



# WOMEN AND PEACE IN THE ISLAMIC WORLD

GENDER, AGENCY AND INFLUENCE

EDITED BY  
YASMIN SAIKIA AND CHAD HAINES

I.B. TAURIS



# CONTENTS

<i>Preface and Acknowledgements</i>	x
<b>Introduction: Situating Peace, Islam and Women in the Everyday</b>	1
<i>Yasmin Saikia and Chad Haines</i>	
<b>Part 1: Deliberations: Questioning the Normative</b>	
1. Ungendering Peace Talk	25
<i>miriam cooke</i>	
2. Dialogical Din and Everyday Acts of Peace: An Islamic Perspective	43
<i>Chad Haines</i>	
3. Negotiating Islamic Feminism: Echoes of Medieval Theological Disputes in Modern Islam	69
<i>Richard C. Martin</i>	
<b>Part 2: Interventions: Claiming Public Space</b>	
4. Women, Islam, Transnationalism: 'Politics of Location' and other Contentions in Women's Organizing in Bangladesh	99
<i>Elora Halim Chowdhury</i>	

5. Agents of Peace: An Exploration of Three Acehnese Women Leaders 136  
*Asna Husin*
6. The Role of Muslim Women in Engendering Peace: Bilād al-Sudan (Sudan and Nigeria) 169  
*Sonad T. Ali*
- Part 3: Formations: Engendering Peace Dialogues**
7. In Pursuit of Peace: Muslim Women's Involvement in Peace-Building 191  
*S. Ayse Kadayifci-Orellana*
8. Crime and Reconciliation: Women's Peace Initiatives in the Islamic Republic of Iran 224  
*Arzoo Osanloo*
9. Religion, Women and Peaceful Revolutions: Perspectives from the Arab Middle East 246  
*Azza Karam*
- Part 4: Relationships: Building Communities**
10. Strangers, Friends and Peace: The Women's World of Abdullah Hall, Aligarh Muslim University 275  
*Yasmin Saikia*
11. The Living Monuments of Mourning: Struggles for Memory and Peace in Post-Revolutionary Iran 309  
*Shabla Talebi*
12. Merhametli Peace is Woman's Peace: Religious and Cultural Practices of Compassion and Neighbourliness in Bosnia and Herzegovina 345  
*Zilka Spahić-Šiljak*
- Conclusion: Gender, Peace and War** 365  
*Sally L. Kitch*

## CONTENTS

ix

<b>Epilogue: Dialoguing Peace</b>	380
<i>Daisy Khan and Cemalnur Sargut</i>	
<i>Contributors</i>	385
<i>Bibliography</i>	389
<i>Index</i>	408

## CHAPTER 5

# AGENTS OF PEACE: AN EXPLORATION OF THREE ACEHNESE WOMEN LEADERS

*Asna Husin*

The issue of women's active participation in social life is sometimes regarded as a secular value infiltrated into Acehese and other Muslim societies through Western influence. Yet, the active role of Acehese women reflects entrenched Acehese cultural norms, as well as deeply embedded teachings of equality in Islam. Culturally Acehese women have always been very assertive. Describing their involvement in the wars against the Dutch occupation, H. C. Zentgraaff commented in his work on Aceh: 'Acehese women are extremely courageous [...]. When they have to fight, this task is carried out with full energy, fearless of death, and [they] are often superior to men.'<sup>1</sup> The Dutch Orientalist and colonial official Snouck Hourgronje in his classic study *De Atjehers (The Acehese)* included an interesting image of women and men vendors in the marketplace – a condition that continues to this day. The image was probably taken prior to, or during his station in Aceh (1891–2). Elsewhere in the two volumes of his work Hourgronje confirms that women were active members of society, especially as *teungkeus* (religious teachers) and as advocates of their own rights in marriage, property and

child-custody. Women's involvement in the day-to-day management of communal life was natural in the context of Aceh's social reality, plausibly driven by the common sense of sharing tasks and burdens between household members, as well as, in the community with its social norms that treated women and men as equals. The testimony of these two Dutch authors characterized the position of Acehese women across classes and social status, and underlined that their engagement in society was a continuation of the traditional Acehese style of men–women partnership; this was demonstrated in the early period of Acehese Islamic history, and which to a certain extent still persists to the present day.

From this perspective, the men–women partnership or gender equality was enacted as part of the normal fabric of human existence and was never a matter of discursive debate, as is the case in the modern era. In ordinary practice, women and men could not think or behave otherwise. In fact, questioning or acting against this widespread general custom of gender–relational fairness was deemed unworthy of dignified men and women. This analysis of men–women collaboration in Aceh does not imply that the two sexes shared the same ratio of equal rights and responsibilities, nor does it suggest that social practices of women and men in Aceh exhibited the universal rights' principles of gender equity eventually adopted by the United Nations in the twentieth century. The reality remained one of obstacles facing both women and men, and discouraged movement beyond established social norms. Rather, it is to indicate that men–women partnership was enacted because it reflects the tendency of human nature to act in mutual association to achieve common goals of family and society where men and women are equal members. This statement should also emphasize that Aceh's established social norms recognized the constructive role of women far beyond their domestic tasks in the '*dapur, sumur dan kasur*' (kitchen, wash room and bedroom). This positive condition was reflected in the long history of Acehese women's engagement in the domestic, economic, political and educational dimensions of human existence. Furthermore, the unquestioned acceptance of gender involvement as an *act* rather than a *discourse* was shared across all segments of Acehese society and was

never viewed to be the privilege of a specific class. This legacy stands in sharp contrast to modern feminist movements, which remain predominantly an upper- and middle-class phenomenon.<sup>2</sup>

Similarly, the effort to locate gender concerns within Islamic classical teachings signals the reality that the issue of female representation and women's rights constitute a praxis or an activity rather than a mere conceptual discourse. An example of such praxis can be seen in the case of Umm Salamah, beloved wife of the Prophet Muhammad, who subtly complained to God's Messenger regarding the fact that divine *wahy* (revelation) was addressed solely to male believers. Her direct challenge led to the revelation<sup>3</sup> of Qur'an *Surah 33 al-Abzab* verse 35: '*Surely the Muslim men and women and the faithful men and women* [. . .]';<sup>4</sup> wherein 11 virtuous qualities referring equally to both men and women are specified. Similarly, Arwah (known as Umm Musa), wife of the second 'Abbasid Caliph al-Mansur (rg. 754–75), demanded a written marriage stipulation from her husband that he would neither take a second wife nor have a concubine while she was still alive. When the Caliph subsequently regretted his agreement and sought it annulled, Arwah appealed to the chief justice whose verdict ruled in her favour.<sup>5</sup> Umm Salamah's sponsorship of equal representation of men and women in Allah's revelation, as well as Arwah's effort to not share her husband with other wives, may be understood as gender-oriented advances advocating women's rights and gender equity.

These examples indicate that these two Muslim women figures might never have recognized the term 'gender' nor promoted gender discourse, but that gender was acted upon in an orthopraxic way. Understanding gender as an act rather than a discursive idea is very important in any discussion of women's rights and responsibilities in an Islamic context including in their promotion of peace. The same attitude had been demonstrated in Aceh and other Islamic societies throughout history. This further suggests that gender concerns are as old as Islam itself, and as such gender is a human concept rather than a Western import, even though the very word and modern discursive advocacy may have its origins in Europe. In other words, to better comprehend gender-equity aspirations and the promotion of women's

rights in Muslim societies, such as Aceh, requires us to look at actions and the active social engagement of women in their respective communities.

This chapter surveys the activities and roles of women in Acehese society by looking at the lives and experiences of three leading Acehese women who are active agents of peace. I narrate the story of their agency as they engage with their families and society. The narrative demonstrates that their gender consciousness occurs as a natural process of life action and social activism without a conscious awareness of the notion of gender discrimination and social inequity. Their access to education began with community-based Islamic institutions, and their involvement in Islamic youth organizations was a very important foundation for developing their social awareness. Family support was an essential dimension that shaped their agency of peace. Similarly, the backing of their husbands in their mature life was also necessary. Exploring the experiences of these women assists our understanding of both Acehese Islamic culture and women's active engagement.

Similar to the case of Sudan and Nigeria<sup>6</sup> women in Aceh play a central role in peacemaking using both Islamic and cultural approaches. This, in turn, empowers them to be leaders for change in their country. No doubt, women's success is limited, but the exploration of the strategies and methods offer a gateway to understand women's peace-building roles in developing societies within the Muslim world. This is significant within the context of real issues of political problems that stand in the way of the development of peace and women's participation in these communities. This study is divided into three sections. The first part looks at the emergence of gender consciousness as these three women journey through their growth and social engagement while reflecting relatively positive attitudes of Acehese culture towards women. The second part gives a brief overview of the conflicts they experienced and their growing involvement in promoting peace and reconciliation. This features the importance of social institutions and collective partnerships in nourishing gender consciousness and fulfilment of their agency for change. The final section assesses the



role of these women in post-conflict Aceh and focuses on their professional and sociopolitical activism to promote gender equity and sustainable peace.

### Gender Consciousness and Social Activism

A strong sense of complementarity between men and women in Acehnese society is reflected in its history. Seven women ruled three different Acehnese Islamic kingdoms<sup>7</sup> – four ruled the Aceh Sultanate for 59 consecutive years (1641–99). The famous woman admiral Laksamana Keumalahayati controlled the Sultanate's maritime security in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. She was noted for designing naval tactics to repulse outside encroachments from rival powers. Such prominent figures were the high point of women's public engagement in Aceh. Women royal guards were also known throughout the Sultanate beginning with Sultan Alaidin Riayatsyah al-Mukammil (rg. 1589–1604) and Sultan Iskandar Muda (rg. 1607–36) with his famous female royal division Keumala Cahaya. The heroic engagement of women, such as Cut Nyak Dhien (d. 1908), Cut Nyak Meutia (d. 1910) and Pocut Meurah Intan (d. 1937), as revolutionary leaders against the Dutch further underlines the high position of Acehnese women in their society. Just as significantly, Acehnese women, including the well-known *Teungku* Cutpo Fatimah (d. 1912) and *Teungku* Fakinah (d. 1933), were involved in the development of the earliest educational institutions known as *dayah* (from Ar. *Zawiyah* (prayer corner or study lodge)).

These historical leaders inspired the women selected for this study. The three represent different professional backgrounds: (1) Rosmawardani Muhammad is a religious high judge; (2) Naimah Hasan is a lecturer turned bureaucrat; and (3) Adiwarni Husin is a businesswoman turned politician. Yet all three are active members of women's religious networks. The first two came from the same geographical area of North Aceh, which has a strong *dayah* environment.<sup>8</sup> Yet they had distinctive upbringings. Muhammad first learned religion (*mengaji* (religious education)) by attending

*dayah* courses whose teachers were primarily men, while Hasan received early religious education in her village from a female *teungku buet* (religious village teacher).<sup>9</sup> Husin came from a different district, Pidie, and received early childhood religious education from her mother before joining a village *bale buet* (religious teaching institution) that was also run by a woman. Although all three are politically conscious, Muhammad has never joined any political party. Hasan, however, independently ran for the national senate in 2004 but lost; this action cost Naimah her university position. In contrast, Adiwarni was a deputy for Indonesia's Islamic Bulan Bintang (PBB) party in the province of Aceh and briefly was a member of the provincial parliament. Husin married a businessman some time after secondary school and never enrolled in university until after her children had grown up; Muhammad and Hasan married their seniors in college (who later became professors) right after finishing their bachelor's degrees.<sup>10</sup>

Coming from a large family of ten children, the sixth child Naimah Hasan lost her father when she was only ten-years-old. Raised by her widowed mother and older siblings, Hasan attended the local Islamic *madrasah* (school) where she impressed her teachers as very intelligent. As a semi-orphan, Naimah was once forced to marry the son of a wealthy family, but she protested by going on a hunger strike, which led to the cancellation of the planned matrimony. Her rejection made her family realize Hasan's ambition for education. Besides attending school, she attended *mengaji* in her village *bale buet* led by *Teungku Asiah* (known as *Miwa*). The *teungku* taught her to read the Qur'an and the basic principles of religion, while Asiah's husband instructed the young woman in reading religious books written in *Jawi*. The *Miwa* was an influential teacher who cared for her pupils and their character development. As one of her best students Hasan gained access to *Teungku Asiah*'s leadership circle and became an active and leading member in her village.

Naimah confessed that her *Miwa* and the *bale buet* unconsciously helped her to become active in community building, which raised the youth's sense of gender consciousness. Along with her friends, she and her teacher observed that other villages celebrated Islamic holidays,

such as the *maulid* (birthday of the Prophet) and *isra' mi'raj* (the Prophet's night journey), with public sermons (*ceramah*) and feasts; her village had never done it. In about 1968 Naimah, assisted by her friends, led the organizing committee to hold the first ever *maulid* ceremony for her village. They invited a female 'alim (religious scholar), *Teungku Sapiah* and her eight-year-old daughter *Mardiana*, to give public sermons in a well-publicized and attended *ceramah*. According to Naimah, 'this event was unique. It was a women's initiative, since everyone involved in organising and performing was female; yet it was attended by both men and women.'<sup>11</sup> The initiative celebrating the *maulid* became a habitual practice in her village repeated for years to come. For Hasan this was just the beginning of her community activism and gender awareness.

At almost the same time of this *maulid* celebration Naimah became involved in the youth organization of the Indonesian Muslim Student Association (PII). She attended its training and leadership workshops that instilled in her the idea of an Islamic mission for a just society and increased her desire for social engagement. Upon completing secondary school Hasan was adopted by her older brother, and she moved to the capital Banda Aceh to attend 'alimah (Islamic high school). Being in the provincial capital, Naimah blossomed further. Her affiliation with PII expanded her horizons as she became acquainted with other students from different areas of Aceh. When she entered University in 1973 at the IAIN Ar-Raniry State Institute for Islamic Studies (now the Ar-Raniry State Islamic University), Hasan had already become a mature young adult. Here she joined the Muslim University Students Association (HMI) that further advanced her experience of Islamic activism, cultural diversity and leadership skills.<sup>12</sup> Naimah excelled in both her academic and extracurricular activities, and she climbed the ladder to become the leader of the HMI Women's Corps in 1978. She was also active in the Ar-Raniry student body where she met her future husband who later supported her activism unconditionally. It was as the head of HMI Women Corps that Naimah experienced the authority and responsibility of leadership. She states that PII and HMI helped develop 'in me a sense of identity as a woman and a Muslim'.<sup>13</sup>

She notes that her awareness of gender equity also emerged from reading books on history: 'I learned about Cut Nyak Dhien and Cut Meutia early on in the context of Indonesia's struggle against the Dutch'.<sup>14</sup> Since she did not understand gender discrimination and did not feel that she had been discriminated against, she stated that her 'reading of Cut Nyak Dhien and Cut Meutia was neutral'.<sup>15</sup> However, the youth trainings as well as her university education changed her perspective when reading history: 'I realized the great contribution of Acehese women towards Indonesian independence and for the development of Islam. I also discovered that Aceh was once ruled by our queens for well over a half century'.<sup>16</sup> Naimah continued, 'the current [official] version of Indonesian history projecting the struggle of the Javanese woman Raden Adjeng Kartini [d. 1904] was different from the Acehese female experience'.<sup>17</sup> She became enlightened and realized that unlike Javanese culture, which restricted women down to the early twentieth century, 'Acehese women were liberated by Islam long before the arrival of the Dutch, and there were sultanas, palace guards, admirals, freedom fighters, and educators'.<sup>18</sup> This awareness made her proud but sad at the same time – sad over the predicaments of women in contemporary Aceh. Therefore, reading history reinforced her notion of women's social engagement and strengthened her Acehese Islamic identity.

Like Naimah Hasan, judge Rosmawardani Muhammad also comes from North Aceh, but from another village. The two met at the same *madrasah* in their area. According to her own account, Rosmawardani 'was not an exceptionally smart student'. She continued, 'unlike Naimah, I was just average'.<sup>19</sup> In addition to schooling, she informally attended *mengaji* at a famous local *dayah*. She went there because the *dayah* was close to her house and one of her brothers, as well as her aunt, boarded students at this *dayah*. Muhammad said, 'I did not formerly register because of its policy banning pupils from attending [public] school' as students were not allowed to attend both.<sup>20</sup> However, being an informal student did not prevent Rosmawardani from learning and experiencing *dayah* culture. According to her own words, when she was in the village, she 'dressed as those registered students and learned along with them'.<sup>21</sup>

However, she also said 'when going to the Islamic school I dressed differently'.<sup>22</sup> Juggling between the *dayah* environment and the school culture made Muhammad aware of their distinct social dynamics and cultural peculiarities, which in a way had implications for her understanding of gender and its multiple social manifestations.

Supported by her parents who were both *madrasah* teachers and local leaders of the Islamic national organization al-Wasliyah (founded in 1930), Rosmawardani developed within herself a strong sense of responsibility and mission. Her comprehension of gender was augmented by the speech of the al-Wasliyah national female leader Ibu Umamah during its 1966 Mushawarah (assembly) in Banda Aceh. Although Muhammad was only 14-years-old at the time and had just entered secondary school, she was so moved by Umamah's words: 'Whosoever among you raises and educates two or three daughters well, then marries them off and treats them honourably, you will indeed enter Paradise'.<sup>23</sup> Rosmawardani continued:

I was so touched by that speech and thus repeated her words over and over and remember them to this day. I did not know then that this was a tradition of the Prophet. It certainly made an eternal mark in my heart.<sup>24</sup>

Rosmawardani began to realize that education was her birthright, and it reinforced her understanding of another Prophetic tradition which she had long since memorized. That is, 'seeking knowledge is obligatory upon every believing man and woman'.<sup>25</sup> These two *Hadiths*, especially the first one as expressed by Umamah, forever changed how she saw herself. As she says, 'I recognise that I have a mission and fulfilling it must begin with my own spiritual and intellectual growth'.<sup>26</sup> Her experience at school and at PII contributed to her development. At one time, her school was organizing a speech competition for students with all candidates being boys. 'I like rhetoric and thus asked the *madrasah* principal if I could compete along with the boys. He welcomed my request and I

won third prize'.<sup>27</sup> Muhammad was a brave student. She said, 'My courage led the school to entrust me to be the head of the student body'.<sup>28</sup> This leadership position was facilitated by her membership in PII whose trainings and workshops helped her 'understand leadership as trust' and expound principal human rights as God-given. When she moved to Banda Aceh to pursue her University education in Islamic law (Shari'a) in 1972, Rosmawardani continued her association with PII. A year later she became the head of the PII Women's Corps when her leadership skills were further sharpened. As leader, she understood her responsibility to realize 'the PII mission of Muslim unity and the empowerment of the youth'.

Rosmawardani also learned about women's rights through history books. She notes:

I learn[ed] about Malahayati and other Acehnese figures early on during our history classes. But I did not then understand their role in the context of gender. I viewed them like any other national heroes who had to defend their country from colonial encroachment.<sup>29</sup>

However, her engagement with historical texts at a deeper level coupled with her enlightenment through the youth organization made her aware of these women's exceptional roles. 'Malahayati's strategic abilities to deter modern Western fleets at sea and her involvement in protecting Aceh's sovereignty were a true act of patriotism'.<sup>30</sup> Her knowledge about these great women leaders increased her sense of identity as an Acehnese and a Muslim. Muhammad attributed their activist role to Islam, a religion that she believes protects women's rights and honours their social, intellectual and religious manifestations. 'Ignorance and stupidity is the only argument placing us women in our current predicament'.<sup>31</sup> Like Naimah, Rosmawardani also found history classes to be empowering and strengthened her sense of responsibility and identity.

Our third informant, Adiwarni Husin, comes from Pidie. Her father was a merchant and an *'alim* who quit his studies to raise a family and became successful in his textile trading. Her mother was a

talented woman from a wealthy family who only finished primary education, but she was proud to be the first and only woman from her village to have completed primary school. Even though her mother was intelligent, she could not continue her education due to the revolutionary and colonial wars. In a sense, both her mother's and father's longings for their own education was transformed in the way they raised Adiwarni and her siblings. Being the second of six children and the eldest daughter, Adiwarni became a second mother to her siblings. She assisted her mother who was involved in community work and Islamic studies. Husin received her initial *mengaji* from her mother and only joined the village *bale buet* when she started school at a local *madrasah* at the age of seven in 1958. She notes: 'I had already completed reading the entire Qur'an when I joined the *bale buet* to learn *kitab*s [religious studies]'.<sup>32</sup> Both her mother and teacher provided Husin with the 'first sense of women leadership; they were influential leaders in our community and their charitable contributions to the needy were their true act of leadership'.<sup>33</sup>

Adiwarni's experience at school was extremely positive. As the most intelligent student in her class, she received praise and attention. When the school organized festive events to celebrate certain Islamic holidays, she would ask for a stage role singing, reciting praises upon the Prophet (*salawat*) or reading poems she created for the event. Husin stated: 'Our school principle was glad that we [my female classmates and I] requested to perform'.<sup>34</sup> When she entered secondary school at the age of 14, Adiwarni also became acquainted with the PII youth organization, and she attended PII trainings with her older brother. Participating in PII evening activities was not easy at the time because there was no electricity, no public transportation and the roads were separated by jungle. The presence of her brother helped but was not enough to make their mother have confidence in the safety of her children. Their mother sent her female relative to escort Adiwarni, her brother and friends to PII trainings. Adiwarni states: 'I was grateful to the efforts of my mother and to the lady who always accompanied me to the night events'.<sup>35</sup> Adiwarni felt that PII trainings inculcated in her a sense of identity as part of the global Muslim community as demonstrated in

her statement: 'PII enlarged my horizon not only on the issue of women's rights, but also on our connections and responsibilities to the Indonesian nation and the *ummah*'.<sup>36</sup> She discovered the importance of Islam as a social force for the betterment of men and women and the human family. Thus, PII broadened her view and provided an additional substance to the Islamic education she received from her school and the *bale buet*.

Adiwarni was engaged to a relative during her secondary school years, but the marriage was only to be consummated some years later. Upon finishing her secondary schooling in 1968 she wanted to enroll at a high school, especially as her older brother had now left Aceh for Medan in North Sumatra to enter university. Knowing that her parents had always supported her education, she was not prepared to hear otherwise. She was sad and disappointed that they did not let her go, but she understood the reasons: the absence of a high school in their area and the safety of a young girl living alone away from home. Her disappointment did not derail her ambition. With her mother's encouragement, Adiwarni began attending advanced Islamic courses offered by various *alims*. As she excelled with one teacher, Adiwarni moved to another. In her quest for knowledge and opportunity, she became a teacher at her former primary school and taught *Bahasa Indonesia* (Indonesian Language). She remained in this position until she married in 1971 and moved to Banda Aceh with her husband. While teaching and studying she prepared for a high school exam that she passed with honours. During the course of her religious study an incident occurred that tested her gender consciousness. Her teacher was accused of impregnating a young student, which he vehemently denied. To defend himself, he took his case to the court. According to Husin: 'Many believed that the charge was made to undermine his credibility'.<sup>37</sup> Believing in his innocence, Adiwarni and her friends attended his court proceedings in the district capital about 16 kilometres from her village. As a bicycle was the only means of transportation, the journey was difficult. On the trial days Husin often arrived home at midnight, welcomed by her anxious mother who was very concerned for her safety. Both mother and daughter understood the principle of trust. Adiwarni noted that 'it was her



trust in me that she permitted my going, and it was my trust in my teacher that I continued to be at the court'.<sup>38</sup> The accusation and the court proceedings taught Adiwarni about the fragility of social connections and the importance of one's honour. She believes that 'we must be vigilant of our actions and movements in order to block any room for allegations and doubts'.<sup>39</sup> As women, she says, 'we have to be even more watchful in order to keep ourselves in the right orientation and perspective'.<sup>40</sup>

As a student, Adiwarni loved history and poetry, and she had access to her father's books and journals. Her older brother who often brought books home was also a lover of Islamic literature. Additionally, her mother was a reader of traditional Acehese narratives (*Jawi hikayats*) and the well-known scriptural commentary *Tafsir al-Jalalayn*.<sup>41</sup> Her mother regularly discussed what she had read in her study circle, which Husin was sometimes part of; furthermore, Adiwarni's school library had a good collection of historical and literary works. Thus, when she became a teacher of *Bahasa Indonesia*, she taught by using history and literary works. She also requested that her students practice poetry writing and the transcription of *Jawi* works into *Bahasa*. She was fascinated by prominent female figures in Acehese history, and she utilized such materials in teaching her *Bahasa* classes. Sometimes she picked out a chapter from a history book and asked her students to discuss or summarize it, or occasionally requested them to analyse its grammar and syntax. She also asked her students to write a poem on famous female or male historical figures and then present their poems to the class. Regarding her own history study, Husin stated:

I never read history works from a gender perspective, since I thought it was natural for women just as for men to engage in their society. One of the benefits of our history study at the time was its gender neutrality which to a certain extent honoured women.<sup>42</sup>

Adiwarni referred to local authors, such as Ali Hasjmy (1914–98), Haji Abdul Malik Karim Amrullah or Hamka (1908–81) and

Mohammad Said (1905–95), who were genuine supporters of women. History taught Adiwarni the naturalness of women's leadership, the contrary of which is against nature. 'Aren't women *khalifat ul-Lah fi al-ard* [God's deputy on earth] just as men are?' stated Adiwarni<sup>43</sup> – referring to the Qur'an *al-Baqarah* 2:30 which portrays the divinely-granted responsibility of human beings on earth.

These fascinating stories about the lives of Adiwarni Husin, Rosmawardani Muhammad and Naimah Hasan demonstrate that equal treatment and social justice is an instinctive human leaning that can only be achieved through proper understanding and assertive perseverance by both individuals and the community. The actualization of justice and peace are values whose practice remains as a quest and a challenge in Achenese society.

### Conflict and Reconciliation

Aceh has always known conflict. However, the current violence began in late 1976 when the Aceh Freedom Movement (*Gerakan Aceh Merdeka*, GAM) was founded. The GAM demanded independence from Jakarta and waged an insurgency against the Indonesian military (*Tentara Nasional Indonesia*, TNI). The TNI sent a large military force to combat the small number of GAM fighters, but they also killed and abused many civilians. Initially GAM received only limited support from the people of Aceh. At that time conflicts were confined to certain areas, while many other places in Aceh remained vibrant and peaceful. However, as killings and torture spread, support for GAM increased and created new pockets of conflict. Once again Suharto's authoritarian government sent more troops and special forces to the province and placed Aceh under the Military Operational Zone (*Daerah Operasi Militer*, DOM) from 1989–98. The removal of Suharto by the reformation movement brought more political openness. In Aceh this unleashed information about ongoing DOM abuses, which raised outcries across the country, and Acehnese support for GAM skyrocketed. Many non-governmental organizations (NGOs), including those demanding a referendum,

emerged while national and international civil society showed support for Aceh. All these developments were greeted by Jakarta with antagonism. In the midst of violence, Acehnese women convened an assembly (*duuk pakat*) demanding a peaceful solution to the conflict shortly after the first peace negotiation known as the *Jeda Kemanusiaan* (Humanitarian Pause) was signed. The failure of the *Jeda* further escalated the conflict leading the government to multiply ground forces, which turned Aceh into a theatre of open war. This was followed by imposing martial law province-wide and an act of civil emergency from May 2003 to January 2005 when open battles, rapes, detentions, mass burning of schools and towns, as well as the destruction of houses and businesses, became a daily routine. The war traumatized the people and destroyed the very fabric of their social lives. This was the situation that Rosmawardani, Adawarni and Naimah faced during the height of conflict.

Adiwarni experienced conflict early on. When GAM was founded one of her brother's friends Teuku Asnawi joined the insurgency movement. As he fought in GAM's guerrilla war, Asnawi occasionally sent messages to Adiwarni's family. Several years later when Asnawi was captured and detained in Banda Aceh's prison, Adiwarni regularly visited him and sent food to his prison cell. As a woman, she had leeway without being accused of supporting GAM. It was during this period that Adiwarni became familiar with Jakarta's unjust economic and social policies against Aceh that had triggered the rebellion. Adiwarni stated: 'It was difficult not to sympathize with our own Acehnese aspirations; yet I was also aware of the danger of associating oneself with GAM'.<sup>44</sup> When the conflict escalated dramatically during the DOM period, Adiwarni encountered it as she travelled across Aceh with her women colleagues. By then she had already become the head of the Wanita Islam national organization in the province and the deputy of the Council of the National Forum for Majelis Ta'lim headed by the wife of Aceh's vice governor. These two are in addition to her affiliation with other institutions, such as the Women's Organization Cooperative Body (BKOW), led by Naimah Hasan. These organizations became Adiwarni's channels to serve those affected by the conflict. She

accompanied the wife of the vice governor across Aceh and experienced the tensions and distrust widespread in the community.

At the height of the conflict during the period of martial law sufferings increased, and the voices of moderation disappeared. As tensions escalated, the Acehnese people even became afraid of each other. Husin stated: 'The most difficult was to be neutral. As Acehnese no matter what we did we were considered GAM [by TNI]. Yet, we were also afraid of our Acehnese fellows [GAM]'.<sup>45</sup> As a business family Adiwarni and her husband had to watch their company's dealings. According to her, 'financial extortions in the name of one or the other party were common. It was an impossible moment for business'.<sup>46</sup> Husin further stated: 'We tried to survive even in the most difficult situation'.<sup>47</sup> As part of her peace efforts in 1994 Adiwarni began a scholarship fund from her family's *zakat*, which later extended to supporting the livelihood of conflict victims. She collected thousands of dollars from her family and relatives in Indonesia and abroad, and travelled to conflict zones to assist victims. As the scale of the need was far greater than what she could give, she felt humbled by 'grief for those who had lost everything to war'.<sup>48</sup> Realizing that material assistance alone would not resolve the root causes of the conflict, Adiwarni and her women colleagues embarked on the next level of their peace efforts.

It was in early 1999 when Adiwarni first contemplated rallying women against violence. Upon returning from a peace assembly in Jordan and learning about the Women in Black network, she discussed the issue with her colleagues. 'We should protest against abuses in front of military offices and public institutions and demand the end to this war', she said.<sup>49</sup> Adiwarni and her friends did not yet have a chance to protest, but this was part of their search for a solution. Discussions on how to respond to violent conflict materialized during the women's dialogue initiated by BKOW in December 1999. The women called for a Consultative Assembly of Acehnese Women (*Duek Pakat Inong Aceh*, DPIA) to be convened in February 2000. The DPIA was a difficult undertaking amidst the polarization of Acehnese women. Nonetheless, 476 women representing a variety of organizations and interests attended. In

spite of efforts to hijack this assembly, the women stood firm on their neutrality. They demanded that the Aceh conflict be solved non-violently.<sup>50</sup> Adiwarni was involved in the DPIA from the start of its preparations. On its opening day before Banda Aceh's historic mosque *Baiturrahman*, she and Rosmawardani led a public *du'a* (supplication) before several thousand participants, invitees and city dwellers who had come to support the women's initiative. The deliberations during the *Duek Pakat* were not always easy. Husin acknowledged: 'As the Acehnese were torn between the demands for a referendum [on independence] and re-integration, so were the participants'.<sup>51</sup> Threats against and support for these two choices as well as walk-outs coloured the deliberations, but overall 'the DPIA was a success'.<sup>52</sup>

Neither the *Duek Pakat* nor the *Jeda Kemanusiaan* that was signed shortly after stopped the violence, but with the voices of women and efforts of numerous civil society groups, solving conflict through compromise now became a viable alternative. Nonetheless, the failure of the *Jeda Kemanusiaan* further intensified violence with the swelling number of internally displaced persons (IDPs). Frustrated by this situation Adiwarni engaged the *ulama*, as she now became an executive member of Aceh's *ulama* Consultative Body (MPU).<sup>53</sup> She argued for action, but Husin was aware that 'everyone [*ulama* or otherwise] was really afraid to act; psychological fear and emotional trauma overwhelmed all of us [Acehnese]'.<sup>54</sup> Once again she contemplated a women-in-black-type protest, but according to her, 'this proposal also received limited support due to the common dread of martial law'.<sup>55</sup> In spite of the lack of concrete results, 'we continued to search for a solution', said Husin. As the situation became more fearful, Adiwarni stated further that 'even bringing humanitarian assistance could become a problem if we were accused of partiality'.<sup>56</sup> It was during this highly traumatized period that Adiwarni became involved in her sister's peace education project and assisted at its trainings and workshops. Husin stated: 'Peace education was the anticipation for emotional and social healing, and through it I glimpsed the shining lights'.<sup>57</sup> The terrible conditions in the wake of the

December 2004 Tsunami finally brought peaceful change to this violence-torn province.

The University lecturer Naimah Hasan gained her master's degree from the Philippine Women's University in 1985. Naimah first learned about the Aceh conflict in the early 1980s but did not experience it directly. She noted that 'life was still normal in most places in Aceh. Activities on campus took place without security concerns'.<sup>58</sup> However, the situation changed during and after the 1990s when violence became widespread. 'We were afraid of both GAM and the military, and felt we were under their surveillance. The news of killings and disappearances were extremely fearful'.<sup>59</sup> Yet the Acehnese could not do much. However, the new era of reformation after the fall of Suharto brought a drastic change. The revelation of these previous atrocities led Naimah and her friends to establish the Human Rights Forum in 1998 in order to properly document them. Enlisting over 100 students and activists, they uncovered numerous abuses across Aceh that reached the national headlines. This forced Jakarta to repeal DOM, but it did not improve the situation. According to Hasan: 'Student activists were pursued, and when they went out of their houses they were prepared never to return. Accused of being *cuak* [conspirator] led to disappearances and killings. The conditions were extremely destructive'.<sup>60</sup> Naimah continued on to say, 'we were all frightened; when our friends were seized and killed we remained silent. Our religious teachers were accused and then murdered, and we also were silent. We were frightened of both sides of the divide'.<sup>61</sup> As IDPs became more numerous and widespread, Hasan collected food packages from colleagues in Jakarta. When the food stuffs arrived in the military plane, Naimah was accused of poisoning the IDPs. She then received personal threats and intimidation as well as 'accusations of being a spy for Indonesia'. Her house was infiltrated, compromising her personal and family safety. She recounts that 'strangers would sometimes arrive to terrorize us with guns. Fortunately, they still respected my husband and called him *Teungku* [*'alim*]. Yet my personal life became very precarious, especially when other leading citizens were being killed'.<sup>62</sup>

Fear for her life did not stop Naimah from thinking of Aceh. Informal and formal discussions were convened in Jakarta, Medan and Banda Aceh that all explored possible solutions. Hasan stated: 'One of our meetings in Jakarta was attended by Bang Nur [Muhammad Nur Husin or Adiwarni's late brother] when we discussed the role of academics and the business community in resolving conflict'.<sup>63</sup> Thus, the *Duek Pakat*, initiated by women, was 'one of the many initiatives' in the making. It was about 'the role and position of women in politics, the economy and the implementation of Shari'a'.<sup>64</sup> As the head of BKOW where the ideas for DPIA were conceived, Naimah was indeed its true initiator. Therefore, when the controversy over a referendum slipped into the *Duek Pakat*, Hasan felt responsible and stated: 'we would all be killed by the military had we accepted the referendum choice'.<sup>65</sup> She tried to convince the participants to 'support neither re-integration nor a referendum, but to focus instead on a peaceful solution to conflict'.<sup>66</sup> In the heated chaotic debates over the two alternatives, Naimah took over the chairing and recited the *salawat* (praises upon the Prophet) to relax the atmosphere. When the situation became slightly calmer, Naimah repeated the disputed choices, and then quickly gavelled in favour of 'a peaceful solution'. Outcries and anger were expressed, but 'the decision was made'. Dissatisfaction was also expressed by spectators outside the hall, and the call quickly spread to harm Naimah and several others. Fortunately the women of the *Duek Pakat* had good internal security, and all were safe while the DPIA was concluded with integrity.

One of the recommendations of the *Duek Pakat* was to create an umbrella organization called *Balai Syura Inong Aceh* (Consultative Council of Acehnese Women), which selected Naimah as its leader. With the *Balai Syura* and BKOW as channels, she embarked on a two-front programme: a legal framework and women's participation. The task at hand was to create laws and regulations supporting direct elections in Indonesia and Aceh that would accommodate the 30 per cent quota for women candidates. Therefore, Hasan lobbied the Indonesian Parliament during its debates on Aceh's *Special Autonomy Law* to help promote both Aceh and women's agendas. She

focussed on policies affecting women and argued for their proper implementation. An important policy dimension was proper distribution of Indonesian public funds designated for Aceh. Joining the national monitoring team, Naimah travelled across the province to evaluate the national government's projects. 'This monitoring showed what conflict had done to these projects. Money was wasted and numerous projects could not be completed'.<sup>67</sup> Security problems, extortion and corruption were the main factors compromising the projects. 'Everyone knew the problems, yet no complaints were filed'.<sup>68</sup> War and conflict had caused the Acehnese to 'lose their values and integrity, for everyone has now become greedy and self-concerned'.<sup>69</sup>

On the issue of women's participation, Naimah and her colleagues spoke of their involvement in the peace process and beyond. When the *Jeda Kemanusiaan* was signed she served on the Committee leading its humanitarian action. Even when the *Jeda* conditions continued to be devastating, Naimah carried out her responsibility often at great personal risk. When the *Jeda* broke down in 2002 the conditions further deteriorated as both sides became more extreme. 'The *Jeda* made GAM stronger', stated Hasan. Aceh was boiling, and the attacks on Hasan increased. Obviously perpetrated by GAM, the threats to kill her, or to bomb her house, as well as the written harassment 'stop selling Aceh', became a daily routine. Her 'husband had to negotiate with GAM' for her personal safety. When the security became very worrying, the Indonesian Government offered to police-guard her house, which she rejected. She did, however, accept an offer of bodyguard protection from friends in Jakarta. Even then her life was at risk; Hasan was then exiled to the capital for two months to protect her own life. This was followed by imposition of martial law and a civil emergency when the violence and brutality peaked. Notwithstanding the deteriorating situation, attempts for peace continued, but to no avail until the Tsunami when new efforts led to the Peace Agreement signed on 15 August 2005. Although women were not directly involved in this peace negotiation, the agreement itself was a fulfilment of their call for a peaceful solution to this long, drawn-out conflict.



Rosmawardani Muhammad also went through the same negative effects of the conflict. She experienced violence first-hand since the early 1980s. Her husband's village, Cot Lureng, in Bireuen was a hot spot in the conflict. Her father-in-law secretly supported GAM. One of her nephews was also a GAM member who was often followed by the security forces. In addition to her family's leaning, Muhammad experienced conflict through another manifestation. While living in Banda Aceh where violence did not manifest until the late 1990s, she and her husband regularly returned to their villages to visit elderly parents since their marriage in 1980. 'We did so even during the height of the conflict', she said.<sup>70</sup> They sometimes arrived in Cot Lureng during the course of open fighting and 'saw the dead bodies being carried away'.<sup>71</sup> They experienced detentions and body searches, and they saw villages and towns burnt down with flaring fires. Her affiliation with the court and her husband's professorship helped them when they argued for neutrality. When life in Cot Lureng was no longer bearable, her in-laws moved to another village and left their house behind damaged and looted. 'This was the price of war'. Rosmawardani observed that 'being always at gun point made us less afraid, although we had to be very careful'.<sup>72</sup>

Although Muhammad herself had become immune from the fear of war, the damage she saw 'broke [her] heart'. Her village had been a prosperous farming area with all varieties of fruit and crops, but 'it is now all left fallow, causing poverty and hardship'.<sup>73</sup> Feeling depressed by this situation, she searched for a solution and reached out to the *ulama*, the Provincial Secretary and to her women colleagues. When the call for the *Duek Pakat* emerged, she embraced it with an open heart. Rosmawardani was part of its planning committee and attended its preparatory meetings in Jakarta, Medan and Banda Aceh. Not aware of donors' financial assistance, Muhammad helped raise funds to support the DPIA. Although she did not secure much, the fact that many donated showed 'how much women and the people of Aceh wanted peace'. The energy manifested during 'the *Duek Pakat* was phenomenal, and the controversy surrounding a referendum was a natural manifestation of a divided society caused by war'.<sup>74</sup> The fact that the *Duek Pakat* was concluded

with integrity demonstrated the maturity of its women participants and organizers.

Rosmawardani believed strongly that political actors and public institutions were critical to conflict management. In 2000 she consciously supported a candidate for governor believing that he would bring peace to Aceh. When her candidate lost, Rosmawardani was disappointed, yet she realized 'that was the reality of the elections: one won and the other lost'.<sup>75</sup> She then tried to work with the elected governor to promote peace. Rosmawardani and several of her friends formed a secret group to search for a solution. They quietly brought the new governor and the GAM leader together to explore the possibility for a compromise. While this meeting was constructive, it did not materialize its intended objective. However, it showed to 'both sides the wish of the Acehnese'. People were indeed tired of war and this initiative was one of many promoted by different Acehnese groups. When the situation 'was extremely frightening with bloodshed and coercion', she returned to the head of the *ulama* arguing for action. Muhammad stated: 'I had a huge disagreement with him because I wanted the *ulama* to do more'.<sup>76</sup> In the midst of uncertainty and fear, martial law was instituted causing Rosmawardani to think '*ka kiamat* [sign of the end hour]'.<sup>76</sup>

Martial law was seen to be a sign of *kiamat* by the Acehnese. Civic work and activism were put on hold, and all NGO foreign workers were forced to leave. Activist citizens were put under surveillance. One of the very few NGOs that remained active was the Peace Education Program (PPD)<sup>77</sup> and Rosmawardani had been involved in this initiative since 2001. She assisted in its workshops and teacher training and attended a PPD mediation workshop where she was exposed to contemporary mediation skills for the first time. Reflecting on her experience, she stated: 'I found peace education to be empowering. At the time [of martial law] when no other activities were possible, PPD became a place of refuge'.<sup>78</sup> Indeed at this time when civic education promoting Indonesian national values and State ideology was banned, PPD's peace manuals were used in schools to inculcate universal Islamic teachings on human rights, pluralism and social justice. As admitted by the teachers involved in this effort at

that time, 'our peace manuals were considered neutral by both GAM and the military'. The experience of these Acehese women leaders during the conflict and their unceasing efforts at reconciliation highlights the human need for communal integrity and societal harmony in the midst of violence.

### Sociopolitical Activism and Sustainable Peace

Rosmawardani's exposure to modern mediation skills strengthened her capacity as a religious judge. The Tsunami that swept away over 150,000 Acehese created a massive inheritance problem. Daily, she witnessed gender insensitive verdicts at the religious court: 'There was an assumption that men were breadwinners. So the assets of those men who had died in the Tsunami went straight to their families, giving female widowers only a small share of their legal inheritance'. If the victims were female, all their assets went directly to the surviving husbands leaving nothing for the wives' relatives. 'This was un-Islamic'.<sup>79</sup> She protested against such verdicts and argued that women could have been the breadwinners, and thus it was the responsibility of the judges to investigate and search for this information. In spite of her protests, these decisions were made, and banks paid the claims. She brought the issue to the attention of her superiors, the National Bank, the local parliament, the *ulama* and many others. Finally, the idea of a workshop to explore this matter emerged in late 2005. This workshop recommended that the rights of women should be given a priority and the issue of *bak bersama* (rights to mutual earnings) – a customary practice sanctioned by religious authority – should be examined. 'This workshop was an eye opener for many religious judges, and it changed their understanding of the Islamic legal injunctions they sought to implement'.<sup>80</sup>

This unusual gathering led to two other important initiatives that Rosmawardani conceptualized: gender training and a mediation workshop. Supported by the Asia Foundation, the three-year gender project aimed to 'empower religious judges with gender perspectives in order to help them deal with court cases with fairness and sensitivity'.<sup>81</sup> This project trained all 300 religious judges from

Aceh's 18 religious courts. It was successful, and many participants felt empowered by this new perspective. It also generated envy on the part of certain court leaders who regarded that 'Rosmawardani has usurped [their] ploughing land'.<sup>82</sup> Despite this, with the support of her superiors in Jakarta, she continued her work, which resulted in her promotion to the rank of High Judge, a promotion she had long deserved; 'as women we were not given any priority'.<sup>83</sup> Her active engagement changed the inattention of her superiors. Upon completing the gender project, Rosmawardani received another grant for mediation workshops. Her own experience with the PPD trainings, as well as her mediation trip to Australia in 2006, helped her see the importance of resolving court conflicts in a peaceful manner. She found it in accord with the Islamic principle of legal justice. Unfortunately, before Rosmawardani could complete her mediation project, news of her transfer to Pekanbaru in central Sumatra arrived. Her 'wish to empower all Acehese religious judges in mediation skills was shattered by this transfer', but the decision was irreversible.<sup>84</sup>

Rosmawardani has since been retransferred to the high religious court in Medan, the capital of North Sumatra. 'Neither Pekanbaru nor Medan is the same as my homeland of Aceh. New places with new people and fresh challenges required time to adjust. It was very difficult, so I could not do like I had done in Aceh'.<sup>85</sup> This challenge opened up a new opportunity, for she indeed found a fresh, broader role in her legal service. Her contribution will now benefit not just Aceh but the entire country. Currently, Rosmawardani is working on a number of legal projects. One concerns the right of women to appeal their divorce cases all the way to the highest national court of appeal – the *Mahkamah Agung* (Supreme Court). This jurisdiction is now part of the Indonesian legal system, but parliament is currently contemplating a new draft law that would remove this issue from the jurisdiction of the *Mahkamah Agung*. Rosmawardani opposes its removal, and along with other advocates she seeks to keep this issue as part of legal protection for women. She has met with members of the Supreme Court, the national parliament and the Women's Human Rights Commission to enlist their support for its

preservation. The second case is that Rosmawardani is now contributing a module for a manual being developed by the Supreme Court. Her 'module focusses on gender issues that can empower religious judges in their court dealings', and it is based on her research and her personal reflections.<sup>86</sup> These are only two examples of Rosmawardani's commitment to gender fairness in her relentless effort for women's empowerment as an essential ingredient for sustainable peace.

Adiwarni, who only enrolled in college for a degree in Islamic law in 1989 at the age of 38 after becoming a successful business woman in property, continues her charity work in the aftermath of the Tsunami. Having earlier become a member of PBB, she was then selected as one of its deputies. Her interests in politics began from childhood as her family was a strong supporter of the (now dissolved) Islamic party of Masyumi. Her career in current politics began in 2001, and she ran for Aceh's parliament in the 2004 election – the single seat PBB won went to her male colleague. During his term this man angered his party for not supporting their agenda, and PBB resolved to remove him and to put Adiwarni in his place. She rejected this on moral grounds and said, 'if we bring someone down, God will bring us down. I will never accept a seat at the expense of friendship'.<sup>87</sup> She often argued that 'politics should be based on legal principles and sincerity, and only then can we honestly represent our constituents'.<sup>88</sup> Her principled ethics and absence of political selfishness marks Adiwarni's quality as a public servant. In the meantime she served as a member of the Governor's Advisory Team. When the male colleague left his seat to run for a higher office, Adiwarni was appointed as a new member by means of the mid-term replacement. Although her parliamentary services were brief, she made an impact by focusing on three major issues: education, women's empowerment and the implementation of Shari'a. 'These matters are extremely critical for gender justice', she stated.<sup>89</sup> She was among those politicians who inaugurated scholarships, which are now still offered to hundreds of young Acehnese to pursue masters and doctoral degrees overseas in Egypt, America, Australia and Germany.

Outside of Parliament, Adiwarni assists female political candidates and has repeatedly been asked to join another party since PBB was disqualified to stand in elections in 2010 for not meeting the required threshold. Since morality and integrity are her guiding principles, she is extremely selective. She turned down a number of offers including an invitation to run as a candidate for Vice Governor in 2011. She has now joined the newly emerging National Democratic Party (Nasdem) because of the issues it espouses. This party's view of women and its concern with gender restorative justice are attractive to Adiwarni. Nasdem is listed as Number One on the electoral ballot across Indonesia for the 2014 elections, and Adiwarni is assigned as Nasdem's number one candidate for the Aceh Parliament representing the areas of Banda Aceh, Aceh Besar and Sabang. She has also served on the *Dewan Syariah* of the *Baitul Mal*, a State-owned institution governing *zakat* and *sadaqah* (obligatory and voluntary charitable contributions). The *Baitul Mal* has provided financial aid to hundreds of poor children, the elderly, handicapped and to small vendors. It has restored the houses of poor families across Aceh and helped build new ones. Her work with the *Baitul Mal* allows Adiwarni to assist many poor women, since 'most poor families are run by women and most elderly are also women'.<sup>90</sup> Adiwarni who is now pursuing her master's degree sees both the *Baitul Mal* and 'politics as instruments to perform good in fulfilment of her responsibility as *khalifat ul-Lah fi al-ard*'.<sup>91</sup>

Like Adiwarni and Rosmawardani, Naimah is also a woman of mission. The Tsunami destruction of Aceh was so enormous that its reconstruction required both local and international support, which gave birth to the Reconstruction and Rehabilitation Body (BRR). Naimah served on BRR's Consultative Board (BC), which she later led. This was a weighty responsibility given that the BC was responsible to ensure the proper implementation of BRR's projects funded by both Indonesian and international donors. With a total budget of roughly 7 billion US dollars in the four years of BRR's existence (2005–9), the recovery effort in Aceh was 'one of the largest humanitarian programmes in history'.<sup>92</sup> While the actual implementation was the responsibility of BRR executives, Naimah

as the head of BC oversaw its effectiveness, its goals and its implementation standards as the agency struggled to restore livelihoods, strengthen communities and rebuild infrastructure. With nearly 700 funding agencies and over 1000 implementing partners, both local and international, the work of BRR was quite complex. Coordination and duplication was daunting, yet with the existence of BC as an internal mechanism 'such weaknesses could be minimised'. As BRR recognized the importance of local community participation in the reconstruction efforts, Naimah and BC strove 'to ensure that such participation be maximised'. Furthermore, she oversaw that women victims received an equitable share and that their needs were properly met. 'Though we recognised some limitations, BRR with its BC contributed to the reconstruction of Aceh and the rehabilitation of our community', Naimah emphasized.<sup>93</sup>

Besides BRR, Naimah has served a few other important institutions at the local and national levels. Since 2011 she has been a member of the Advisory and Assistancy Board for the economic development of Sabang Free Port. This board is the Aceh government's economic institution to negotiate the rights of Aceh vis-à-vis Indonesia in the progress of Sabang Free Port and its overall role in Aceh's economic development. In addition, Naimah has also served the *Kemitraan* (The Partnership) since its foundation in 2000. This is a multi-partnered non-profit organization working with government institutions, international organizations and civic society to advance the reformation of Indonesian State bureaucracy. Initiated by the powerful institutions of the United Nations Development Program, the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank in the aftermath of the 1997–8 economic crisis, The Partnership was established by 20 influential citizens of Indonesia including current President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (SBY) and Vice President Boediono. Naimah Hasan is a founding member who has since served on its Executive Council. As a high-profile organization, its work has received praise as well as criticism. Some of the positive claims for The Partnership refer to its insistence on good governance and anti-corruption. In contrast, criticism of The

Partnership reflects the conventional distrust by many Indonesians of foreign aid and UN agencies. Their chief concern is the perceived promotion of the global capitalist agenda for the benefit of powerful nations and their local collaborators. Naimah is not apologetic about such criticisms. She openly states that 'any intervention of this kind carries strengths and weaknesses, and The Partnership is no exception'.<sup>94</sup> Her association with it was 'motivated by [her] wish to assist Aceh'. In so doing she is now able to help both Aceh and the rest of Indonesia. Her active concern with women's issues may be better addressed if 'government [of Indonesia] practices good governance, and this is the interest of The Partnership'.<sup>95</sup> In short, the *Kemitraan* for Naimah is a venue for continuing her 'struggle against corruption and injustice'. Finally, Hasan is now a candidate for the 2014 national parliamentary elections listed on ballot number six for the SBY-founded Democratic Party representing the North East Aceh region. Similar to the *Kemitraan*, Naimah's engagement in politics is an integral 'part of her active exertions for good governance and social and gender justice'.<sup>96</sup> All of these may be regarded as our women's holistic effort to create sustainable peace in their community and nation.

### Conclusion

This survey of the lives of three contemporary Acehese women activists demonstrates that fairness and equity is a natural human inclination requiring recognition and nourishment. These women have fought hard to actualize these in practice, albeit with limited success. Their efforts, however, strengthen the claim that the ideal and real is a continuous negotiation for becoming. The potentials are there and efforts make one move forward in a journey for continuous improvement. The role of religious and social institutions, family environment, and the overall flexible posture of Acehese culture, as well as the dynamism of an individual's personality, are important factors for the activation of gender consciousness. Acehese legacies and positive female experiences provide certain advantages for the nourishment of women's active agency. The prototype of the



Sultanahs and Admirals of the past still reverberates within the Acehnese psyche, as does the heroic participation by women opposing colonial oppression. Although this legacy has not been fully emulated, contemporary Acehnese women seek to implement it through differing manifestations as they respond to the challenges of today's cultural and social reality. Their response to the demands imposed by violent conflict and civil war, their promotion of peace and of gender empowerment and their fulfilment of social and ethical obligations are contemporary manifestations of the historical women's legacy. The present study has not discussed the post-conflict challenges affecting Acehnese women, including an emerging trend of religious and political conservatism; matched by the attraction of materialist and permissive lifestyles, which is indeed a real concern. Both of these opposing tendencies could impact negatively on women as they engage in socially-conscious activism and promote sustainable peace.

### Notes

1. H. C. Zentgraaff, *Aceb*, transl. Aboe Bakar, (Jakarta: Beuna, 1983), p. 78.
2. Consult Margot Badran's study on the emergence and evolution of the feminist movement in Egypt in the first half of the twentieth-century in her *Feminists, Islam and Nation: Gender and the Making of Modern Egypt* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).
3. Those unfamiliar with the 'causes of revelation' of the Qur'an (the exegetical genre known as *asbab al-nuzul*) should be mindful that among the many occasions of Qur'anic revelation were events provoking answers and responses to requests by the Muslim community of the time – which of course included prominent women. Thus, the complaints and veiled protests by the Prophet's wife Umm Salamah fall within this category.
4. Wahbah az-Zuhayli, *Al-Tafsir al-Munir fi al-Aqidah wa al-Shari'a wa al-Manhaj* [A Clear Exegesis about the Doctrine, Law, and the Path], Vol. 22 (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1411/1991), p. 17.
5. See narratives of courageous women in Islam recounted in Wiebke Walther's *Women in Islam: From Medieval to Modern Times* (Princeton: Markus Weiner Publishers, 1993).
6. Souad Ali, 'The Role of Muslim Women in Engendering Peace: Bila-d al-Sudan (Sudan and Nigeria)', Chapter 6, this volume.

7. Aceh's Islamic Kingdom of Tamiang was ruled at one time by Queen Lindung Bulan (rg. 1353–98) who acted as Prime Minister to her Royal Father; and the Kingdom of Samudra Pasai was ruled by Queen Nur Ilah (d. 1380) and Queen Nahrasiyah Rawangsa Khadiyu (rg. 1400–28).
8. *Dayab* or Islamic boarding school is known by different names, including *pesantren* in Java and Kalimantan, *surau* in West Sumatera and *pondok* in other regions of Southeast Asia. In Aceh it was also called *rangkeang* 'hut'. For the development of *pondok* or the Islamic traditional school in modern Malaysia, see the chapter 'Pondoks, madrasahs and the production of "Ulama" in Malaysia', in William R. Roff, *Studies on Islam and Society in Southeast Asia* (Singapore: National University of Singapore Press, 2009), pp. 116–30.
9. *Teungku buet* directs a *bale buet* (village religious teaching institution) found in almost every Acehnese village, which provides basic religious instruction and religious education for young children. There are thousands of *bale buets* across Aceh, and most are run by women.
10. I have known these three women for over 25 years, and one is in fact my older sister. In addition to watching their roles in their families and in society, as well as their professional careers, I conducted five interviews with each of them in August, September and October 2012. I also had two telephone interviews with Rosmawardani in November 2012, and three telephone interviews with Naimah: two in November 2012 and one in November 2013; I also conducted one Skype interview with Adiwarni in December 2012.
11. Naimah Hasan, Personal Interview (August, 2012).
12. Both HMI and PII were born in 1947 during Indonesia's final phase of colonial revolution and its early state of nation-building as a free country. The former is affiliated with school students and the latter with those studying at university. The two organizations were major players not only for reinforcing Indonesia's Islamic character but also for safeguarding the new nation from political and social confrontations. Both PII and HMI have produced some of the finest intellectuals and officials who dominated the country's academic, social, political and religious scenes from the 1960s down to this day. While their torch has now faded by the emergence of modern NGOs, HMI and PII remain significant players in Indonesian youth development.
13. Naimah Hasan, Personal Interview (August, 2012).
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid.
19. Rosmawardani Muhammad, Personal Interview (August 2012).
20. Ibid.
21. Ibid.
22. Ibid.

23. Rosmawardani believed that neither she nor her parents received a written text of Umamah's speech, but the speaker's words were remembered by many, and our quotation is given as memorized by Rosmawardani.
24. Rosmawardani Muhammad, Personal Interview (August 2012).
25. Ibid.
26. Ibid.
27. Ibid.
28. Ibid.
29. Rosmawardani Muhammad, Personal Interview (September 2012).
30. Ibid.
31. Ibid.
32. Adiwarni Husin, Personal Interview (August 2012).
33. Ibid.
34. Adiwarni Husin, Personal Interview (September 2012).
35. Ibid.
36. Ibid.
37. Adiwarni Husin, Personal Interview (October 2012).
38. Ibid.
39. Ibid.
40. Ibid.
41. As its title indicates, this Qur'anic commentary was written by two *Jalals*: Jalaluddin Muhammad b. Ahmad al-Mahalli (d. 864 H) and Abu al-Fadl Abdur Rahmah b. Abi Bakr b. Muhammad Jalaluddin al-Suyuti (d. 911 H). The *Tafsir al-Jalalayn* continues to be famous among religious teachers and Islamic schools in Indonesia.
42. Adiwarni Husin, Personal Interview (August 2012).
43. Ibid.
44. Adiwarni Husin, Skype Interview (3 December 2012).
45. Ibid.
46. Adiwarni Husin, Personal Interview (August 2012).
47. Ibid.
48. Ibid.
49. Adiwarni Husin, Personal Interview (September 2012).
50. Although participants in non-violence workshops conducted by Michael Beer and Karim D. Crow of Nonviolence International in 1999 may have been the first group in Aceh to promote a non-violent solution for the Aceh conflict, these women were the first to popularize the demand by making it central to daily discourse.
51. Adiwarni Husin, Personal Interview (October 2012).
52. Ibid.
53. Even before the arrival of Adiwarni, many *ulama* members had always discussed the possibility of solving the Aceh conflict peacefully, and Adiwarni, along with her female colleagues, provided an additional energy and flavor to an already existing idea for a non-violent solution to Aceh tensions.

54. Adiwarni Husin, Personal Interview (September 2012).
55. Ibid.
56. Ibid. and October 2012.
57. Adiwarni Husin, Skype Interview (3 December 2012).
58. Naimah Hasan, Personal Interview (October 2012).
59. Ibid.
60. Naimah Hasan, Telephone Interview (16 November 2012).
61. Naimah Hasan, Personal Interview (October 2012); Telephone Interview (16 November 2012).
62. Ibid.
63. Naimah Hasan, Telephone Interview (17 November 2012).
64. Ibid.
65. Ibid.
66. Ibid.
67. Naimah Hasan, Telephone Interview (16 November 2012).
68. Ibid.
69. Ibid.
70. Rosmawardani Muhammad, Personal Interview (October 2012).
71. Ibid.
72. Ibid.
73. Rosmawardani Muhammad, Telephone Interview (3 November 2012).
74. Rosmawardani Muhammad, Personal Interview (October 2012).
75. Rosmawardani Muhammad, Personal Interview (August 2012).
76. Rosmawardani Muhammad, Personal Interview (October 2012). Muhammad's view reflects the frustration of Acehese leaders *during* the height of the conflict, rather than any lack of action by the *ulama*. This author has worked closely with the Acehese *ulama* for over 12 years and knows they also pursued several initiatives, but the destructive situation mitigated their efforts.
77. PPD was founded by Asna Husin in October 2000 as an independent affiliate of the Washington-based Nonviolence International. It executed two projects: peace education for high schools and for the *dayah*. In the first project PPD cooperated with the government of Aceh, the second with the MPU. Its close association with the government and Asna's Acehese connections were the main reasons PPD was allowed to operate during this challenging period. Nevertheless, it experienced great difficulties.
78. Rosmawardani Muhammad, Personal Interview (September 2012).
79. Rosmawardani Muhammad, Telephone Interview (5 November 2012).
80. Ibid.
81. Ibid.
82. Ibid.
83. Rosmawardani Muhammad, Personal Interview (October 2012); Telephone Interview (3 November 2012).
84. Ibid.
85. Rosmawardani Muhammad, Telephone Interview (3 November 2012); Ibid.

86. Ibid.
87. Adiwarni Husin, Personal Interview (September 2012).
88. Ibid.
89. Adiwarni Husin, Skype Interview (3 December 2012).
90. Ibid.
91. Adiwarni Husin, Personal Interview (September 2012).
92. Naimah Hasan, Personal Interview (August 2012); Telephone Interview (17 November 2012).
93. Ibid; Telephone Interview (17 November 2012).
94. Naimah Hasan, Personal Interview (September 2012).
95. Ibid.
96. Naimah Hasan, Telephone Interview (7 November 2013).