation from beyond his own state when that is permitted by international law ... Yet the identification and application of human rights law has no meaning independent of the judicial instruments that belong to individual nation-states (or to several states bound by treaty) and the remedies that these institutions supply—and therefore of the individual's civil status as a political subject. (Asad 2003, p. 129)

The contradiction Asad uncovers within human rights discourse applies to how Human Rights Watch readily assigns blame for the implementation of *syariah* and suggests the only viable solution is to enforce the existing national secular laws, while failing to recognize that the

Indonesian state continues to be the primary source of violence, instability, and exploitation in the lives of many Acehnese people. Essentially, localized and communal formations of *adat* and *syariah* in Aceh are rendered meaningless³⁴ from the standpoint of human rights and any sense of agency within them is being denied meaning as well. As presented in detail in chapter two of this dissertation, there are several methodological problems with assuming a secular-liberal subjectivity that are inherent in human rights discourses since its codification in 1948 (Hunt 2007, pp. 223-29). By assuming the primacy of a secular-liberal subjectivity in cross-cultural research, it inevitably positions the researcher (Human Rights Watch and myself) and the audience (you as the reader) in a privileged position of the disembodied 'self' looking down on the 'other' as those who are morally and politically inferior and in need of help. I argue this discursive framework is detrimental when attempting to understand how women in Aceh are constructing, deconstructing, and inhabiting *syariah* in their daily lives.

It is worth noting that at the time when the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on December 10, 1948 that Aceh was considered part of the Netherland's East Indies despite already declaring independence from the Netherlands three years prior. It was not until December 1949 that the Dutch and the United Nations in the following year officially recognized the sovereignty of an independent state from the former Dutch colony. From its inception, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights excluded certain peoples and, I would contend, legitimated acts of state violence in the name of establishing and maintaining human rights. A postcolonial feminist approach to *syariah* provides support for rejecting the imposition of a liberal-secular subjectivity through an

³⁴The communal practices of *adat* and *syariah* are rendered meaningless in that they are excluded from consideration as a viable social, political, and ethical alternative to state sanctioned human rights.

international human rights discourse by bringing the legacies of colonialism and state-centered patriarchy to the forefront of the analysis.

One example of why this approach is so problematic for even a descriptive analysis of *syariah* in Aceh is the attempt to account for the secular distinction drawn between civil and criminal laws that does not exist in Acehnese understandings of *syariah*. In the Human Rights Watch report on *syariah* in Aceh, the authors describe the phenomena of informal groups in the community assisting in the enforcement of and punishments for violating *syariah* as chaotic, disorderly, and as a form of vigilantism. What the authors do not consider is that for many Acehnese, *syariah* primarily involves communal obligations and responsibilities to others within the community, not to the state. By labeling communal (non-state) attempts to implement *syariah* in Aceh as ‘vigilantism,’ Human Rights Watch is failing to take into account the myriad other contributing factors, such as the impact of the concomitant internationalization of the provincial economy, the unequal distribution of international aid after the tsunami, the remnants of thirty years of intermittent lawlessness and military rule by *fiat*, the decreasing significance of indigenous systems of governance, or the continuation of political corruption and lack of transparency since LoGA was signed in 2006 (Human Rights Watch 2010, pp. 50-60).

Returning to the question of *syariah* as a utopia or dystopia in Aceh, the first step is to be clear what we mean by utopia and dystopia and what kind of moral and political agency is possible within each discursive framework. The English usage of utopia originates from Thomas More’s *Utopia* as an adaptation from Greek of the terms *οὐ*, a place, *τόπος*, being combined with a good/well, *εὖ*, place, *τόπος* (Utopia n.d.; Eutopia n.d.; Hetherington 1997, p. 9). By More “turning nowhere into the good place,” utopia becomes a place that by definition

cannot exist in the present and yet is considered the ideal state of social existence (Hetherington 1997, p.viii). Utopias are characteristically anticipatory futures that “are [illusionary] sites with no real place ... they present society itself in a perfected form” (Foucault 1986, p. 24). In contrast, dystopia did not emerge until the 20th century as an adaptation that applies the Latin prefix *dys-* to utopia as an indictment of a ‘utopia gone wrong’ or the anticipation of the worst possible (anti-utopian) social arrangements in the future (Hetherington 1997, p. viii-ix; Jacoby 2005). In a recent survey of utopian thought, Russell Jacoby traces a genealogy of utopian thought and its anti-utopian backlash from the Greek poet Hesiod to the 21st century and finds several peculiarities beginning with the works and life of Thomas More (Jacoby 2005).

In *Utopia*, More describes the ideal society as being one free of “bitterness towards others” and in this future world it would be “an errant folly for anyone to enforce conformity with his own beliefs by means of threats or violence” in stark contrast to the divisive impact of the Protestant Reformation during More’s lifetime (More 1992, p.74 cited in Jacoby 2005, p. 45). However, Jacoby warns that a purely textual analysis of More’s *Utopia* would be incomplete without taking into account the events of More’s life as an advocate of intolerance and violence towards heretics and reformers of the Church (p. 41-49). In his own words, More described himself as a “molester of thieves, murders, and heretics” (More 1984, p. 285; cited in Jacoby 2005, p. 46). It is in this contradiction between More’s ‘heavy-handed’ intolerance during his later life and his earlier depiction of a future of social harmony in *Utopia* that Jacoby identifies as the beginning of an anti-utopian backlash that would eventually dominate the emerging secular-liberal political tradition (p. 48).

In a recent article, Fatima Vieira argues that “neither utopia as a concept nor as a literary genre is moribund” and identifies three common misconceptions used to support anti-utopian discourses (Vieira 2010, p. 21). The first misconception is that utopian literature has declined drastically over the past two centuries. She discredits this claim by pointing towards the continual adaptability of utopian literature and the recent example of a utopian literary genre that utilizes “the narrative construction of hyperfiction” or a sub-genre of ‘hyperutopia’ found online in a web of blogs, discussion forums, and commentary (Vieira 2010, p. 19). The second common misconception she identifies is the assertion that utopian thought is necessarily linked to what many liberal political theorists argued are the failed social projects of Marxism or Communism. Vieira dismisses this claim by pointing out that the assertion that Marxism and Communism are failed political ideologies is still widely disputed among scholars and by reminding the reader that utopian thought is by no means bound to Marxist/Communist conceptions of an ideal/just society (p. 20). The third common misconception used to support recent anti-utopian discourses is, “paradoxically, connected with a very positive view of the possibilities of changing society, and was the result of the revival of utopian spirit that took place in the late 1960s and 1970s” based on the belief that “all of the material and intellectual forces that would enable change were already within the reach of man” (Vieira 2010, p. 20). Vieira argues for a pragmatic conception of utopian thought and warns against the conflation “between utopia and political blueprints” that has turned the phrase ‘utopian vision of the future’ into a pejorative statement (p. 22).

Twentieth century liberal political theorists such as Karl Popper, Hannah Arendt, and Isaiah Berlin have continued this anti-utopian line of reasoning by arguing that utopian thought,

especially in a Marxist/socialist form, leads to totalitarianism and constitutes an illegitimate radically evil 'ideology' for Arendt, 'illiberalism' for Berlin, and 'historicism' for Popper (Jacoby 2005, pp. 50-84). According to Jacoby, a common conceptual problem with each of these theorists is that they conflate two contradictory understandings of utopia and thus mistakenly correlate utopian thought as a whole with anti-utopian totalitarian movements during the 20th century. What each of these theorists are actually attacking is a fixed technologically driven deterministic model of utopia or what Jacoby labels a 'blueprint utopia,' which is wholly different in nature to an open-ended indeterminate and idealistic model of utopia or an 'iconoclastic utopia' (Jacoby 2005, p. 81-96). This difference is captured in Martin Buber's critique of the misusages of the term utopia that "undertake to deliver a blueprint of the perfect social order" rather than more accurate usages of utopia which embody the "true spirit of community" that can respond "to the needs, the stress, the demands of a situation" through human relationships and mutual cooperation (Buber 1996; cited in Jacoby 2005, p. 95-96). It is iconoclastic utopias that are of primary concern in the second half of this chapter.

Blueprint utopian thought and its dystopian counterpart function in somewhat similar ways in society by fomenting hegemonic and counter-hegemonic narratives. Hegemonic and counter-hegemonic narratives are ones that subsume all other explanations, be they individual or communal, into one overarching structural explanation of social phenomena. Hegemonic and counter-hegemonic discourses generally do not take the form of the inverse of the other, just as dystopias often revolve around the exploitation of one group for the benefit of another rather than representing a decline into all out disorder and conflict. They appeal to universalizable categories in order to catalog social identity and social space and thus create

fixed essentializing categories that offer “at one end, a blindness towards diversity, and at the other end, the total disintegration of the category” (Natter and Jones 1997, p. 145).

Discourses over the implementation of *syariah* in Aceh are often presented in such terms. According to many government officials and media reports, the implementation of *syariah* refers to the following of a blueprint in order to achieve a clear and comprehensive system of rules and regulations. While for many of the Acehnese women I interviewed, discussions surrounding the implementation of *syariah* were often prefaced with careful considerations of their relationships with others in the community, the importance of local customs, and the broader social aims behind implementing *syariah*.

While insights from Foucault and Natter and Jones help to recognize the inadequacy of limiting our theorization of *syariah* to either hegemonic or counter-hegemonic explanations, the work of Soja is beneficial in expanding how we understand space by challenging the epistemic foundations of ‘historicism’ that privileges time, “as richness, life, dialectic” and treats space as being, “fixed, dead, undialectical” (Foucault quoted in Soja, 1999, page 11). Historicism requires a constant reference to time as an overarching guide to the placement of all social occurrences and acts as “an overdeveloped historical contextualization of social life and social theory that actively submerges and peripheralizes the geographical or spatial imagination” (p. 15). It is this marginalization of spatiality that is important to recognize in order to begin to consider *syariah* in iconoclastic utopian terms rather than as a blueprint utopia or dystopia. The solution that Soja provides is to re-conceptualize social phenomena as a triple dialectic between ‘space, time, and social being’ in order to “open up and recompose the territory of the historical imagination through a critical spatialization” (p. 12). By constructing a

synthesis between space, time, and social being, space and social being are lifted to the same level of analysis as social scientists normally hold time. The implementation of *syariah* in Aceh needs to be approached in a similar manner by focusing on how it is constructed and deconstructed relationally among Acehnese rather than trying to map out the government's progress in codifying and enforcing *syariah* as a legal system through coercive force.

During interviews with women in rural areas of Aceh, the implementation *syariah* was often correlated to the implementation of *adat*. Several women described the practice of *gotong royong* (mutual/communal aid) as part of their village's *adat* and as being consistent with *syariah*: "It is our customary tradition to help each other plant paddy (rice) in the fields, if we don't have money to pay others. This tradition still exists ... Well, those things that I mention we do when we come to our neighbors' *khenduri* (community feasts)" (100620_001 2010, p. 11). *Khenduri* (sometimes spelled *kenduri*) are celebrations of important events such as a wedding, the birth of a child, the harvesting of rice or a young boy's circumcision and are seen as a way of redistributing wealth in the community (Nazamuddin et al 2010, pp. 95-96; Siapno 2002, pp. 127-29). *Khenduri* and *gotong royong* are examples of how *syariah* is being constructed and inhabited by women in Aceh that challenge the dominant narrative of a state-centered *syariah* being implemented vertically as opposed to *syariah* being spread horizontally through mutually beneficial relationships within a community.

Space is normally thought of as fixed and always in reference to something else in time, e.g. time zones always referring back to Greenwich Mean Time or historical events happening before or after the start of the Common Era. It is by way of fixed categories that space has a tendency only to be seen as referent, just as the space of a person's identity has had a tendency

to be viewed as an existing category that needs to be filled. For both concepts of space and identity, the interaction of a socio-spatial dialectic provides a way of visualizing the interstices or interconnectedness between the signifier and the signified. As space and identity are socially produced and act as an 'object/sign system,' there is "the potential for *tactical* refusal and resistance" such that they are inherently political as well (Soja 2011, p. 150-151). It is within this socio-spatial dialectic that we can find alternatives to hegemonic and counter-hegemonic narratives.

The concept of a 'triple dialectic' helps to explain how social phenomena occur across a plane of space, time, and social being in a similar way to how we think of a past event occurring at a particular time and place. By considering social space as a triple dialectic, *syariah* can be thought of as existing other than or outside of blueprint utopian/dystopian (hegemonic/counter-hegemonic) discourses. One implication of this for understanding *syariah* in Aceh is the need to recognize the multiplicity of forms that *syariah* can inhabit and the interplay between these forms as an "alternate ordering" or heterotopia "based on a number of utopias that come to being in relation to a tension that exists within modern societies between ideas of freedom and ideas of control or discipline" (Hetherington 1997, pp. ix-x).

The term 'heterotopia' originates from the prefix *ἕτερο* (hetero: different, abnormal, or other) combined with the Greek word *τοπία* (topia: place or landscape) and is most commonly used today as a medical term denoting a physiological 'displacement in position' between the abnormal and the normal (OED 2012, heterotopy). Once the object of study is shifted to social phenomena, the meaning becomes opaque from a purely historical materialist perspective. For example, are we referring to an event at a particular time and place in which an individual's

behaviors/actions are objectively being performed incorrectly or hold no significance to others?

For the purposes of analyzing social phenomena, heterotopias are better approached through both spatial and historical materialisms as embodied spaces that, as Foucault states:

have the curious property of being in relation with all of the other sites, but in such a way as to suspect, neutralize, or invert the set of relations that they happen to designate, mirror, or reflect. These spaces ... [are] real places—places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society—which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted (Foucault 1986, p. 24).

Foucault is arguing for a radical shift away from thinking of space in terms of sign posts along a linear chain of progressive events bound in time. Instead, heterotopia requires that space be thought of as places constructed and inhabited by social relationships that at times may correspond to a particular geographic location while at other times exist only in terms of a shared possibility or in a shared anticipation within a community. Foucault elaborates on this definition by providing six general characteristics of heterotopias: first, they are not exclusive to Western European societies and probably appear in some form in every society; second, they function differently over time, within a society, and across societies; third, they can integrate multiple and even contradictory sites into one place; fourth, they are usually connected to specific moments or spans of time that are disconnected from the present; fifth, they are constrained in such a way that entry is usually compulsory or based on the fulfillment of communal 'rites and purifications'; and sixth, they often fulfill the role of making a mockery of the irrational compartmentalization of people's lives or conversely by constructing a wholly-other/alternative space of possibility (Foucault 1986, pp. 24-27). Each of these provides insight into how heterotopias function and hint at how they are distinguishable from blueprint utopias/dystopias. The benefit in recognizing *syariah* as a potential heterotopia is that it creates

new avenues for conceptualizing *syariah* for Muslims and non-Muslims without falling into the trap of presuming a secular-liberal binary of a resistance/oppression model of agency.

In a recent study on the politics of identity and power in postcolonial space, Jane Jacobs conceptualizes lived postcolonial experiences as inhabiting spaces, both material and imagined, that are co-constitutive elements in the formation of the “cultural politics of place and identity” (Jacobs, 1996, p. 3-5). According to Jacobs, colonialism in all its forms not only appears ‘*in space*’ but also ‘*through space*’ and ‘*about space*’ (Jacobs 1996, pp. 1-3). It is in ‘place-based struggles’ that ‘signs, metaphors, and narratives’ of resistance to (neo)colonialism can take place and it is in these underlining spaces that the application of a postcolonial discourse is the most beneficial (pp. 1-3). It is from this radical approach to understanding space that Jacobs argues for a re-examination of how “the ‘real’ geographies of colonialism and postcolonialism” are constructed, deconstructed, and disseminated into people’s lives today (pp. 2-3). She is arguing for a shift in conversation on the postcolonial by rejecting the assumption that a lived postcolonial experience can be compressed onto a ‘textualised landscape’ that deemphasizes and reduces space to ‘a cultural politics of place’ (pp. 9). It is at the past and present sites of colonial contact that Jacobs finds the ideological and practical imprints of colonialism. The uses of rationality in the spatial imaginary of colonialism and in the production of the Third World city are important concepts for Jacobs. As Jacobs points out, the social power relationships of colonialism did not end with the formal end of European colonialism; power inequalities continue to persist in a host of different ways and often the former colonized elites embody the role of colonizer for those in minority groups or living on the periphery of the state. For many of the women I interviewed in Aceh, this spatial imaginary of colonialism (presently thought to

emanate from Jakarta) continues to be influential on how they perceive the significance of *syariah* in their lives. As discussed at length in chapter three, the Dutch East Indies administration viewed *syariah* as a threat and codified parts of *adat* across the archipelago into *hukum adat* (customary laws) as part of a 'divide and rule strategy' (Schröter 2010, p. 157-58). This contributes to the present populous support that *syariah* appears to have among most Acehnese. It is with this in mind that we now turn towards the main analysis of the interviews with women in Aceh.

5.2 Women's Voices: *Syariah* as Utopia, Dystopia, and Heterotopia

At the beginning of 2009 and during the summer of 2010, I conducted a series of interviews with Acehnese women from different socio-economic statuses, different ages, educational levels, and from different locations across the East and West Coast of Aceh. Three distinguishable perspectives on *syariah* and its implementation in Aceh emerged from the interviews. Before arriving in Aceh, I read the most recent academic discussions of *syariah* in Aceh, numerous articles from the national and international media and Human Rights reports from NGOs stressing the detrimental effect that the implementation of *syariah* was having on women in Aceh (Blackburn 2004; Feener and Cammack 2007; International Crisis Group 2006; Robinson 2002; Siapno 2002). These accounts are often framed in terms of religious fanaticism or Islam as a political ideology infringing upon the human rights of Acehnese people, especially women, followed by an assertion that *syariah* is inherently unjust and conflicts with basic human rights. Usually, pictures of a woman being caned or women looking nervous while being questioned by the *Wilayatul Hisbah* (*syariah* police) are scattered throughout these reports. In a recent speech in Indonesia, US President Barack Obama only made one reference to *syariah*

or Aceh by referring to the need for the “rights of citizens” to be “treated equality” in provinces such as “Aceh” so “that all Indonesians have equal rights” (Obama 2010, p. 4). The implicit claim that Aceh is lacking basic human rights is one that has been repeated over and over again in the media and one that is almost always linked to the implementation of *Syariah* law. In each of the following sub-sections, I present a different understanding of *syariah* as potential social spaces of heterotopia.

5.2.1 *Syariah* as a Blueprint Utopia

In contrast to the negative appraisal of *syariah* by international NGOs such as Human Rights Watch, I found many younger women in Aceh were quite supportive of the state implementing *syariah* in their communities and described it as empowering for Acehnese women. They often explained this need for the local government to implement *syariah* as a reasonable and justified response to the behavior of some Acehnese women who are not following Islamic dress codes or social norms. As one engineering student states,

The norms prevailing within the communities bring even more shameful consequences to the wrongdoers than those of being imprisoned or fined. I personally think that *Syariah* Law implementation is good because our life will be more organized and directed. However, we often find Banda Aceh’s women have not worn proper Islamic clothes to cover their bodies (100615_000 2010, p. 10).

Participant-1 is describing *syariah* in hegemonic terms as being both fixed in its prescriptions and clear in its prolepsis³⁵ of achieving an ideal existence as *ummah muslimah* (a community surrendered to God) in Aceh (Denny 1977, p. 59). The anticipatory element is further reinforced by linking *syariah* to a romanticized past of Acehnese resistance to Dutch colonialism and as a rejection of the present social inequalities in Aceh as not being Islamic. She continues,

³⁵ In this context, the term ‘prolepsis’ refers to a state of being in anticipation of a future event that someone believes will happen or has a significant potential of becoming a reality.

Talking about *Syariah* Law we should look at our history. Cut Nyak Dhien was wearing a headscarf to cover her body. Although she did not literally cover all over her body (like women nowadays), but her dress code indicated that Acehnese women were known as polite ... Acehnese people also strongly uphold their culture and traditions. That's why we can find customary laws here are stricter than state laws (100615_000 2010, pp. 9-10).

By invoking Cut Nyak Dhien, she is suggesting that the current emphasis by the *Wilayatul Hisbah* (*Syariah* Police) on women's dress is a necessary and legitimate step in constructing a future society based on a blueprint utopian approach to *syariah*. Her emphasis on the need for the state to correctly and comprehensively implement *syariah* may have partially resulted from being part of the first living generation of Acehnese to have grown up with *syariah* implementation being sanctioned by the state. Later on in this chapter a generational divide will become apparent from the interviews with women who were already adults when *syariah* first began to be implemented through the state, with the divide manifesting itself between those who approach *syariah* implementation as a blueprint utopia and those who approach it as an iconoclastic utopia. A second university student interviewed, Participant-2, originally came to study in Banda Aceh from a small village along the East Coast of Aceh, explains,

The implementation of *syariah* law serves as the real form of implementation of customary laws which have been ingrained into the Acehnese mind ... implementing *syariah* law is one of the responsibilities of the people of Aceh. For me, I embrace this responsibility towards my religion ... what I mean is that *Syariah* Law has been well put and it is our responsibility to God [*Tuhan* not *Allah*] to implement it ... implementing *Syariah* Law is a choice for each Muslim. They can choose whether they implement it or not; this is their responsibility to implement the teachings of their religion. It is my personal responsibility (100615_000 2010, pp. 11-12).

She describes *syariah* in terms of an individual choice or as her personal responsibility. She even used the generic *Tuhan* (an essentially secular word for God) instead of the more

common *Allah* during the interview.³⁶ While she does acknowledge the significance of customary laws, she relegates *adat* to being subordinate to the broader project of implementing *syariah* through the state. According to her, customary laws happen to fit in with *syariah*, not the other way around. She is also critical of other Acehnese women who choose not to implement *syariah* within their own lives. This is in contrast to understanding *syariah* as a shared responsibility within a group, a communal (not personal) responsibility, and in specifically Islamic religious language. Participant-2's understanding of *syariah* deemphasizes the role of the community by privileging individual responsibility to the state and emphasizing the universality of *syariah* for all Muslims in all places at all times. In the following passage, she describes how the main impediment to achieving *syariah* through state implementation are Acehnese people themselves, mainly women, who need the state to intervene on their behalf because they failed to make the correct choice, according to Participant-2, on their own.

In Islam, there are things that are either allowed or not allowed; if we look at what happened now, many of these things are being violated. This includes corruption and dress codes. Perhaps, at the beginning, women are targeted. If the women are beginning to wear proper Islamic clothes, behave well, and do not breach other *syariah* laws, *Syariah* Law implementation will then be running well ... Perhaps, *syariah* law implementation is first aimed at women, for example the raids - raids against women wearing tight jeans. I think it is fine because these people [*wilayatul hisbah* officers] are trying to remind and lead us to the righteous path. In fact, they remind us to be a better being not encourage us to display our body but encourage us to wear proper Islamic clothes (100615_000 2010, pp. 14-15).

She describes the implementation of *syariah* by the state as a necessity and a logical step towards achieving the long-term goal of social justice through social harmony implemented by the state. Some readers may instinctively want to conclude that Participant-2 is endorsing illiberal social values through the imposition of negative freedoms on women in Aceh. In contrast, I argue that making this sort of assumption is premature and in need of

³⁶³⁶ In Indonesia, it is common for Muslims and some Christians to use *Allah* when referencing God. *Tuhan* is a more general (neutral) term for God that can be used to refer to God in any religious tradition.

further interrogation. Rather, I interpret both Participant-1 and Participant-2 as essentially adopting a liberal-secular model of agency in a way that is empowering for them. While Participant-1 and Participant-2 fall into the category of viewing *syariah* as a blueprint model for achieving utopian social harmony, this does not mean that they are endorsing an illiberal vision of *syariah* or that they are in some way more prone to violence or intolerance than those who perceive *syariah* as a dystopian blueprint of society. They embrace *syariah* as a part of an Acehense identity and a legitimate part of civil and criminal laws that they personally can choose to follow. *Syariah* as a fixed codified body of law enforced by the state is appealing from their perspective, in part because of the promise of instilling order in a society dominated until recently by chaos and violence.

After finishing one of the interviews and getting ready to leave, I remember one of the participants telling me stories about what life was like during the conflict and how it was not uncommon to find a dead body lying on the side of the road in her village. She described how people were too scared to go near the body and give the person a proper burial out of fear of being labeled a *GPK-teroris* (*gerakan pengacau keamanan*: group of security troublemakers) by the Indonesian military. Since life during the conflict was not the primary focus of the interviews, I did not specifically ask them to tell me about their experiences during the conflict unless they had already brought it up in the conversation.

5.2.2 *Syariah* as a Blueprint Dystopia or Iconoclastic Utopia

From an outside observer's perspective, it is not difficult for me to imagine that thirty years of armed conflict with the government would leave many Acehense distrustful of the government's plan to create a new police force to enforce the new *syariah qanuns* in Aceh.

After the establishment of the *Wilayatul Hisbah* (Syariah Police) in 2005, several local NGOs focusing on human rights began to become more critical of *syariah* and especially of the *Wilayatul Hisbah* officers. This dystopic vision of *syariah* appeared to center on the *Wilayatul Hisbah* officers themselves. One of the main criticisms of the *Wilayatul Hisbah* officers is that they are poorly trained, poorly organized, and arbitrarily implementing *syariah*. The night I first arrived in Banda Aceh in the summer of 2010, I was introduced to a woman who had a different perspective on the implementation of *syariah* from the participants quoted above. In the following passage, she describes her experience of being arrested and detained by *Wilayatul Hisbah* officers.

I was caught by the police *syariah* in Ulee lheue harbor. I was eating corn with my friend and suddenly they [*wilayatul hisbah*] came in and because we are not *Mahram* [a person related to you that you cannot marry] we are supposed to, I mean, so, they took me to their office ... I don't want to confess anything because I don't have any special relationship with him. But, they won't let me go unless I make that statement. So, I have to make that statement and sign the papers. [So they made you sign?] Yes, and this is at 2AM in the morning (100610_000 2010, p. 5).

Participant-3 and her friend, a local journalist, were arrested at 9PM in the evening and detained for five hours until they agreed to sign a confession before they would be allowed to leave the *Syariah* Police office. When I asked her what reason they gave for arresting her she explained,

They [*wilayatul hisbah*] said its *khalwat - khalwat* means when you were in – in a remote place with someone who is not your husband or wife. But there are lots of people around me that night. No, I was not alone. They did that because that night, it was recorded by Al-Jazeera. Yes, there was a cameraman that night. So, they caught how the implementation of *Syariah* law in Aceh (100610_000 2010, p. 5).

Before allowing her to leave, the *Syariah* Police officers contacted her family about the incident and the next day they informed her employer as well. She described how both her family and co-workers blamed her for being arrested. Participant-3 is in her late thirties and is a divorced single parent of three children. For her and many other women I interviewed who

were 29 or older, they were already adults when the calls for *syariah* to be implemented first began in 1999.³⁷ In the following passage, Participant-3 describes how the implementation of *Syariah* Law has affected her life:

I think - it's the wrong time to run *syariah* law here in Aceh right now, because the community is not stable. We just got our - say freedom and we still have many trauma[s] from the tsunami. And we have to – to put the rule of *syariah* law here? I think it's not important. There is [sic] a lot [of] thing[s] [that are] more important to do here in Aceh than use *syariah* law ... I don't like this situation here in Aceh. Yes, they force woman to wear [a] veil. I don't [sic] wear [a] veil before *syariah* law. So [now], I have to do this. [*you feel like you have to do this?*] Yes, I have to do this but not for myself. It's because I have to follow that rule (100610_000 2010, p. 5-6).

Participant-3 describes the implementation of *syariah* in Aceh in terms of a blueprint utopia that turned into a dystopia and is having a negative impact on Acehnese women's lives. She states that "they [*wilayatul hisbah*] make good woman become bad woman" by appealing to a harsh and inflexible understanding of *syariah* (100610_000 2010, p. 6). Instead of focusing on what she views as the more pressing social, political, and economic issues in post-conflict/post-tsunami Aceh, the state implementation of *syariah* has come to dominate public discussions of social justice in Aceh. Towards the end of the interview with Participant-3, I learned that she was originally at Ulee lheue harbor that night to meet another friend, a lawyer, about helping one of her neighbors resolve a land dispute with the military. She said she was the only person in her neighborhood that was willing to stand up to military abuses of power. Instead of being deterred by the experience of being arrested by the *Wilayatul Hisbah*, she described the experience as galvanizing for her to become more active and involved in her community with the aid of a local human rights NGO. According to her, *syariah* should not be implemented by the state and it is better understood as a personal code of ethics. She did,

³⁷ While the state implementation of *syariah* through the *Wilayatul Hisbah* did not get off the ground until 2004, women's dress became a target of vigilante attacks in the summer of 1999 following a national campaign to allow the province of Aceh to implement *syariah* law alongside the existing secular national laws. See chapter three for a discussion on the early attempts to implement *Syariah* Law in Aceh.

however, still express a positive view of *syariah* when it is not being implemented through the state.

In the next interview with Participant-4, a woman in her thirties who is a community activist in a rural village off the East Coast of Aceh, the interviewee explains how the implementation of *Syariah* Law has affected her,

Even if *Syariah* Law is not officially implemented, we have long been Muslims; we have recited *shahadat* [bearing witness that there is no God but Allah and Muhammad is His Messenger]. *Syariah* Law implementation brings no effects on me because I have long been a Muslim. ... We're already Muslims. For me, it is not *Syariah* Law implementation but people that make mistakes ... It seems that *Syariah* Law is only for women. This is wrong. As a matter of fact, our religion doesn't teach this. I personally support *Syariah* Law Implementation but it should not be merely aimed at women (100701_001 2010, p. 5-6).

She describes the current implementation of *syariah* as being misguided and mismanaged by government officials. Instead of focusing on corruption, education or social welfare, she explains that *Wilayatul Hisbah* officers are primarily interested in targeting women's dress to give the appearance that *syariah* is visibly being implemented in Aceh. Several of the women interviewed described the targeting of women's dress as unusual in Aceh because wearing an 'Arab style' *jilbab* (headscarf covering the hair, ears, and neck) and concealing the entire body was not common in Aceh until the late 1990s. It was not until 1991 that the Indonesian government finally lifted a ban on wearing a *jilbab* in schools and universities.

One of the startling realities that became apparent to me within the first few weeks of arriving in Aceh is the inconsistency and seemingly randomness of the enforcement of an Islamic dress code. On several occasions, I observed the *Wilayatul Hisbah* conducting raids or sweeps on the street or on the beach. However, on the way to and from the *Wilayatul Hisbah* office they would drive past numerous women not wearing a *jilbab* or wearing tight jeans

without stopping. It seemed clear from my perspective as an outside observer that women in Aceh by and large did not follow the dress code supposedly being enforced by the *Wilayahul Hisbah*. The authority of the state in terms of enforcing a dress code appears to stretch no further than ten meters from the *Wilayahul Hisbah* office door and along certain highly patrolled corridors in the city. At one point, Participant-4 became angry after listening to an imam on *Baiturrahman* (a local radio station) preaching that, “WH [*Wilayahul Hisbah*] should not only deal with dress codes for women but also other daily matters” (100701_001 2010, p. 6). She was irritated that *syariah* was being limited to superficial issues in the community,

Syariah Law is a universal thing and it doesn't discriminate. It doesn't merely, for example, aim/stone those who are dating or committing adultery ... Yes, that should be one of their tasks. They should not only aim at people who are dating; what about those who don't perform prayers five-time-a-day? WH should conduct socialization activities in their own community first. WH personnel also committed adultery in the toilet [a reference to a well-publicized case of rape by WH officers in January 2010]. So, how could they act as moral police for the community? They should be trained and educated prior to being deployed in the community. They should get adequate education before they can judge other people. They should deal with their personal issues first (100701_001 2010, p. 6-7).

The current state of implementation of *syariah* for Participant-4 runs counter to what she describes as the true purpose of *syariah*, or what I argue represents an iconoclastic utopian understanding of *syariah*. In the village she lives in, they do not have local *wilayahul hisbah* officers that regularly patrol the area. Instead, the national police often take over this role. Her criticism of *Wilayahul Hisbah* is largely based on news coverage, first-hand accounts from other women in her village, and from her semi-monthly trips into the capital city, Banda Aceh. For less than 20,000 rupiah (about \$2) she can catch a ride on a minibus to Banda Aceh and stay the night with relatives in the city. Participant 4 describes the current implementation of *syariah* in terms of a blueprint utopia turned into a dystopia but one that should be reformed as an

iconoclastic utopian understanding of *syariah* that is concerned with the greater principles (*maqasid syairah*) behind implementing *syariah*.

5.2.3 *Syariah* as Iconoclastic Utopia

A third understanding of *syariah* comes primarily from women interviewed in the rural mountainous areas in the interior of Aceh. One of the main differences for people living in these mountainous regions is that they did not receive the development aid that poured into Aceh from national or international donors after the tsunami because they live just outside of the zone affected by the tsunami. However, the mountainous areas were directly affected by the conflict more than the coastal regions and women in particular were left out of reconciliation process resulting from the 2005 MoU-Helsinki. Logistically, it was difficult for me to arrange interviews outside of urban centers; especially in regencies further away from the capital Banda Aceh. I had visited my father-in-law's village in Pidie Jaya on a previous trip to Aceh in 2009, so I initially focused on arranging interviews in rural areas along the East Coast of Aceh. I was able to finally arrange for a set of interviews in more remote areas with the help of a woman I interviewed in Banda Aceh, but who was also from Pidie and knew my father-in-law's village. I could not have done this without her help. She offered to come with me and invited me to her home in Pidie as well as arranged for me to meet with several women further out in the country. I asked her if she could introduce me to three or four women to potentially interview, but when I arrived, there were nine women who had traveled several hours from villages even further out in the country to meet me. I only had about two hours before we had to head back to return the rental car, so I ended up conducting the interviews in small groups,

three at a time. It would have been better to do the interviews individually but the circumstances would not allow it.

I asked the first group of women I interviewed about how the implementation of *Syariah* Law has affected their lives. The initial response from one of the more senior women, Participant-5 was “What do you mean?” followed by “I don’t think so – nope (we don’t have)” any changes in *syariah* (100620_000 2010, p. 13). A second woman in the group, Participant-6 explained “*Syariah* Law implementation is only about taking care of those [women] wearing tight clothes and short skirts ... I don’t have a problem with that because I don’t wear such tight or un-Islamic clothes” (100620_000 2010, p. 14). The three women in this group ranged in age from their mid-twenties to mid-thirties to early-forties and wore relatively plain clothes. When I asked the group more directly, ‘is the implementation of *Syariah* Law a good thing or not?’ Participant-5 responded “I would say it’s good” followed by Participant-6 commenting “it should be good,” “because they ban Muslim women from wearing tight clothes” added Participant-5 (100620_000 2010, p. 15).

At the time, I was not able to follow what Participant-6 tried to ask at the end of the conversation about *syariah*. Later on when transcribing the interviews I discovered she had asked “why doesn’t he ask about my time in the jungle where one of my children died?” and when I did not respond to the question she added “well, we should be talking about it” (100620_000 2010, p. 15). What is striking after reading through the complete transcription is how insignificant the state implementation of *syariah* appears to be for many of the women I interviewed in rural areas of Aceh. They seemed baffled as to why I was asking questions about *Wilayatul Hisbah* and the state’s implementation of *syariah* when every woman in the group

had lost their home, at least one family member, and any savings they had during the conflict. At the same time, they did not express ill feelings or disapproval of *syariah* in their community but just seemed to express the idea that it did not seem to be a problem for them.

Instead of continuing down the list of my questions, they wanted to shift the conversation towards the financial problems that they have faced since the conflict ended and the lack of national and international aid in their village that was supposedly distributed across Aceh. Participant-5 began, “we wish that we women can open a business. We would like to continue our previous businesses but we don’t have money to resume our business activities. The government just ignores us” and Participant-6 added: “we got nothing from the government; we will surely not get anything if we wait for the government” (100620_000 2010, p. 17). The distrust of the government and the disillusion with the male leadership of GAM (Free Aceh Movement) emerged as a common theme in these interviews.

All of the women I interviewed that day identified themselves as *Inong Balee* (war widows/ex-combatants of GAM) and because of this, the conflict had a far greater impact on their lives than the tsunami or the state implementation of *syariah*. During the conflict, many of the women I interviewed describe the poor living conditions in the jungle when they were in hiding from the Indonesian military and the police. They described how their houses were burnt down by the military and everyone I interviewed had lost at least one immediate family member, a husband, or a child because of the conflict. Several women I interviewed that day described how their husbands ‘disappeared’ during the conflict and they are still searching for the location of their bodies. For these women, the state implementation of *syariah* did not appear to represent either a utopian or a dystopian future. Rather, their responses focused on

a lack of support from the state for basic needs (food, shelter, and education for their children) and how maintaining local customs (*adat*), including a communally-centered *syariah* and practices such as *gotong royong* (mutual aid), have had a more positive impact on their community.

In the next group of three women (Participant-8, Participant-9, and Participant-10), I began by holding off with my usual list of questions to give them a chance to steer the conversation to what was really important to them before shifting back to the predefined interview topics. Although I did not know until later the full extent to which the first group was unhappy with the focus of the conversation, I did pick-up on that they wanted to discuss other topics besides women's involvement in the community and *syariah*. The second group consisted of participants ranging from thirty to forty-five years of age. The first ten minutes of the interview focused on the increasing hardship being placed on women in rural communities in Aceh and the lack of access to adequate housing, jobs, and job training. All three women described how hard their lives were during the conflict and how life is still difficult since the signing of the MoU-Helsinki. When I began to redirect the conversation to the implementation of *syariah*, I received very similar responses to the first group. The initial response was from Participant-8 "*Syariah* Law umm=" with a long pause followed by Participant-9 chiming in "We are not impacted at all, right? We have already dressed like this even before Sharia Law was officially implemented [*So, no impact?*] nope (we don't have)" (100620_001 2010, p. 9).

Then when I asked if there were any positive changes in their villages since the implementation of *Syariah* Law, Participant-9 replied "No, nothing changes (not much of anything)" followed by Participant-10 "(for a woman) nothing changes" (100620_001 2010, p.

10). Participant-9 continued “Nope (we don’t have changes); the conflict had forced me to stop attending my classes at the university. I now want to resume my college education but I am not able to pay the fees. My child is attending a *Persantren* (Islamic boarding school) and I have to have money for him too” (100620_001 2010, p. 10).

The final group (Participant-11, Participant-12, and Participant-13) expressed similar views of indifference towards the state implementation of *Syariah* Law for themselves.

However, when the conversation shifted to discussing the practical benefits of implementing *syariah* Participant-11 added,

Yes, we like them (*wilayatul hisbah*) because they’re doing something good. - In the past, our teenage girls could freely roam everywhere they wanted to. *Syariah* implementation has helped discipline them. – I think it’s good. We’re no longer afraid when our teenage girls go out ... we used to prevent our teenage girls from coming out of the house [during the conflict] (100620_002 2010, p. 11).

What is interesting about Participant-11’s comment is the emphasis she places on the present practical benefits of implementing *syariah* rather than focusing on the potential future benefits that we saw from Participant-1 and Participant-2. One potential factor for this difference is the financial disparity between these two groups and the lack of economic opportunities available for the *Inong Balee* I interviewed. In the next section, I return to the question of space and how *syariah* is being socially produced in Aceh.

5.2.4 The Social Production of *Syariah*: *Syariah* as a Heterotopia

One of the most revealing experiences for me about the contradictory ways in which *syariah* is being socially produced by women in Aceh came from two interviews with a local *Wilayatul Hisbah* Commander and a female *Wilayatul Hisbah* Officer under his command.³⁸ I

³⁸ In order to maintain the interviewees’ anonymity, I am only including details specifically related to explaining the social production of *syariah*. Given the unique circumstances of public events surrounding my interview with both participants and their high level of relevance to the present discussion on *syariah* in Aceh, I have removed the

have argued earlier in this chapter that *syariah* existed in Aceh before the formation of the *Wilayahul Hisbah* in 2004. However, the presence of *Wilayahul Hisbah* as a government institution with police officers, office buildings, check points, and daily patrols has had a significant impact on the socio-spatial configuration of *syariah* in Aceh. In the remainder of this section, I argue that the implementation of *syariah* by the *Wilayahul Hisbah*, along with the reports by women in Aceh presented in the previous three sections, produce a particular kind of socio-spatial relationship that is consistent with Foucault's and Soja's description of a heterotopia. While the interviews with one *Wilayahul Hisbah* Commander and one *Wilayahul Hisbah* Officer are not enough evidence to draw generalizable conclusions about the *Wilayahul Hisbah* for the entire province of Aceh, they do provide insights into how some *Wilayahul Hisbah* Officers are engaged in the socio-spatial production of *syariah* in Aceh.

Before arriving in Aceh, I had planned on interviewing several *Wilayahul Hisbah* officers and their commanders from different regencies across Aceh. Unfortunately, this was not possible and I was able to arrange only two interviews. I had several meetings scheduled with the *Wilayahul Hisbah* commander for the capital city, Banda Aceh, but they were always postponed at the last minute. I was able to observe *Wilayahul Hisbah* patrols and checkpoints in various locations across Aceh. A *Wilayahul Hisbah* patrol consists of targeting a location in the community where people are suspected of being in violation of *syariah*, such as dimly lit cafes

name of the actual city in Aceh where the interviews took place and used pseudonyms for the interviewees and relevant public officials. In the United States, it is unlikely that the identities of the respondents would be ascertained based on the information provided. However, someone living in Aceh would likely recognize where the events I am describing took place and potentially be able to look up the identity of one of the participants (there is only one *Wilayahul Hisbah* Commander in each district/city). While I do not believe any harm would come to the participant in the unlikely event that someone was able to identify her/him, I am requesting that this portion of the dissertation remain restricted to Virginia Tech access in order to ensure the highest level of anonymity for all of the participants in this study.

where young people hangout at night or the beaches, and checking for one of the four main violations of *syariah*. The four primary *syariah* violations regulated by the *Wilayatul Hisbah* are the following: the consumption of alcoholic beverages (*khamar*), gambling (*maysir*), illicit relationships between men and women (*khalwat*), and adhering to the right belief/worship/symbols of Islam (*'aqīda/'ibāda/syiar Islam*) which in practice is often limited to the appropriate dress for men (covering the knees to the navel) and for women (all of the body except the hands and face). A *Wilayatul Hisbah* checkpoint targets high traffic areas, such as a busy intersection or entrance to an outdoor market, and focuses primarily on checking for violations of the Islamic dress code while still keeping a look out for other more serious violations.

In one particular city in Aceh, a new policy was introduced about a month and half before I arrived in the city that required the *Wilayatul Hisbah* to confiscate women's pants and provide them with a long loose fitting skirt. The new policy did not come from the governor of the province or the *DPRA* (provincial parliament). Instead, it came directly from the *Bupati* (Regent) of the area and proved to be quite controversial in the local and national media. It turns out that the *Wilayatul Hisbah* office answers directly to the local government of the regency and their duties vary greatly across Aceh mattering how the *Bupati* interprets the appropriate relationship between *syariah* and the state. I was able to arrange an interview with one of the officers and the commander of the *Wilayatul Hisbah* for the city.

On the way to the *Wilayatul Hisbah* office, I observed that a majority of the women I saw on the road and in the shops were not observing this policy. Most women were wearing a *jilbab* (headscarf) and long sleeves, although some had on short sleeves as it was a very hot day,

but very few women had on long skirts or a full upper-body *jilbab*, one that drapes over the shoulders down to the waist. This was the case all the way up to the door of the *Wilayatul Hisbah* office, where I was greeted warmly by several of the *Wilayatul Hisbah* officers and taken in to Commander Saiful's (a pseudonym) office. I began by asking Saiful about his background and how he came to be in his current position. Commander Saiful explained that he was appointed by the *Bupati* and his educational background is in public service. He was originally from another part of Aceh and moved to this city to work under the *Bupati*. He had several years of experience working for city government. Interestingly, he does not have any formal qualifications in *Syariat Islam*³⁹ (Islamic jurisprudence) or in *da'wa* (inviting others/proselytizing Islam). I was surprised because there are several local Islamic colleges and universities in Aceh that offer programs on *syariat Islam* and *da'wa*. Presumably, it would not be difficult to find graduates of these programs to fill such positions or at least fulfill an advisory capacity for local *Wilayatul Hisbah* offices. This was not the case. The head of the *Wilayatul Hisbah* in this city was trained primarily in Public Service and appeared to run the *Wilayatul Hisbah* office similar to any other department in the local government.

Commander Saiful began the interview by explaining the scope of the *Wilayatul Hisbah* in the city:

Right now in Aceh actually with *syariat Islam* we have four programs: about how to prevent gambling, how to prevent adultery, how to prevent alcohol consumption, and how to educate Muslims about their religion. Therefore, there are four programs in Aceh but in this (regency) our *Bupati* has a program to ask the people (in this city) to wear Islamic clothes. (100726_000 2010, p. 3-4)

We can see Muslim people - like girls or women wearing clothes like in Christianity ... there is no jilbab, they wear sexy clothes maybe ... tight [clothes] yeah, so our *Bupati* asks [Wilayatul Hisbah for] a program to make our people - Muslim people (in this city) wear Muslim clothes. (100726_000 2010, p. 4)

³⁹ Please note, *syariat* is the Indonesian spelling of the word *syariah* in Acehnese. Since the Indonesian language is the primary language used in local universities and colleges, it is more common to see the Indonesian term *syariat* rather than *syariah* when referring to programs of higher education in Aceh.

It is not unusual for the *Wilayatul Hisbah* in Aceh to enforce some level of an Islamic dress code. However, it is unusual that the *Wilayatul Hisbah* in this city took the additional step of confiscating women's pants and gave them a long skirt to wear instead. It is also interesting to note that he frames the problem as one of a growing Christian influence coming from NGO workers and international aid programs after the tsunami. Similar fashion trends exist in other parts of Indonesia and they do not appear to have the same stigma of being un-Islamic, especially when most of the women I observed would still be wearing some version of a *jilbab* (headscarf). I asked the Commander if this program is mainly focusing on women wearing Islamic dress or does this focus on men as well. He responded by explaining:

Yes, about the dress - they are the same. Women and men are the same, but we can see more of the – mistakes/errors (*kesalahan*) with women, it is a women's issue. Because we see men right now, the clothes they wear are what Islam requires ... but women they forget maybe or they are not ready yet to wear Islamic clothes. So, the focus in the program is still on women. The challenge/defiance (*tantangan*) is a woman's issue ... women think clothes and dress are a personal issue. So, that is the challenge. (100726_000 2010, p. 4-5)

When I pressed him further about the details of the skirts for jeans program, the Commander denied that his *Wilayatul Hisbah* officers had confiscated and then destroyed women's clothes because they were considered un-Islamic. He explained that:

Until right now, we still patrol areas that we believe that we can control. We do not cut their [women's] pants or something like that, we do not do that. But, we give information. In Islam, we have a law on how to wear clothes ... So, when we patrol and we find women or men are not wearing Islamic clothes, we stop them and give them information. We take their IDs and we ask them to go home, change their clothes, and after they change their clothes come back to that location. And get back their IDs. So, we do not pressure them. We do not cut their clothes. We do not do something like that, but we do still try to be persuasive. (100726_000 2010, p. 6)

The Commander is indirectly responding to several accounts published in the local media that have accused the *Wilayatul Hisbah* of doing more than giving advice. I do not necessarily believe the accuracy of this statement in its entirety because I heard several

informal accounts from NGO workers and people I spoke to in the city that the *Wilayatul Hisbah* have confiscated women's pants and destroyed them. One woman with whom I spoke, who unfortunately did not have the time to sit down for a formal interview, expressed her anger at the *Wilayatul Hisbah* for destroying her blue jeans that were very expensive and hard to replace since shops are banned from selling them in the city.

The implementation of *syariah* by the *Wilayatul Hisbah* appears to be sporadic and uneven across the city. It is almost as if the kind of *syariah* being implemented by the *Wilayatul Hisbah* is so different from what is commonly practiced throughout the city that the state's *syariah* moves with the *Wilayatul Hisbah* patrols and checkpoints. Based on my observations, once the *Wilayatul Hisbah* officers left a location the state's implementation of *syariah* evaporated. These observations of the implementation of *syariah* are consistent with the way that Foucault described a heterotopia. To recall, Foucault theorized that the six characteristics of a heterotopia are as follows: first, they are not exclusive to Western European societies and probably appear in some form in every society; second, they function differently over time, within a society, and across societies; third, they can integrate multiple and even contradictory sites into one place; fourth, they are usually connected to specific moments or spans of time that are disconnected from the present; fifth, they are constrained in such a way that entry is usually compulsory or based on the fulfillment of communal 'rites and purifications'; and sixth, they often fulfill the role of making a mockery of the irrational compartmentalization of people's lives or conversely by constructing a wholly-other/alternative space of possibility (Foucault 1986, pp. 24-27). The *Wilayatul Hisbah's* implementation of *syariah* in this city

appears to fulfill, at least partially, each of these requirements. When I asked the Commander if he thought the program has been successful so far, he replied by explaining:

We cannot say it is successful right now because there are so many challenges from women in society. There are so many challenges from NGOs that say this is a human rights issue. They say the government should not be involved so deeply in society - in the community with this issue about dress and clothes because it is a personal issue. We still try to be persuasive. We still give information, we share information – we hope they can understand why we are doing this. We did not make this program to cause people trouble - because we want to protect women from abuse. There are so many problems from boys and girls that have illicit relationships (*zinā*). And then they have a child and are killed by their parents because they are not married yet. So, we want to protect them from making that mistake. (100726_000 2010, p. 7-8)

There are many contradictory lines of thought embedded within this passage, including several patriarchal assumptions regarding culpability, communal responsibilities, and human nature. His response seems to imply that one of the ethical goals of the skirts for jeans program is to discourage young people from having pre-marital sex by wearing more Islamic (less revealing) clothes. Further, this passage suggests that the Commander believes women hold a greater amount of responsibility than men in the community for engaging in illicit sexual relationships (*zinā*) and as such, women have to be protected from this moral attribute as part of human nature. While these patriarchal narratives are framed as a justification for the implementation of *syariah*, I interpret his response as potentially having more to do with a crisis of modernity in an increasingly globalized city rather than his statement representing a unique characteristic of the implementation of *syariah* in Aceh. One of the reasons I interpret his response in this way is because the *Wilayatul Hisbah*'s enforcement of *syariah* began to grow dramatically at the same time as the conflict was coming to a close in 2005. For the first time in many years, a sense of establishing social order to the chaos caused by the conflict became a possibility in Aceh. Restrictions on life inside of Aceh were lifted and travel to Aceh opened up nationally and globally during this period.

The Commander draws a further connection between a perceived lack of general knowledge about Islam and how some Muslims in this city have such little knowledge about Islam that they have converted to Christianity. He describes the situation as the following:

We can see how Acehese people change after the tsunami. When the NGOs started coming to Aceh and people from other countries came to Aceh. We know that most of them are not Muslim people. There are so many social problems in Aceh because we know that some of our people, Acehese people, don't know better about Islam ... They do not know better about Islam, so NGOs come into their society, into their community. They give information about Christianity – about another religion compared to Islam. So, because people don't know Islam and foreigners – strangers compare Islam to Christianity, they, the Acehese, can think that Christianity is better than Islam. That is why until now we have a problem that there are people in Aceh who have been converted to Christianity. (100726_000 2010, p. 10-11)

To provide some context, it was only a few days prior to my arrival in that city that a small group of Christian missionaries were escorted out of the city based on the accusation that they had coerced a Muslim woman to convert to Christianity. As a general social rule in Indonesia, Christian groups are not allowed to proselytize to Muslims and Muslims are discouraged from proselytizing to Christian Indonesians. In contrast, it is generally acceptable for Christians and Muslims to proselytize to Indonesians that have not already adopted Christianity or Islam. After the interview finished with the *Wilayatul Hisbah* commander, I requested to interview one of the female *Wilayatul Hisbah* officers. I was directed to interview one of the new recruits who had joined only a few months prior. I was interested in finding out more about why she joined the *Wilayatul Hisbah* and how *Wilayatul Hisbah* officers determine if something or someone is violating *syariah*.

Nurul (a pseudonym) was in her mid-twenties and was originally from the local community. She moved to Banda Aceh to study law at the state university in Aceh, Syiah Kuala University or *Unsyiah* for short. It is important to note that Nurul's degree from Unsyiah was in

Indonesian secular law, not Islamic law. When I asked her how she ended up working for the *Wilayatul Hisbah*, she explained:

I think my intention was no different from any of the other graduates who wanted to find a job after graduation. I did not just apply for a position at the *Wilayatul Hisbah* office but also for other [government] positions. But, I ended up being here. I guess it is my destiny. However, I like working here. If I did not like being here, I would simply withdraw myself. (100726_001 2010, p. 3)

It is my understanding that it is less prestigious to work for the *Wilayatul Hisbah* office than for many of the other government offices, as well as less pay. However, any government job is still competitive because of the stability it provides and the high level of unemployment across Indonesia. Nurul's answer did seem to insinuate that working for the *Wilayatul Hisbah* was not her first choice, but she appeared to be comfortable in her job. Nurul described her basic duties as a *Wilayatul Hisbah* officer in the following passage.

Our duties and responsibilities have been pretty much set up for us in the log book; we follow such instructions. Furthermore, we also conduct surveillance activities against potential Syariah Law violations. So far, I have not been deployed to any of the surrounding villages. I have only been involved in surveillance activities in and around the city. I mainly conduct surveillance activities. If we find any violators, we will brief them as well as provide suggestions on site. (100726_001 2010, p. 4)

At this point, I shifted the conversation to the numerous potential *syariah* violations that I witnessed earlier that day on the way to the *Wilayatul Hisbah* office. I asked her "as you're a Syariah Police officer, how would you respond to such violations?" Nurul explained,

We would do something. We would first greet and warn them; we would also ask why are they not wearing Islamic clothes? We brief, advise, and warn them to not repeat it in the future. So far, we have only conveyed our message orally ... People respond to our advice differently; some accept it but others reject it. We are only trying to convey the message [of Islam] and it is up to them whether or not they change. Based on *Qanun* (locally made laws) No. 11 [2002], WH's main job is to 'educate.' (100726_001 2010, p. 5-6)

I decided to press Nurul further on what *Wilayatul Hisbah* officers would do if they found someone committing a more serious violation such as gambling or drinking alcohol. I asked her if she would take them in for questioning for such violations. She responded by describing several possible scenarios:

Actually, WH will process cases reported by the people or found during regular patrols. Usually, the local people will bring Syariah Law violators to our office and we will then begin the legal proceeding against such violations. If we find any unmarried couple sitting too close together during our daytime patrols, we will ask them to return to their respective homes. However, we will take them in if we prove that they have committed sexual activities on site. (100726_001 2010, p. 7)

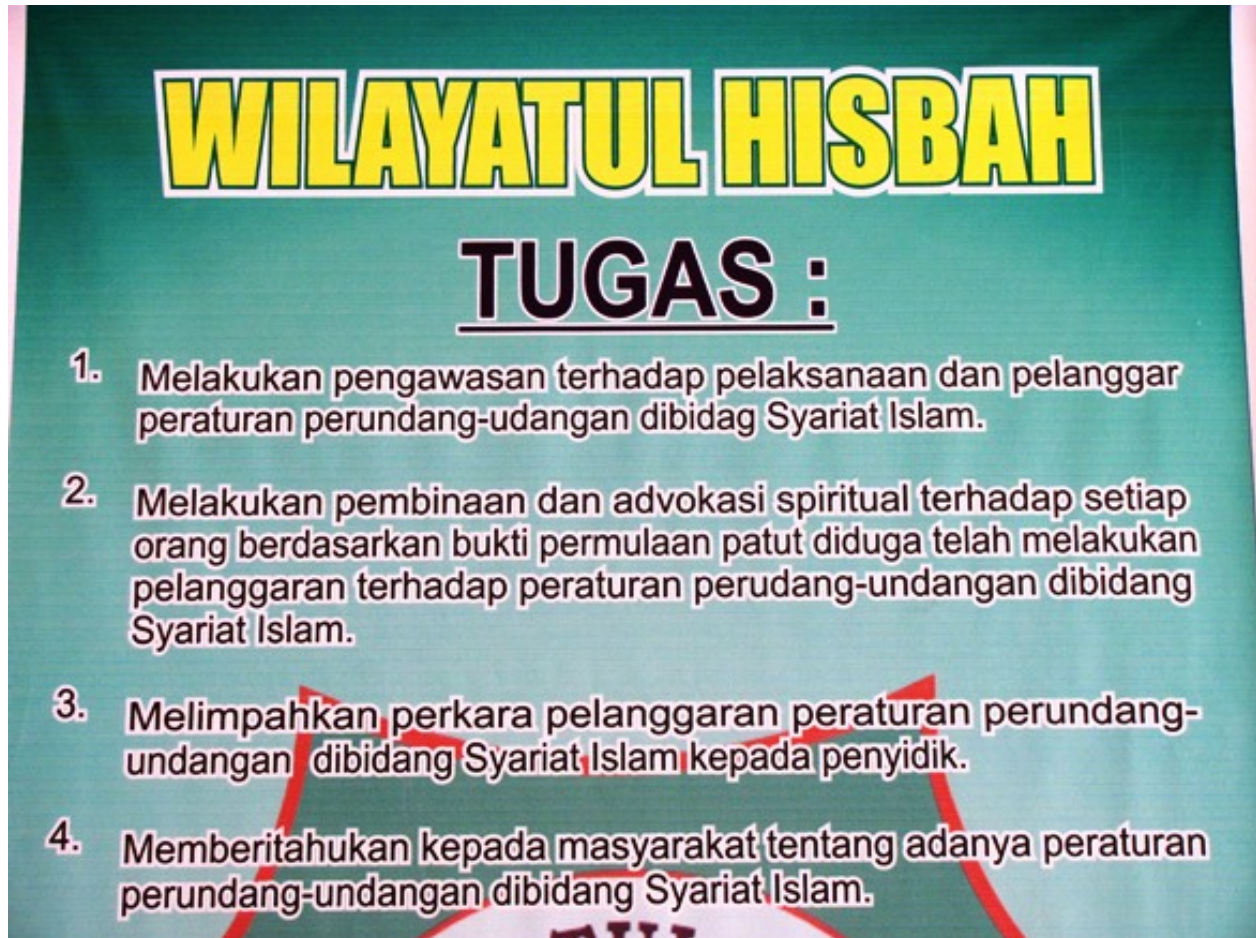
I wanted to know more about how *Wilayahul Hisbah* officers determine if a violation occurred in the first place. So, I asked Nurul what I thought would be a straightforward question, what is the basis for determining if Syariah Law has been violated? She did not understand my question, so I rephrased it as what kind of training did you receive about *syariah* when you became a *Wilayahul Hisbah* officer? Nurul appeared reluctant to answer at first and replied that “such training was not held but perhaps it will be held in the future; generally we are only briefed about WH” (100726_001 2010, p. 8). When I asked her if there was an official manual or *TUPOKSI* (duties and responsibilities) for *Wilayahul Hisbah* officers, she responded:

Do you mean individually? Or, do you mean the manual that is attached to the wall? A personal version of the manual is not yet available. (100726_001 2010, p. 9)

Nurul gestured towards two posters on the wall behind her that lists the tasks, authority, vision, and mission of the *Wilayahul Hisbah* for this particular city (see Figure 2 at the top of page 183).⁴⁰ The first poster describes the *Wilayahul Hisbah* as having the authority and tasked to prevent, counsel, reprimand, and prohibit anyone in the community from violating *syariah*. The second poster describes the vision of the *Wilayahul Hisbah* as promoting peace, public order, and community spirit. The *Wilayahul Hisbah* mission is described as to realize the implementation of *syariah* through partnerships with community leaders, religious leaders (*ulama*), and government officials. I had expected Nurul or another one of the *Wilayahul Hisbah*

⁴⁰ Only a partial image of the poster can be included because it contains an emblem with the name of the city as part of the background.

Figure 2. The top half of a poster prominently displayed on the wall at the *Wilayatul Hisbah* headquarters in a city in Aceh.



officers sitting nearby to suggest the Qur'an or a maybe a *tafsir* (commentary on the Qur'an) as the basis for determining how to implement *syariah*. All of the usual guides and sacred Islamic texts found in mosques, universities, and other centers of religious learning in Aceh appear to be disconnected (possibly absent) from the actual implementation of *syariah* by *Wilayatul Hisbah* officers.

At the time, I found it striking that no one in the *Wilayatul Hisbah* office made a reference to the Qur'an, *hadith* (saying/deeds of the Prophet), or *tafsir* (commentary on the Qur'an) when I asked about the basis for implementing *syariah*. In contrast, the average person on the street would likely say *syariah* is based on the Qur'an or the teachings of the Prophet.

Towards the end of the interview, I asked Nurul if she thought there were any problems with the current implementation of *syariah*. She explained the current situation as,

Syariah Law implementation needs the support of both the people and the government. This support is very important. I do not think that there is any problem with [*Wilayatul Hisbah's*] implementation of *Syariah* Law; the problem is with the people. (100726_001 2010, p. 11)

There is a sharp contrast between the conception of *syariah* that Nurul and Commander Saiful are actively trying to produce in Aceh and the *syariah* that is being produced and inhabited by the women interviewed earlier in this section. In both cases, women's bodies in public locations such as outdoor markets, on the street, and at recreational spaces such as at beaches are being defined through contradictory manifestations of *syariah* in a socio-spatial materialism that resembles what Foucault and Soja identify as a heterotopia. The significance of identifying the social production of *syariah* as a heterotopia is that women's agency as representative of a Muslim feminism in Aceh affords the flexibility to recognize contradictory visions of political engagement as a spectrum of embodied relational practices and values. In the same location, *syariah* can be constructed simultaneously as a blueprint utopia/dystopia, a state-centered iconoclastic utopia, and a communally-centered utopia from the perspective of differently positioned women in Aceh.

5.3 Conclusion

The role of *syariah* in the lives of women in Aceh is not as simple as being wholly empowering or disempowering as it is often portrayed to be in NGO reports, from government officials, and in the media. One of the main conceptual problems with activists, politicians, and journalists attempting to explain *syariah* continues to be the assumption that it is not problematic to superimpose a liberal-secular model of agency onto Acehnese women. This is

most commonly expressed through the discourse of human rights laws that are in theory universally valid across all people at all times. The problem is that it is no longer a discussion of human rights per se, in terms of a flexible and adaptive approach to an egalitarian communal ethic; rather, it is formulated as a judicial-theoretical system of laws bounded by a nation-state model of governance that is openly antagonistic to a local communal ethic that is not state-centric. According to the Acehnese women I interviewed, the implementation of *syariah* represents both the solution to and part of the cause of the Indonesian state's illegitimacy as a source of social morality and stability.

Syariah can be thought of as a heterotopia for women in Aceh because it is a socially constructed relational space that is inhabited in a multitude of ways and is constantly in a state of flux. The women I interviewed in Aceh describe their lived experience of *syariah* as ranging from a state-centered space of coercive veiling and homosocial normativity to an individually empowering space of equality through veiling and mutual respect in the community to a shared-space of a relational ethic that adapts to a particular communities norms and values. The socio-spatial dialectic aids in subverting the hegemonic discourses originating from superimposing a secular-liberal subjectivity that inhibits activists, politicians, and the media from recognizing the iconoclastic utopian vision of *syariah* as expressed by most of the Acehnese women I interviewed. *Syariah* should not be thought of as either a blueprint utopian ideal or dystopian nightmare; instead, it is actively constructed and inhabited in iconoclastic utopian terms that have the potential to form alternative ways of being. The potential for a localized-indigenous Muslim feminist politics to emerge in rural communities in Aceh becomes

a possibility when *syariah* is constructed as an egalitarian space for social justice that can allow for a communal moral economy rather than individualistic economy based in self-interests.

Chapter 6: Towards a Muslim Feminist politics

Integrating Muslim women's political agency with feminist theory is fraught with difficulties because of the patriarchal legacies of colonialism, the increasing international pressure to marginalize *Syariah* in many Muslim societies, and because of the divergences among scholars and among activists when it comes to defining what feminism is and where it should be headed. The aim of this dissertation is to address a number of these difficulties by bringing together insights from religious studies scholars, sociologists/anthropologists, feminist scholars, political scientists, historians, and Indonesianists/Southeast Asian studies scholars. A case study of women's political agency in Aceh, Indonesia provides a unique opportunity to study the coalescence of women's agency, politics and feminist theory in a predominantly Muslim society that has a history of being matrifocal (women-centered). Aceh is also uniquely positioned within Indonesia as the only province to be granted the right to implement *syariah* as part of the negotiations to end the prolonged conflict between separatist movements and the central government in Jakarta. The resolution of the conflict, that occurred in 2005/6, caused Aceh to enter a post-conflict period in which civil society and political institutions were opened up to allow former separatists (*GAM*) as well as a growing educated class of youth in Aceh to participate in determining Aceh's future. Given Aceh's history of matrifocal traditions and a strong sense of a Muslim identity, as the Veranda of Mecca (*Serambi Makkah*), how are women engaging in and inhabiting socio-political 'spaces' since the opening up of Aceh in 2005/6? The answer to this question, more than any others, contributes to furthering our understanding of how women's agency, feminist politics, and Islamic ethics come together in surprising and provocative ways.

In the first section of this chapter, I provide an overview of the main arguments from chapters one through five. I argue for adopting a localized-indigenous Muslim feminist conception of women's political agency and examine the benefits of applying a postcolonial feminist approach to the assemblage of ethical, political, and religious expressions found in the narratives of Acehnese women regarding the state implementation of *syariah*, informal/communal politics, and life in a post-conflict Aceh. Section two of this chapter identifies three potential avenues for continuing further research, based on the limitations of the present study. The potential areas of further research are in the following: the field of applied ethics/moral philosophy. This field can extend the analysis of an expressive-collaborative approach to ethics by considering women's engagement in 'moral repair' in post-conflict Aceh; the field of political theory/political philosophy, which can expand the analysis of the informal political structures in Aceh and focus on communal/informal political engagement in rural areas; the field of feminist studies/women's and gender studies, which can extend the analysis of religious feminisms, and the field of religious studies/Islamic studies, which can expand the analysis of how women in Aceh engage and inhabit *syariah* by collaborating with Acehnese women through a participatory action research project that fosters a non-patriarchal and non-state-centric *syariah* in Aceh. The final section of this chapter draws together the main conclusions from the dissertation and relations them to their respective fields of study.

6.1 Muslim Feminism(s) in Aceh

In chapter one, I identified three focal points for this research project that culminate in a postcolonial feminist approach to women's agency in Aceh through an assemblage of ethical, political, and religious expressions found in the narratives and practices of Acehnese women.

The first focal point was to develop a localized understanding of women's political agency in Aceh that is inclusive of communal (non-individualistic) ways of being, that is inclusive of non-state-centric ways of knowing and being, and that is inclusive of a broader understanding of religion (Islam) as a spectrum of embodied relational practices and values. A second focal point was to provide a critical engagement with the colonial legacies in the writing of Acehnese history that aid in understanding how Acehnese women position themselves in relation to Indonesian-nationalism, colonial feminisms, and Islam. A third focal point was to develop an understanding of how women inhabit, construct, and deconstruct religious law (*syariah*) in Aceh. Each of these focal points was achieved through a critical engagement in chapters two through five.

In chapter two, I presented several debates over liberalism's and secularism's influence on how scholars theorize agency in predominantly Muslim societies. Theorists such as Saba Mahmood, Jacqueline Siapno, and Judith Butler were central in supporting the argument that liberal-secular conceptions of agency based on individual choice and procedural rationality constrain the potentiality of women's agency to emerge in informal/communal arrangements. I argued that one of the central tenets of Islamic feminist scholarship has been to emphasize a shared responsibility among Muslim women across spatial, temporal, and cultural boundaries such that an image of a universalized Muslim woman is constructed in opposition to or in contention with particular examples of non-Islamic, often secular, groups of women (Badran 2009; Moghadam 2002; Robinson 2009; van Doorn-Harder 2006). Rather than redefining Islamic feminism to avoid such essentializing and reductive conceptions of women's agency, Tohidi, among others, has suggested abandoning the Islamic feminist project in favor of the

terminology of Muslim feminisms (Tohidi 2003). I argued that ‘Muslim feminisms’ provides a more accurate classification and increases the explanatory power of conceptualizations of women’s agency in the case of Aceh.

The use of ‘Muslim feminisms’ is especially relevant to the women I interviewed in Aceh because of their self-identified reliance on Islamic values and *adat* (local customs and norms) that are crucial for explaining how they understand themselves in the world. Embracing the plural form of the term Muslim feminisms allows for multiple interpretations of religious practices as well as other cultural values to be integrated into a more complex articulation of agency for women who identify in part as Muslim, thus, breaking the Eurocentric bifurcation of religious/secular life that so many scholars and activists have relied on in the past. I utilized Jacqueline Siapno’s study of women’s agency during the 1990s as a springboard for contextualizing Acehnese women’s experiences since the end of the conflict and the expansion of the implementation of syariah by the state in the province. Siapno’s account of *muslihat* (achieving one’s goals through indirect means) in Aceh and her critique of past portrayals of women in Aceh as passive ‘suffering stoic women’ were crucial in developing a theory of agency (Siapno 2002). Siapno identified the Acehnese adaptation of *jihad fi sabilillah* (striving for God) as a significant concept for understanding the amalgamation of *adat* (local customs) and Islam as part of a shared sense of an Acehnese identity. Additionally, I drew from the work of Saba Mahmood on the virtues of *Ṣabr* (patience) and *al-ḥayā’* (modesty) as a way to begin to conceptualize agency for women in Aceh that is both constitutively performative and ethically grounded (Mahmood 2005).

In summary, I argued that secular-liberal formations of subjectivity produce a particular *a priori* conception of agency that is antagonistic and detrimental to the present study of women's agency in Aceh. A secular-liberal conception of agency encompasses the following characteristics: a) a romanticization of agency as 'resistance' and a fetishization of 'resistance' as 'power'; b) the presumption that 'freedom' is universal, innate, and normative at all times, in all places, and for all peoples; c) the presumption that agency is separable and ultimately disconnected from material bodies; and d) the presumption of an artificial split between the political and the moral dimensions of agency. I argued for a conceptualization of women's agency in Aceh that is communally-centered and embodied within the socio-political space of a localized Muslim feminism.

Chapter three introduced Acehnese history and analyzed the effect that disciplinary rifts have had on the study of Islam and the study of Southeast Asia at universities in the Global North. These divisions laid the foundation for my elaboration on theoretical insights drawn from James C. Scott's theory of 'deliberate statelessness' in a revised conception of world history and the development of a non-state centric method to historiography (Scott 2009). The impact of colonialism on people living along the peripheries of state control has led some groups to engage in a politics of 'deliberate statelessness', which presents a direct challenge to the dominant historical myths in academia that promote the normativity of urban growth and the civilizing benefits of technological progress. I argued that an anarchist history is consistent with and is able to elaborate a postcolonial feminist approach by being critical of universal claims to the necessity for urban development and claims of the need for developing/maintaining a centralized state. A postcolonial feminist approach to historiography

allowed for the possibility of theorizing agency outside of the constraints of state-centrism, the privileging of urban life, and the constraints of liberal-secular conceptions of social equality and freedom.

I analyzed two historical cases from the history of Aceh in order to understand the connection between legacies of colonialism and Acehnese historical narratives. The first case was a comparison between the nationalist heroine Raden Adjeng Kartini from Java and the Acehnese local heroine Cut Nyak Dhien. A second case considered the recent expansion of the state's implementation of Syariah in Aceh and the competing discourses surrounding who initiated it and what Syariah actually represents for women in Aceh. Each case provided insights into understanding the interviews with Acehnese women from a non-state centric and non-patriarchal conception of Acehnese history. In summary, chapter three argued for the acknowledgment of an embedded patriarchal state-centrism within colonial historical narratives of Aceh and a need to better understand how Acehnese women position themselves in relation to Indonesian nationalism, Islam, and the legacies of colonial feminism.

In chapter four, I developed a localized-indigenous understanding of Acehnese women's political engagement that is inclusive of a non-state-centric and a non-patriarchal politics. I relied on the concepts of *muslihat* (achieving one's goals through ancillary or indirect means), *Ṣabr* (perseverance in spite of adversity), and *al-ḥayā'* (reticence or modesty) from Jacqueline Siapno and Saba Mahmood to aid in developing an understanding of how Acehnese women position themselves politically within their wider community. My initial research question for this project was to determine why there were so few women candidates in the run up to the 2009 provincial elections in Aceh. The preliminary results from field research in early 2009

suggested that a perception existed among some of the candidates, party officials, and local activists that women candidates in Aceh somehow '*masih belum cukup kapasitas*' (lacked the capacity) to successfully run for political office. In order to adapt the study to the available data, I shifted the focus of my research from women's engagement in formal political parties to women's engagement in informal or communal forms of politics.

I provided two illustrative examples of women who worked from outside of traditional positions of authority from the state and who were able to successfully mediate disputes that state structures were ill-equipped to handle. The first case was a woman from *Pidie Jaya* (Greater Pidie) who became an influential figure in her village by working her way through school despite the social stigmas against her doing so and by enabling other women in the village to further their education. The second case was a woman from the mountainous region of *Aceh Jaya* (Greater Aceh) who was able to keep a man out of jail and supported two women in negotiating through the communal stigmas associated with domestic violence and divorce. These women's experiences during the conflict illustrate examples of political agency that are distanced from the state, and, I argue, a conception of agency that potentially represents a politics of 'deliberate statelessness' in parts of Aceh. In summary, chapter four argued for moving away from a secular-liberal model of subjectivity in order to conceptualize a localized-indigenous Muslim Feminism in Aceh that aids in challenging broader discourses of religious/secular feminisms that continue to rely on patriarchal and state-centric formulations of women's agency.

Chapter five dealt with the complexities involved in analyzing how women in Aceh inhabit, transform, construct, and deconstruct *syariah* in their daily lives. The concept of a

'socio-spatial dialectic' and envisioning *syariah* as a 'heterotopia' were utilized in order to move beyond the dominant explanations by academics and local activists of *syariah* representing the potential for either a utopian or a dystopian future. Additionally, I argued that while Acehese women have been characterized in NGO reports and in the media as appealing to or describing *syariah* in a reductionist utopian or dystopian terminology, the majority of women I interviewed responded with a more nuanced perspective on *syariah* that does not clearly fit into either of these categories. The introduction of the terminology of Muslim feminisms provided a needed element of flexibility to move beyond secular/religious binaries that the current dominant academic discourses along the lines of an Islamic/secular feminisms is unable to accommodate.

The work of Russell Jacoby provided a basis for identifying an anti-utopian trend that aims to restrict utopian thought to a utopia/dystopia binary grounded in 20th century liberal political theory (Jacoby 2005). Jacoby argued for conceptualizing utopian thought in terms of iconoclastic or blueprint variations as a way to counteract appeals to an overly simplistic utopian/dystopian binary. An additional insight from chapter five is that *syariah* has the potential to represent a heterotopia aided in re-envisioning the possibilities of how *syariah* is being constructed, deconstructed, and inhabited by women in varying locations across Aceh. A heterotopia is a socially constructed space connected to a particular experience or physical location that acts as 'multiple places at once' in ways that challenge and, at times, reinforce hegemonic norms in a society. The first step in allowing for this possibility is the recognition of the inadequacy of restricting religious ethical practices and values, such as found in *syariah* in Aceh, to hegemonic or counter-hegemonic explanations. Based on the interviews with women in Aceh, I identified three distinguishable views of *syariah*: first, those who recognize the

current state implementation of *syariah* to be consistent with their understanding (*syariah* as a blueprint utopia); second, those who recognize of the current state implementation of *syariah* to be inconsistent or antagonistic to their understanding (*syariah* as an state-centered iconoclastic utopia); and third, those who recognize the current state implementation of *syariah* to be essentially irrelevant but not necessarily inconsistent or antagonistic to their understanding (*syariah* as an communally-centered iconoclastic utopia). In summary, chapter five argued that understanding *syariah* as representing a heterotopia through a socio-spatial dialectic allows for the recognition of a Muslim feminist conception of women's agency and opens up the possibility that an egalitarian non-state-centric Muslim feminist politics may potentially exist in communities across Aceh.

6.2 Contributions, Limitations, and Avenues for Further Research

There are several limitations within this study that can be overcome or addressed by conducting further research. One of the limitations of this study is its focus on women's political engagement in the community and the lack of targeted data collection and analysis of the specific Islamic practices and norms that permeate daily life in Acehnese communities. In order to have a richer understanding of how Islam is manifested in women's lives in Aceh, it would be beneficial to conduct additional research through targeted interviews, focus groups in selected communities, and an increased amount of time spent conducting participant observations of variations in religious practices across different regencies in Aceh. A second strategy for improving and expanding the field research component of this study would be to collect additional data through interviews and participant observations in cooperation with local universities and research centers such as Syiah Kuala University Banda Aceh, the Aceh Institute,

and ICAIOS (International Centre for Aceh and Indian Ocean Studies) regarding the success of recent non-governmental and government sponsored projects to support women's political education and increasing women's involvement in formal politics. The recent initiatives led by local NGOs such as Balai Syura and LIGA Inong Aceh (LINA) come to mind as examples of non-government efforts to support Acehnese women's engagement in formal politics.

During my time spent in Aceh in 2009 and 2010, I was told of a limited number of projects from local NGOs that focused on women's political education. Unfortunately, I was unable to attend any of these sessions due to the limited scope of my study and my limited time in Aceh. I received conflicting information on the success of these projects, as one participant who I interviewed described one of these workshops as 'impractical for Aceh' and as nothing more than an excuse to spend the day in an air-conditioned hotel with a free meal. Despite this discouraging sentiment, further research on the scope and success of local projects to promote women's political education in rural areas of Aceh would be beneficial in filling in gaps within the present study. There is significant potential for future collaborations between scholars residing in the Global North and local scholars and activists in Aceh, especially on utilizing multiple time frames and the potential for adopting an action research methodology.

As a dissertation in the Alliance for Social, Political, Ethical, and Cultural Thought (ASPECT) program, one of the central aims of this study is to develop new formations of knowledge production based on cultivating interdisciplinary approaches to academic dilemmas that would be otherwise unimaginable or outside the scope of traditional (multi)disciplinary structures. The investigation into a postcolonial feminist approach to Acehnese women's

agency that I undertook in this dissertation has the potential to contribute to numerous recent studies. In the remainder of this chapter, I will briefly discuss several of those studies.

With regards to moral philosophy and applied ethics, this dissertation contributes to studies that seek to elucidate the relationship between ethical and political dimensions of agency by situating it within the context of Acehese Islamic practices. Furthermore, this dissertation has the potential to be further developed by extending the current analysis of moral considerations in Acehese Islamic practices as part of an expressive-collaborative approach to ethics from a discussion focused primarily on defining the conceptual boundaries of ethical norms and values to one focused on 'moral repair' in post-conflict Aceh (Hinton and O'Neill 2009; Walker 2006). In terms of what academics and intellectuals can potentially learn from the knowledge and experiences of women in Aceh, the concept of moral repair, answering the question of what should we (members of a community: including victims, perpetrators, and bystanders) do now that an egregious harm or wrongdoing has been committed, stands out to me as a recurring question throughout this dissertation that is not directly addressed (Walker 2006, p. 6-7).

Asking questions such as, how are women in Aceh engaging in reestablishing broken relationships, establishing forms of accountability where there were none only a short time before, acknowledging past injustices, and cultivating hope in a better future for the community. This is at a time when the provincial government, national government, religious leaders, and the national military continue to struggle for social and economic power in Aceh. It would be beneficial to learn more about how a localized-indigenous Islam is being used or has the potential to mediate concepts such justice, forgiveness, and moral repair in Aceh. I believe

the field of moral philosophy is in need of a practical political grounding through a postcolonial feminist approach to moral reparations that is woefully absent in the majority of undergraduate textbooks, course syllabi, and academic discussions of ethics at universities in the Global North.

In terms of religious studies in general and Islamic studies in particular, this dissertation contributes to the efforts made in many current studies towards a re-imagination of women's agency, and the relation between secularism and religious traditions and practices. As such, this dissertation can further be developed by expanding the analysis of the socio-political spaces where women in Aceh are constructing, deconstructing, and inhabiting *syariah*, to exploring potential connections between the presence of Sufism in Aceh and the acceptance of more egalitarian interpretations of Islamic practices in parts of Aceh, to fostering collaborative projects with local scholars and Acehnese communities through developing a multi-year participatory action research project that cultivates a non-patriarchal and non-state-centric engagement with *syariah* in Aceh. As suggested in Jacqueline Siapno's work, there is a need for additional research focusing on the significance of race and gender in Acehnese folktales written in old Malay and Acehnese. An unknown number of these works have been lost in recent decades due to the prolonged conflict and natural disasters such as the tsunami in December of 2004. The present study provides much of the conceptual work needed to begin such a task.

Islamic studies as an emerging disciplinary field within the general umbrella of religious studies would benefit from additional research on the localized-indigenous Islamic practices across the regencies in Aceh that were discussed in this dissertation. It is my contention that communities in Aceh possess a local knowledge of Islam (and of feminism) that has the

potential to contribute to transcultural initiatives for inter/intra-faith religious solidarity grounded on place-based commitments to mutual-aid, shared-respect, and shared-responsibility with one another. The present study contributes to the growing prominence of postcolonial analyses within Islamic Studies and has the potential to connect with similar projects from other regions around the world.

This dissertation is also an attempt to contribute to the many works in feminist studies/women's and gender studies that seek to decenter the relationship between the individual and the state, and those that problematize the bifurcation of the public and the private, by expanding the analysis of religious feminisms and particularly Muslim feminisms that can potentially connect to indigenous feminist movements, women of color/black feminist movements, feminist scholarship from other religious traditions - particularly Jewish and Christian feminists, and feminist scholarship under the rubric of Subaltern Studies. The connection drawn between state-centrism and a liberal-secular conception of agency needs to be further explored with additional examples from more diverse locations to determine if the thesis presented in this dissertation could potentially travel outside of the context of Aceh. A deeper engagement with feminist scholarship on anarchist and postcolonial critiques of global capitalism would add a level of context to the present study that is currently missing. At the time of this writing, the significance of the spread of global capitalism in Aceh over just the last decade remains under theorized and largely unexamined. At present, scholars do not know the full effect that the opening up of Aceh to the global economy has had on communal norms and practices that regulate ownership, exchanges, and debt in communities across Aceh.

Finally, with regards to political theory/political philosophy, this dissertation contributes to the ongoing discourse on citizenship and critique to global capitalism. As such, it has the potential to be expanded with regards to the analysis of the relationship between the formal and informal political structures in Aceh, such as focusing on the communal political structures that are being maintained or have emerged in response to the tsunami, the military occupation during the conflict, and the post-conflict realities of an Aceh that is increasingly bound to the global economy. At times, the formal and informal political structures in a community overlap and they need to be explored further to gain a better understanding of how politics function at the village/sub-district level. Additionally, there is a need to determine the nature of connections between religious structures of authority and informal political structures. Much of the current academic research relating to the relationship between gender and politics in Aceh focuses primarily on state-centered and secular models of political engagement and leaves room for the potential misappropriation of communal practices as non-political when the very opposite may be true.

6.3 Concluding Remarks

In many ways this dissertation marks the beginning of several overlapping research projects rather than the culmination of a satisfactory conclusion to any one of the disciplinary or multi-disciplinary research questions considered within the dissertation. I acknowledge the concern that the use of 'state-centric' and 'non-state-centric' is not supported by sufficient empirical data to justify the following claims: that the colonial legacies in Acehnese historical discourses are state-centric, that some women in Aceh are politically engaged in non-state-centric ways, or that some women in Aceh construct, deconstruct, or inhabit *syariah* in non-

state-centric ways. I accept the need for further historical and conceptual research, which I intend to do as part of my future endeavors after graduation.

As someone who is at the beginning stages of embarking on interdisciplinary research, it is unclear if this failure to satisfactorily address disciplinary and multi-disciplinary questions is a result of the conceptual and empirical limitations of this study or if it is inherent in interdisciplinary research projects. The primary research question of this study was to develop a postcolonial approach to analyzing a localized-indigenous Muslim women's political agency given the limited scope and number of interviews that I conducted in Aceh between January 2009 and August 2010. In this dissertation, I have attempted to provide an interdisciplinary engagement with a localized-indigenous understanding of women's political agency in Aceh, a critical engagement with the colonial legacies in the writing and reproduction of Acehnese history, and an analysis of the potential for a non-patriarchal and a non-state-centric socio-spatial production of *syariah* in Aceh. It is my hope that this academic inquiry at the intersection of agency, religion, and politics will contribute, in some small way, to bringing together multiple disciplinary worldviews into a shared dialogue to promote a sense of mutual understanding and shared responsibility among academics, practitioners, and the communities in which they work. While I do not expect that anyone will completely agree with the interpretations and conclusions expressed in this dissertation, I hope that the readers will be able to find some redeeming value in the present study's attempt to better understand the relationship between religious practices and feminist values at a location that I find myself professionally and personally invested in nurturing the prospects for a better future.

Appendix 1 Interview Protocol and Consent Form (English version)

Interview Protocol for: 'Examining Community Involvement among Acehese Women'

Introduction

Overview of the project: I am conducting a qualitative research project entitled, "Examining Community Involvement among Acehese Women". The purpose of this study is to investigate community engagement among Acehese women since the tsunami in 2004 and the expansion of Shari'a in the province. I believe your input is critical in exploring and understanding women's involvement in community life in Aceh.

- Read the informed consent form aloud.
- Answer any questions regarding the consent form.
- Begin audio recording
- Test the audio-recording device - have the participant count from 1 to 10 in a normal voice.
- Record the participant's response and play it back to ensure audio quality and confirm that the device is functioning properly.
- Inform the participant that the study will begin when the audio recording starts.

Begin with Interview Questions:

Demographic questions:

- How long have you lived in _____ (city name, village name, etc.)?
 - What year were you born?
 - Where were you born?
 - Would you say that you identify as _____ (Indonesian? Acehese? Padang? etc.)
 - What is your highest level of education?
 - Are you married?
 - How many children do you have? (how many boys, how many girls)
1. Do you know of any women here locally who are involved in trying to improve the community? (If yes...) What kinds of things are they involved in?
 2. How has women's influence in the community changed over time?

3. Do you know of any women's groups that support other women in your community? If so, are you active in any of them? How do they help women?
4. Are there things that trouble you about the status of women in Aceh?
5. What do you hope for your daughters' or other young female relatives' future in Aceh? What do you think it will take to achieve this for them?
6. Could you talk about the impact of Shari'a implementation on women in Aceh?
7. Has Shari'a implementation personally impacted your life? (any examples?)
8. How important is Shari'a for you? (in your daily life?)
 - a. If this is true, do you think women should be involved in writing Shari'a for Aceh?
 - b. Have you ever had any experience with the *Wilayatul Hisbah* (Shari'ah police)? Can you tell me about your experiences with the WH? (if not personally, of friends or family members?)
9. As a woman, is there something that you could not do before Shari'a that you now can do? And, the reverse?
10. Some people say that outside (non-Acehnese) influences have really increased in the past 10 years. Do you agree? Please explain.
11. In your own words, how would you define the concept of 'women empowerment'? Do you support this concept?

Examining Community Involvement among Acehnese Women

Informed Consent for Participants in Research Projects Involving Human Subjects
Barbara Ellen Smith, Ph.D., Principal Investigator, Department of Sociology, *Virginia Tech*
Reed Taylor, Co-investigator, ASPECT PhD candidate

You are being asked to participate in a research project that investigates the community involvement of Acehnese women since 1998.

This study requires minimal effort on your part beyond participating in an interview which should last no more than forty-five minutes. In order to participate in this study, you must be at least 18 years old. This research involves no known risk to your person.

There is no compensation for participation in this project. Participation is voluntary and you may discontinue the interview at any time if you wish with no penalty. Your decision whether or not to participate or withdraw will not adversely affect you in any way.

The information you provide during this research will be recorded for accuracy. All individual identifying information will be kept separate from any questions you answer, to keep your responses anonymous. You will NOT be identified in any report or publication about this study. The researchers will provide the utmost confidentiality to you and other research subjects. In addition to not identifying you by name in any research presentations, reports, papers or articles, we will make every effort to faithfully and accurately record each response you give. Following standard university research procedures, all data will be secured using hardware or software locks and passwords. Only the listed researchers will have access to the interviews.

This research project has been approved, as required, by the Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects.

I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I have read the Consent Form and conditions of this project. I hereby acknowledge the above and give my voluntary consent:

Subject signature

Date

Should you have any pertinent questions about this research or its conduct, and research subjects' rights, you may contact:

Principal Investigator:	Barbara Ellen Smith, Ph.D.,	(+1) 540-231-8189 (smithbe@vt.edu)
Co-investigators:	Reed Taylor, ASPECT	(+62) 899-730316 (rtaylor2@vt.edu)
David M. Moore Chair, Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects		(+1) 540-231-4991 (moored@vt.edu)
Office of Research Compliance		
2000 Kraft Drive, Suite 2000 (0497) Blacksburg, VA 24060		

(verbal consent form: please read aloud)

Title: Examining Community Involvement among Acehnese Women

Informed Consent for Participants in Research Projects Involving Human Subjects
Barbara Ellen Smith, Ph.D., Principal Investigator, Department of Sociology, *Virginia Tech*
Reed Taylor, Co-investigator, ASPECT PhD candidate

[Read to participant and ask if they have any questions.]

You are being asked to participate in a research project that investigates the community involvement of Acehnese women since 1998.

This study requires minimal effort on your part beyond participating in an interview which should last no more than forty-five minutes. In order to participate in this study, you must be at least 18 years old. This research involves no known risk to your person.

There is no compensation for participation in this project. Participation is voluntary and you may discontinue the interview at any time if you wish with no penalty. Your decision whether or not to participate or withdraw will not adversely affect you in any way.

The information you provide during this research will be recorded for accuracy. All individual identifying information will be kept separate from any questions you answer, to keep your responses anonymous. You will NOT be identified in any report or publication about this study. The researchers will provide the utmost confidentiality to you and other research subjects. In addition to not identifying you by name in any research presentations, reports, papers or articles, we will make every effort to faithfully and accurately record each response you give. Following standard university research procedures, all data will be secured using hardware or software locks and passwords. Only the listed researchers will have access to the interviews.

This research project has been approved, as required, by the Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects.

I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I have read the Consent Form and conditions of this project. I hereby acknowledge the above and give my voluntary consent:

[Ask if they agree with last statement and if they have any questions before giving consent. Offer a hardcopy of consent form.]

[Ask for consent.]

Should you have any pertinent questions about this research or its conduct, and research subjects' rights, you may contact:

Principal Investigator: Barbara Ellen Smith, Ph.D., (+1) 540-231-8189 (smithbe@vt.edu)
Co-investigators: Reed Taylor, ASPECT (+62) 899-730316 (rtaylor2@vt.edu)
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The numbering system for the interviews corresponds to the date and ordering of the interview based on the following: the first two digits denote the year, the third and fourth digits denote the month, the fifth and sixth digits denote the day of the month, and the final three digits denote the order in which the interview was recorded on that day.

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