

Perceiving What Comes After War is ‘Natural’: Women Ex-soldiers in Post Conflict Aceh, Indonesia

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the Free Aceh Movement or *Gerakan Aceh Merdeka* (GAM) women ex-soldiers in the post-Helsinki agreement period. This article argues that the patriarchal dividend in the form of material reward and higher social standing gained by the GAM ex-commanders from the peace process are sustained through militarised masculinist ideology in domesticating women ex-soldiers into families and subsuming them into the mainstream GAM ex-military organization (the Aceh Transition Commission or the KPA, *Komite Peralihan Aceh*). The research findings confirmed that women ex-soldiers’ subordination has been ‘taken for granted’ by their ex-commanders. The taken-for-granted-ness of the ex-commander’s view on women ex-soldiers in the post conflict Aceh was as an effect of the gendered power relations. As a result the ex-commanders presumed women ex-soldiers’ return as going back into ‘normal’. Women ex-soldiers’ return was presumed by their ex-commanders as going back into their families, back into society as ordinary girls or women in villages. Although to some extent their ex-commanders still ‘recognized’ them as part of the GAM insurgency movement, in fact their post conflict retained military status was different from their male counterpart. The women were called by their ex-commanders as ‘passive soldiers’ or ‘supporting soldiers’.

Keywords: Gender, GAM, Women Ex-Soldiers, Militarised Masculinist Ideology

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Introduction

In this paper I argue that the patriarchal dividend in the form of material reward and higher social standing gained by the ex-commanders from the peace process are sustained through militarised masculinist ideology in domesticating women ex-soldiers into families and subsuming women ex-soldiers into the mainstream GAM ex-military organization (KPA).

However, unlike the male civilian elite and rank and file ex-soldiers who were strategically marginalised, women ex-soldiers' subordination has been 'taken for granted' by their ex-commanders. The taken-for-granted-ness of the ex-commanders' view on women ex-combatant return in post conflict Aceh is arguably as an effect of the gendered power relations structuring the logic of masculinity of the ex-commanders. As a result the ex-commanders presumed women ex-soldiers' return as going back into 'habitat' (normal). Women ex-soldiers 'return' was presumed by their ex-commanders as going back into their families, back into society as ordinary girls or women in *gampoeng* (villages). Although to some extent their ex-commanders still 'recognized' them as part of the GAM insurgency movement, in fact their post conflict retained military status was different from their male counterpart. They were called by their ex-commanders and male comrade as reserve 'soldiers', 'passive soldiers' and 'supporting soldiers' who are not like 'a real soldier who carried a gun and fought in the battle'. Hence, female ex-soldiers are having lower status than male ex-fighters and gain less material reward from the post conflict reintegration.

Having been recognised as female ex-soldiers under the GAM insurgency movement, women ex-soldiers were perceived by the ex-commanders as part of the spirit of the corps as the GAM movement. In the eyes of their ex-commanders, the female ex-soldiers are 'our *inong balee* corps' although they did not directly fought in war. They are seen as their 'daughters' and 'sisters' who supported the GAM insurgency movement. Yet, in the current civilian context, to legitimate their interests in the form of high status standing and power as ex-commanders, the ex-commanders require women group who accept and maintain the militaristic masculine ideology of great warrior men who fought and suffer most from war compared to the other male GAM civilian elites. In this sense, the female ex-soldiers' positions are important in extoling the glorification of their ex-commanders as the great contributor of the bloody armed conflict as well as the protector of *bangsa* Aceh (Acehnese). This is also done through the inclusion of the female ex-soldiers group in the KPA patronage network organizations such as '*Putro Aceh*' that subsume them into the ex-commanders' interests in local political power contestation.

This paper is divided into four sections. The first section discusses the concept of logic masculinity. The second section elaborates on what has post conflict reintegration done to female ex-soldiers. The third discusses perceiving what comes after war is natural. Finally, the last part of the paper describes the conclusion.

The concept of the logic of masculinity

I use the term 'the logic masculinity' to explain how and why the ex-commanders treated female ex-soldiers in their return into the post conflict society in Aceh. I do this for two reasons. Firstly, the term logic of masculinity inherently entails the

explanation of how formal properties of masculinity effect the way the ex-commanders, which is all belong to men in high status and power (ex-commanders) see the post conflict situation regardless of the quality and content of their masculinities. Secondly, the logic of masculinity echoed by Hutching (in Parpart et al, 2008a and 2008b) covers the logic of contrast and contradiction embedded in the concept of masculinity itself which is understood as power relations link to the gendered division of labour and hierarchy of power.

The terms logic of masculinity developed by Hutching, refers to an understanding that masculinity is 'a resource of thought for our framework to see the world' (Hutching in Parpart et al, 2008a). It is a fundamental way of seeing how masculinity has functioned as 'a cognitive short cut' in our mind regardless the attribute and quality attached to men and masculinity or in ways that masculinity operates to negate the trait and quality inherently embedded in women and femininity (Hutching in Parpart et al, 2008a). Masculinity has always been regarded as 'a stable and coherent meaning' and it strongly influences and structures our thinking (Hutching in Parpart et al, 2008a). According to Hutching (in Parpart et al, 2008a), the reason why masculinity operates as a logical thinking and framework to assume a wide a range of social scientific phenomena particularly in international politics is because masculinity entails a logic of contrast and contradiction. The logic of contrast provides masculinity 'flexibility and malleability and enable change' in way that masculinity is able to legitimate a given contrast (higher versus lower, active versus passive). The logic of contradiction gives masculinity 'as a fixed-value hierarchy' and distinctions which make things are different and eventually value masculinity over femininity (Hutching in Parpart et al, 2008a).

Hutching approach in understanding masculinity as a reference or resource of thought in gender relations (masculinity and femininity) is useful to analyse the taken for granted of gender assumption. The logic of contrast and contradiction in her analysis covers the dualism principle in gender ideology of separate sphere, negation and valorisation of the one over the other. The strength of her framework is in way that gender power structure is sharply crystallised into the logic of masculinity concept in which she explained why and how masculinity operates as a frame of thinking and its implication on dualistic opposition principle and valoration of the one over the other. It has covered more or less the notion of gender structure explained by the feminists like Connell (1987, 1995) and Young (2002, 2003) - in which they distil and breakdown the concept of gender structure into three interconnected aspects: gender division of labour, normative heterosexuality and hierarchy of power.

What has post-conflict reintegration done to female ex-soldiers?

It has been almost a decade since Helsinki peace agreement concluded 30 years of bloody armed conflict with the Indonesian military forces. Yet little has been known about the fate of female ex-soldiers group under the *Pasukan Inong Balee* (the PIB), a division of the GAM military female soldiers. Based on the GAM military structure, the PIB was part of the GAM military wing (Schulze 2003). The PIB's position in military tasks was pivotal to underpin the GAM armed movement. As the GAM battalion they underwent military training and had significant military skills as intelligence unit and logistic surveyor (Schulze 2003, Uning undated).

In post conflict situation, Uning (undated) has indicated that the reintegration program for women did little to improve their economic life since they received fewer resources from the program than the male ex-soldiers. Some women ex-soldiers revealed their disappointment with the current peace process as their contributions during the conflict have been considered unimportant by the current reintegration program (Uning, undated). Although Uning's research on female ex-soldiers provides important point for the women ex-soldiers' social and economic condition after DDR process, her study is very limited and lacking analytical framework of gender power relations underpinning the distribution of reintegration resources to the women ex-soldiers.

Reintegration of the GAM combatants was mainly channelled to the GAM military hierarchy and highly controlled by the GAM leaders particularly the ex-commanders. Although the formal process of reintegration was institutionally monitored by the Aceh Monitoring Mission (AMM) in conjunction with the Indonesian government as well as the local authority such the Aceh Reintegration Board (the BRA) but in practice it was the ex-commanders who dictate how should combatants be reintegrated into Aceh community. Women ex-soldiers were not included on the reintegration list as the ex-commanders were afraid of the sexual abused committed by the TNI once the peace agreement broken. Female ex-soldiers were formally unregistered by their commanders as they claimed that they had to protect female bodies from sexual abuse committed by the TNI (Braithwaite, et al, 2010). Though the GAM leaders did not elaborate more in this sense but it was assumed that if the female were included as targeted group of reintegration beneficiaries while the peace collapsed then women would be targeted as victim of sexual harassment (Braithwaite, et al, 2010). In the process of fund disbursement, not single women ex-fighter' name was on the list provided by the GAM commanders. The 3000 demobilised ex-combatant mentioned on the list was totally men. In this particular issue, nothing that the AMM, the BRA and the local government could do instead of agreeing whatever the GAM wanted to do with the list of men they given to the BRA.

Discussion: perceiving of what comes after war is 'natural'

The return of the *Pasukan Inong Balee* (women ex-soldiers) into Acehnese community has been operating in a broader context of power relations linked to the larger interests of their ex-commanders group. Nothing that women ex-soldiers can do instead they reintegrate themselves of what their ex-commanders have called 'natural reintegration'. Female ex-soldiers' resilience with their community, comeback and rejoice the peace with members of family. To gain an understanding of why and how women ex-soldiers subordination into domestic or private live by their ex-commanders is to chart a larger pattern of power relations in how the ex-commander interest over high status and power is geared toward an ideological masculinist logic to rationalise a dominant position of men over women in society.

Some of the ex-commanders justify the return of the women ex-soldiers into domestic lives by using the word 'women are back into their habitat'. For the ex-commanders, the term 'habitat' refers the family as a site of gender construction leading to the legitimation of their masculinity. This trajectory is not just simply justifying the power of the elite ex-commanders through the patriarchal gender order already established in Aceh but it is broadly linked to the larger ex-commanders' interests of

sustaining their patriarchal dividend in both material and non-material rewards of peace building process and outcomes. In this particular context I analyse the family in relation to both explanation of the power of male dominant position in a gender patriarchal order and the gendered division of labour in family that legitimate the subordination of women ex-soldiers either to their men (their male counterpart or the husbands for the female ex-soldiers who are already got married and to the high status and the power of the elite ex-commanders).

In the gender patriarchal order like Aceh, family as a social institution is matter. It is important for women and men as heterosexual couples bounded with marriage and comply with a gender social arrangement that organize a husband is a head of household and decision maker in family (Meghdadi 2009). Or if women ex-soldiers are still single they might stay close to their extended family including mother, father, siblings and some include grant mother live in together in the same house. However, it is the father or husband who has larger authority to decide matters related with the family.

In post-conflict Aceh, family is a place where female ex-soldiers currently and mostly live with. Women ex-soldiers, in the eyes of ex-commanders, are perceived as ordinary family members, as daughters, widows, and little sisters. They are *urinueng* (Acehnese's term for women). The GAM ex-commanders portray that female ex-soldiers' reintegration is resembling to the return to family members in *gampong*, village sort of family gathering with mother, father and siblings or raise a new family, husband and wife. Although they could not mention in detail how many female ex-soldiers had come back to their family yet they claimed that in majority, women ex-soldiers involved in GAM had reunited early before the Helsinki agreement particularly before the last state military operation in 2003 through their family.

If we look at the way the ex-commanders think about women ex-soldiers in the process of post conflict reintegration, the logic of masculinity is underway. It was framed through the gender assumption that perceives women as something relates to the nature or essence of women as linked to the tranquillity, domesticity and family regardless of the masculine quality of their ex-commanders. Once they think about women ex-soldiers, then their thinking automatically switches on to the assumption of women as belong to family. It is perceived as normal for them to stay closed with their families. In the gender patriarchal order like Aceh, family as a social institution is matter. In patriarchal gender relations, women and men as heterosexual couples, bounded their sexual relationships with marriage and comply with a gender social arrangement that organize a husband is a head of household and decision maker in family (Meghdadi 2009). If women ex-soldiers are still single they might stay close to their extended family including mother, father, siblings and some include grant mother live in together in the same house. In fact when come into decision making it is the father or husband or uncle who has larger authority to decide matters related with the family.

The logic of contrast inherently embeded in how ex-commanders thinking about women ex-soldiers is bassically shaped by their understanding of given gendered social system already attached to the local culture which could be functions as norms, sanctions and code of conduct that condition gender relations between men and women. In patriarchal social culture like Aceh, *adat* and Islam are the two interrelated

gendered social system influence and shape day to day practice of people's social interactions. *Adat* that constitutes value, norm and practice had been influential factor in shaping what 'traditional' Aceh society looked like. It strongly ruled Aceh society in terms of household, property, land ownership, labour division and inheritance matters (Srimulyani 2010). *Adat* influences gender relations between men and women, between masculinity and femininity. In terms of household aspect, women's responsibilities were in internal household such as taking care of the morality and education of their children, whereas men social responsibilities associated with the outside house (typically in *muenasah*, a public place for praying and gathering) (Robinson, 2009: 25). In relation to labour division, women jobs associated with rice cultivation (*mita breuh*) while men with money (*mita peng*) (Sri Mulyani, 2010: 331, Robinson, 2009: 25). Men had responsibility to earn money from outside economic activities to support the economy of their families. While women stay close to the home. *Adat* has been in the frame of thinking of the ex-commanders and rendered the dichotomous thinking between men and women. And value men and masculinity.

The other social factor that contributes to the opposite duality in shaping the logic of masculinity of the ex-commanders is Islam as a dominant religion in Aceh. Islamic value and norms as well as practice may vary across society, but Islamic sharia law in Aceh generally structure the relationship between men and women. For instance, Islam value patriarchal norms where men have more control over decision making, property and inheritance. This value has structured gender roles between men and women. Men's primary responsibility is to maintain financial support while women are responsible for taking care of the domestic sphere (Vianen 2006 in Nowak and Caulfield 2008).

Gender structure has infused and reflected not only on the broader social system explained above, but gender also attaches in the nature of the GAM military institution, the TNA (Tentara Negara Aceh) or the Aceh state soldiers. It has manifested in the strong division of labour between male and female GAM combatants ranging from recruitment to military training and post military training period during war. All of these arrangements have impacted in how their ex-commanders and their male comrade see women ex-soldiers in post conflict agreement. To analyse the logic of contrast and contradictions relates to the binary opposition or dichotomous thinking of the ex-commanders in current post conflict situation, we need to understand why women ex-soldiers was labelled by their ex-commanders and their male comrade as 'reserve soldiers' or 'passive soldiers' and 'supporting soldiers' through the militaristic ideology embeded in the logic of masculinity of the ex-commanders GAM.

Assuming that the reintegration of the female ex-soldiers is 'natural', family as gender institution (Connell, 1987) along with the combination with broader intersecting social factors, *adat*, Islam and the militaristic institution, value, and practice of the GAM become crystallised as a given context for ideological construction of ex-commanders GAM that later indorse their logic of masculinity as well as their identity as men with high social status standing as ex-commanders GAM in the KPA. This has larger implications on how the ex-commanders treated the women ex-soldiers in post conflict situation. What the ex-commanders think about women ex-soldiers in fact has ideological and material implications to the process of domestication of women ex-soldiers into already existing social structure that confines the women into household

matters. Considering that it is male not female who are head of household, then the resulting welfare outcome is female ex-soldiers gained less even nothing from reintegration fund allocation compared to their male counterparts. In this context, some ex-commanders argue that men ex-soldiers are priority rather than women as they bear the burden of family economy and stressing that most women ex-soldiers are married and have relied heavily on their husband for economy.

Some group of female ex-soldiers confess that they are now doing household things. They just make a living through going to work in paddy rice field as labour. They do not own the land but working as *buruh tani upahan* (daily labour) and gained less than Rp. 100. 000 per day (approximately accounted for 10 Australian dollars). They do it in the morning and the rest of the day they do family matters such as helping husband in raising kids. While the others who still single just stays with families in *gampong* (villages) while helping the family through making and selling cakes. The other female ex-soldiers spend half day doing household things in the morning and the rest of the day they use their time to earn living through working as labour in small home industry in *gampong* (villages). However, the situation is a little bit difference with those who are still maintaining clientelistic networks with their former commanders or those who are educated and married with middle class men. They have done better working and earning more income. Ironically, most female ex-soldiers did not know what exactly the reintegration funds and how they had been delivered. The amount of money they received was varied from village to village. Some others did not receive any reintegration fund.

While the male ex-soldiers in particular those who close to the inner circle GAM ex-commanders are able to do business, having easy access to politics and bureaucracy, even for those who are excluded by their ex-commanders and do protest to their ex-commanders, they still enjoy patriarchal dividend in the form of higher status and material rewards, such as charity incomes or petty money. Most women ex-soldiers' economic life is different from that of men. They mostly depend on domestic economic production such petty street sellers, farming or even just simply do household things.

Besides women ex-soldiers are having less material rewards as has been elaborated above, women ex-soldiers also pay hard price for their lower military retained status as 'reserved soldiers or 'passive soldiers'. Until now there is no explicit acknowledgement either in local or national public recognitions of their status as women GAM ex-soldiers. There are never recognized formally. There is no specific organization acting as formal organization to shade the female ex-soldiers.

In comparison with the context of post conflict Timorese women for instance, Sara Niner (2011) explains that the meaning of 'traditional 'in fact reflects masculine interests specifically in subordinating women's roles leading to women lower status than men (Niner 2011, 415). In the post conflict Timorese context, this trajectory has continued and reinvented in the form of masculine military ideology created by former resistant movement that further marginalised the status of women, including women who previously served in arm forces (Niner 2011, 428-429). Looking at Aceh context indeed assumption has been made by the ex-commanders on the basis of gender differences that make post conflict reintegration of men ex-soldiers and women ex-soldiers are completely distinct. It reflects in a huge contrast with the

female ex-soldiers's situation, the ex-commanders are having easy access to power and resources in local parliaments and bureaucracy. Although the local regulation allows women to participate in local election to fulfil the 30 % quota for female representative in local parliament, but until present there is no single women ex-soldiers sit in local parliament. Some women ex-soldiers might show compliance of their lower status in respect to their male rank and file and their ex-commanders and still maintain relationship with their ex-commander.

Conclusion

The paper demonstrates that the women ex-soldiers' subordination is 'taken for granted' by the ex-commanders GAM. The logic of masculinity that entails the logic of contrast and contradictions has framed the ex-commanders' perceptions on the women ex-soldiers' return into post conflict society. This has created gender assumptions that lead to the domestication women ex-soldiers into what the ex-commanders said as 'women are going back into habitat' (family) and stereotyping women ex-soldiers' lower status as 'reserve soldiers' or 'passive soldier' and supporting' soldiers. As a result, women ex-soldiers gained less distribution of resources and lower retained military status in respect to their male comrades. The patriarchal dividend in the form of material reward and higher social standing gained by the ex-commanders from the peace process is also sustained through the logic of masculinity operates as 'frame of reference' in further seeing the women ex-soldiers.

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