

Building back better? – negotiating normative boundaries of gender mainstreaming and post-tsunami reconstruction in Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam, Indonesia

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Abstract. This article focuses on gender mainstreaming policies and advocacy on gender equality in the post-tsunami context in Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam. Through the analysis, this article illustrates how gender mainstreaming policy documents and gender advocacy of the provincial and central government, when drawing from sex/gender division and binary of genders, reproduce heteronormative boundaries. By focusing on details, I argue that the image of the heteronormative nuclear family participates in normalising other identity categories; such as urban and middle-class. I also provide examples of how simultaneous to the production of dominant norms, gender advocacy challenges heteronormativity and norms governing heterosexuality and actively question the dominant gender norms. Drawing from postcolonial feminist and recent queer critiques, I argue that advocacy that solely focuses on gender and/or sexuality reduces human bodies and their desires to simplistic stick figures. Thus, it remains blind to other forms of violence, such as global economic and political frameworks that define ‘building back better’ primarily as recovery and rehabilitation of economy, assets and labour force.

Introduction: gender mainstreaming – mainstreaming heteronormativity?

Gender mainstreaming was formally endorsed by the UN member states at the fourth United Nations (UN) World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995¹ as a policy strategy to promote gender equality and the advancement of women. Since 1995, gender mainstreaming has become the dominant mode for promoting gender equality for most international, regional and national organisations, both state and non-state actors, at least at the level of rhetoric.² Although the gender

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¹ Later referred to as the Beijing Conference.

² Sally Baden and Anne Marie Goetz, ‘Who Needs [Sex] When You Can Have [Gender]? Conflicting Discourses on Gender at Beijing’, *Feminist Review*, 56:1 (1997), pp. 3–25.

mainstreaming policy approach was officially introduced at the Beijing Conference in 1995, the concept 'mainstreaming' can be seen as a continuation of previously introduced concept 'integration'.³ What began as an approach to 'integrate women into development' (or Women in Development, WID) in the 1970s changed into 'integrating a gender perspective' or 'mainstreaming gender' into development (Gender and Development, GAD approach) in the 1990s.

What is significant about the Beijing Conference is that it provided an international forum on how the concepts of sex, gender, and sexuality became intelligible within the context of international development aid and programmes. In the final preparatory committee meeting of the Beijing Conference which provided the last opportunity for country delegations to signal their reservations over parts of the outcome document, a number of countries (Honduras backed up by various Catholic countries) proposed bracketing the world 'gender' throughout the text, which refers to using the form '[gender]' whenever the word was mentioned.⁴ An informal contact group of sixty states was established to devise an acceptable definition of the term and the final statement of the group clarified that gender was to be used in 'its ordinary, accepted usage [. . .] there was no indication that any new meaning or connotation of the term, different from accepted prior usage, was intended in the Platform for Action'.⁵

This wording raises important questions about what an 'ordinary, generally accepted usage' actually means. Some governments (Guatemala, Holy See, Peru) made a reservation that the word gender was to be used in reference to women and men, and the biological sexual identity of male or female. Further some other countries made clear that the rights provided in the Platform for Action are restricted to the context of formal marriage between men and women (for example, Egypt, Iran, Libya). Some other country delegates (for example, Malaysia, Holy See, Peru) were concerned that the concept of gender might refer to permitting sexual rights to non-heterosexual relationships.⁶ This arguably homophobic tone was apparent during the Asian Pacific preparatory meeting of the Beijing conference in Jakarta in June 1994 when the Indonesian Minister for Women's Affairs made a statement:

I cannot accept them [lesbians] as Indonesian women. My belief is that lesbianism is not in accordance with Pancasila [Indonesia's five-point state ideology], because lesbians have forgotten their fundamental duties to be mothers, giving birth and raising children.⁷

The politicised debates around sex, gender and sexuality in Beijing should not be seen as an isolated or idiosyncratic, but as a continuation of debates that took

³ See for example, Carolyn Hannan-Andersson, 'Clarity on Concepts, Goals and Rationales: Key to Progress in Implementing the Mainstreaming Strategy', paper presented at the conference *Mainstreaming gender in policy and planning, South-North experience* (Development Planning Unit, University College London, 28 June–1 July 1999, London).

⁴ Baden and Goetz, 'Who Needs', p. 11. Bracketing in the UN documents signals that it is disputed language, that there is no agreement on the appropriate use of the term or concept. See for example, Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 187–8.

⁵ United Nations, 'Report of the Informal Contact Group on Gender: Note by Secretariat', United Nations, Fourth World Conference on Women, A/CONF.177/L.2, 7 July 1995.

⁶ Charlotte Bunch and Susana Fried, 'Beijing '95: Moving Women's Human Rights from Margin to Center', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 22:1 (1996), p. 202.

⁷ B. J. D. Gayatri, 'Indonesian lesbians writing their own script: issues of feminism and sexuality', in Monika Reinfelder (ed.), *Amazon to Zami: Towards a Global Lesbian Feminism* (London: Cassell, 1996), p. 86.

place within the UN in 1994 at the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo, and the 1993 World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna, and the previous conferences on Women.⁸ After the Beijing conference, it has become usual practice that UN documents include a footnote:

For the purpose of this declaration and programme of action, it was understood that the term 'gender' refers to the two sexes, male and female, within the context of society. The term 'gender' does not indicate any meaning different from the above.⁹

Consequently, most of the UN documents insist on two genders (male and female), and do not discuss the possibility of any other gender identities.¹⁰ Gender equality is framed, without exception, in the context of equality between men and women – the binary which defines and constitutes analyses of gender roles.¹¹

It is important to note that gender experts play an important role in the production of knowledge about gender and to the conceptual limits of gender analysis. The group of 'gender experts' hired by government bodies and international organisations are not necessarily a homogenous group of people, but rather a mixture of international consultants, nationally and locally hired experts and sometimes expertise 'outsourced' to national and local NGOs.¹² To become a gender expert requires usually a university education, related work experience, proven skills to conduct gender analysis and gender advocacy, and in Aceh increasingly, knowledge of Islamic Studies and *shari'a* law. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak argues that 'metropolitan education' has created a foreign and indigenous elite who share a class line cutting across race and North-South divide, and who speak the same language over the Subaltern voices. This language reproduces colonial subjects and distances the advocates from those whom they intent to protect.¹³ A gender expert is someone who is expected to 'know gender' and be able to advise other people, and for example, give advice on how to integrate gender concerns to humanitarian or development assistance.

What does 'knowing gender' do to bodies and their desires? I suggest that further critique is required about how concepts such as 'woman', 'gender' and 'sexuality', contribute towards normative violence and regulation of bodies. I also argue that feminists need further address the question 'who knows' and 'what relationships of work, production and exchange are concealed and revealed by acts

⁸ See for example, Cynthia Rothschild, Scott Long and Susana T. Fried, *Written Out: How Sexuality Is Used to Attack Women's Organising* (New York: International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission, Center for Women's Global Leadership, 2005), p. 84.

⁹ Quoted in Jennifer Chan-Tiberghien, 'Poststructural Feminisms, Transnational Feminisms, and World Conference Against Racism', *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 6:3 (2004), p. 476.

¹⁰ Manish Desai, 'Transnationalism: the face of feminist politics post-Beijing', *International Social Science Journal*, 57:184 (2005), p. 324.

¹¹ Nivedita Menon (2009) has made an observation of the two parallel agendas: one focusing on women's empowerment and equality between men and women in relation to state development activities, and the other as a critique of the heteronormative practices of states requesting for recognition of human rights for non-normative sexualities and genders. The latter is advocated through the UN Human Rights treaty bodies and most recently through General Assembly. However, these agendas are yet to meet and merge in relation to gender and development/disaster discourse and practice. See Nivedita Menon, 'Sexuality, Caste, Governmentality: Contests Over 'Gender' in India', *Feminist Review*, 91:1(2009), pp. 94–112.

¹² See also Sonia E. Alvarez, 'The Latin American Feminist' NGO 'Boom', *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 1:2 (1999), pp. 181–209.

¹³ Gayatri Charkavorty Spivak, *Other Asias* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), pp. 16–18.

of speaking'¹⁴ when gender experts speak of gender relations in concrete contexts of development/humanitarian aid. This speech act can be described as a 'dubbing culture'¹⁵ or production of 'voice over'¹⁶ in which the aid contexts are translated into the cultural logic of gender mainstreaming.

In order to address these questions in this article, I focus on gender mainstreaming policies and advocacy on gender equality in the post-tsunami context in Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam, Indonesia. In my analysis, I focus on how gender mainstreaming policy documents, when drawing from the sex/gender division and binary of sexes, reproduce heteronormativity, and thus provide normative boundaries to what is promoted as livable life in Aceh.

Three governmental structures/bodies have promoted integration of gender into governance in Aceh: the Bureau for Women's Empowerment and its district offices (est. 2000), gender 'architectures' of the Bureau for Rehabilitation and Reconstruction of Aceh and Nias (2005–2009), and Aceh Peace-Reintegration Board (est. 2006). In addition to these three state bodies, a loose network, called as Gender Working Group, was established in 2005 by the Governor's instruction to co-ordinate and share information about of gender advocacy and gender initiatives in the post-tsunami context in Aceh. The group's diverse membership from both local and international organisations is not restricted to just 'gender experts', but is comprised more widely of women activists. The boundaries between state and non-state, or local, national and international, are blurred, as all these structures have received outside funding for their activities and for the recruitment of additional gender experts. The link with the international funding in the Indonesian context is crucial to the existence of these bodies. At the time of the adoption of gender mainstreaming in 2000, just a couple of years after the Asian economic crisis, the percentage of foreign debt of the Indonesian state budget varied between 100 per cent in 1999 and 40 per cent in 2006 of the GDP and international contribution to the tsunami funds has been approximately 70 per cent.¹⁷ The inter-textual analysis of this article draws from a wider range of policy documents on gender produced by the Indonesian central government, the UN and international donors since 1975.

My aim is to reflect on how the analytical category of gender, when relying on the binary of sexes, is a tool of normalisation, turning certain bodies 'invisible'¹⁸ and 'unintelligible'¹⁹ while promoting certain ways of life as normal and natural. By focusing on details, I illustrate how the image of universal heteronormativity participates in normalising other identity categories such as urban, middle-class and religion. I further demonstrate how simultaneous to the production of normativity, documents and advocacy can potentially challenge heteronormativity and norms governing heterosexuality. Drawing from postcolonial feminist and

¹⁴ Sara Ahmed, 'Who Knows? Knowing Strangers and Strangeness', *Australian Feminist Studies*, 15:31(2000), pp. 49–68.

¹⁵ Tom Boellstorff, *The Gay Archipelago: Sexuality and Nation in Indonesia* (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2005).

¹⁶ Boellstorff, 'The Gay Archipelago'.

¹⁷ See World Bank, 'Indonesia's Debt and World Bank Assistance' {<http://go.worldbank.org/VVG6KR2TU0>}, 2007, accessed in May 2008 and website of Bureau for Reconstruction and Rehabilitation of Aceh and Nias {www.e-aceh-nias.org}.

¹⁸ William B. Turner, *A Genealogy of Queer Theory* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000).

¹⁹ Butler, 'Undoing Gender'.

recent queer critiques, I argue that advocacy that solely focuses on gender and/or sexuality, remains blind to other forms of violence, enacted through economic and political frameworks that define ‘better’ primarily as a recovery of economy, assets and labour force. The next section aims to introduce the context in which reconstruction efforts, and efforts to define the ‘new Aceh’, are conducted.

‘Build back better’: locating the post-tsunami Aceh

“Better?” I say, in a small voice. How can he think this is better? “Better never means better for everyone”, he says. “It always means worse, for some”.²⁰

The epicentre of the Indian Ocean earthquakes and tsunami in December 2004 was one hundred kilometres off the coast of Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam (henceforth referred to Aceh). The earthquake and the tsunami had devastating results: lost and displaced lives, destroyed and damaged infrastructure. Eight months after the tsunami and some thirty years of conflict, the government of Indonesia and the Free Aceh Movement (GAM) signed a peace agreement on 15 August 2005 that led to a new governance law and local elections in 2006. For many, it was time to ‘build Aceh back better’. This slogan has been used by organisations involved in promotion of gender mainstreaming, and post-tsunami and post-conflict initiatives in general, and I want to analyse the meanings of each of the words in the slogan.²¹

Firstly, the word to ‘build’ (*membangun*) in Indonesian also means ‘to develop’ and has a specific ideological genealogy. Since independence in 1947, ‘development’ has had a strong connotation of ‘nation-building’, ‘modernisation’, ‘economic growth’ and development of ‘Indonesian character/identity’.²² Experts and technocrats plan and determine the direction of ‘development’. The process of achieving ‘the development’ is built into concepts that have aimed to convey a positive meaning, such as ‘participation’, ‘mutual cooperation’ (*gotong-royong*), and ‘socialisation’.²³ The role of government technocrats was particularly strong during president Suharto’s New Order period (1965–1998) and contributed to an emergence of a group of Acehnese technocrats in charge of implementing national development programmes. Acehnese *ulama* (religious leaders) saw the state-led programmes as a threat to the morals of the Acehnese society, whereas technocrats feared that the powerful Acehnese *ulama* were discouraging foreign investment in the region.²⁴

²⁰ Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid’s Tale* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1986), p. 211.

²¹ Although I use concepts ‘post-tsunami’ and ‘post-conflict’ to mark the time after 26 December 2004 and 15 August 2005, I found this categorisation problematic as communities and locations are divided into tsunami and conflict victims/zones as if those boundaries could be drawn so clearly, and as if tsunami and conflict or their emotional and experiential landscapes were ‘over’ or ‘behind’.

²² President Suharto (1965–1998) was called ‘Father of Development’ and the New Order governments were also called as ‘Development Orders’. See for example, Ariel Heryanto, ‘The Development of “Development”’, *Indonesia*, 46 (Oct 1988), p. 11.

²³ See for example, Heryanto ‘The Development’ and John Bowen, ‘On the Political Construction of Tradition: *Gotong Royong* in Indonesia’, *Journal of Asian Studies*, 45:3 (1986), pp. 545–61.

²⁴ Michelle Anne Miller, ‘What’s Special about Special Autonomy in Aceh?’, in Anthony Reid (ed.), *Verandah of Violence: The Background to the Aceh Problem* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 2006), pp. 295–9. The same debate on *shari’a* law implementation and investment culture has continued in the post-tsunami setting. See for example, Jakarta Post articles in September 2007.

Central government introduced gender mainstreaming as a part of the process of moving towards ‘democratic, pluralist and decentralist government where government interacts with the population’.²⁵ This introduction took place at the same time as ideas of reformation and decentralisation, as well as combating corruption, collusion, and nepotism (in Indonesian referred as KKN) collided with strengthened neoliberal aspirations of bringing democracy through an open market economy and reducing the role of the state.²⁶ At the same time as praising the reforms, the Ministry for Women’s Empowerment listed the transition to regional autonomy, along with certain interpretations of religion and cultural values, as threats to successful gender mainstreaming. It has been argued that the decentralisation law allows revitalisation of local values and traditions, and strengthens local patriarchal values, and also consolidates local political and economic elites.²⁷

Secondly, the word ‘better’ seems to imply a binary position where some ways of being and living are, literally, better than others, and that some other ways of being and living are categorised as worse, unintelligible or incomprehensible.²⁸ To many organisations, ‘better’ is described within the context of rebuilding economy, infrastructure and revitalisation of human resources in Aceh.²⁹ Many organisations add that the importance of reconstruction processes is in ‘rebuilding of lost and damaged values and norms’.³⁰ So ‘better’ is not just evaluated from reconstructed houses, roads and bridges, but also in ideas, ideals, and norms. Thirdly, the word ‘back’, when put together with the word ‘better’, seems to suggest that the comparison of ‘now’ with the ‘past’ includes the expectation of linearity, and evolution, where the aim is to improve the past.

Finally, Benedict Anderson’s deconstruction of ‘Indonesia’ as an ‘imagined community’, an active process of performing the idea of Indonesia as a united nation, can be also used for ‘Aceh’.³¹ Aceh, is often called the ‘Veranda of Mecca’,

²⁵ Minister of Women’s Empowerment, *The Manual of Implementation Guidelines on Gender Mainstreaming in National Development as an annex of Circular of Minister for Women’s Empowerment no. B-89/Men.PP/Dep.III/IX/2002*, September 2002.

²⁶ Further of the connections between gender mainstreaming policies and neoliberalism, see Tanya Lyons, Jayne Curnow and Glenda Mather, ‘Developing Gender Mainstreaming and ‘Gender Respect’, *Development Bulletin*, 64 (2004), pp. 37–41, and Jacqui True, ‘Mainstreaming Gender in Global Public Policy’, *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 5:3(2003), pp. 368–96.

²⁷ Asima Yanty Siahaan, *The Politics of Gender and Decentralization in Indonesia* (Center for Policy Studies, Central European University, Open Society Institute, 2003), pp. 22, 26–7 and Henk Schulte Nordholt and Gerry van Klinken, ‘Introduction’, in Henk Schulte Nordholt and Gerry van Klinken (eds.), *Renegotiating Boundaries: Local Politics in Post-Suharto Indonesia* (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2007), pp. 1–29.

²⁸ See for example, Butler, ‘Undoing Gender’.

²⁹ President of the Republic of Indonesia, *Peraturan Presiden Republik Indonesia Nomor 39 tahun 2005 tentang rencana kerja pemerintah tahun 2006* [Presidential Regulation Number 39 year 2005 on the government’s action plan for year 2006] and Aceh Peace-Reintegration Board, ‘Mengenal BRA, Sejarah BRA [To get to know BRA, History of BRA]’ {<http://www.bra-aceh.org/history.php>}, 2007, accessed in April 2008.

³⁰ United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, *Asia and the Pacific Beijing +10: Selected Issues. Presentations from 2004 High-Level Intergovernmental Meeting to Review Regional Implementation of the Beijing Platform of Action and its Regional and Global Outcomes* (New York, 2005).

³¹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991 [1983]). Benedict Anderson is also an important contributor to the existing literature on queer and LGBT issues in Indonesia, but usually this work is less known in the IR literature. By LGBT I refer to lesbian, bi, gay, transgender subjectivities that are used by the self-defined LGBT groups.

reflecting the long tradition of Islamic influence in the region.³² The Muslim population is said to be between 90–99 per cent, although there are also Christian, Buddhist and Hindu communities, each proportionally one per cent of the total population, and communities practising animism. ‘Acehnese people’ are ethnically, culturally and linguistically a diverse group. However, in the current context the word ‘Acehnese’ is often used to refer to the groups that are considered ‘indigenous’, and it does not include the ethnic Chinese (mostly Christian), or transmigrant (mostly ethnic Javanese) population.³³ Further, post-tsunami reconstruction projects and initiatives have been criticised for being insensitive towards the long history of violence and to the divided communities that it has caused. Thus, the question remains: whose imagined community the reconstructed ‘Aceh’ is, and what are its normative limits?

Dominant gender norms in Aceh are constructed and negotiated as a continuous interplay between customs (*adat*), Islam, state ideology, 30 years long violent conflict and militarisation and exploitation of natural resources.³⁴ Since the early 1960s, the implementation of *shari’a* law has been part of the laws defining the status and government structures of Aceh and since 2001, all policies and local regulations are reviewed through the lens of *shari’a* law. It has been argued that the implementation of *shari’a* law would increase unity in the conflict ridden society, although it is also seen as a political commodity for political and religious elites in Jakarta and Banda Aceh.³⁵ Several women’s organisations are concerned that local regulations on the *shari’a* implementation ‘are based on framework of symbolic, literal and un-contextual interpretations of Islam’.³⁶ The focus on moral behaviour (for example, Muslim dress, adultery) reproduces women as representations of the strength of Islam.³⁷ Women are portrayed as the symbolic value of the society and they become a target of normative control. It is difficult to publicly criticise the interpretation and implementation of *shari’a*. Attempts to open up discussion on feminist interpretations of the Qur’an are interpreted by some

³² Yusny Saby, *Islam and Social Change: The Role of the Ulama in Acehnese Society* (Bangi: Penerbit Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 2005), p. 17.

³³ See further, for example, John R. Bowen, ‘The New Anthropology of Ethnicity and Identity – and why it matters for Aceh and Indonesia’, presented at the First International Conference of Aceh and Indian Ocean Studies, 24–26 February 2007, Banda Aceh.

³⁴ See further, for example, Jacqueline Aquino Siapno, *Gender, Islam, Nationalism and the State in Aceh: The Paradox of Power, Co-optation and Resistance* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2002); Susan Blackburn, *Women and the State in Modern Indonesia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) and John R. Bowen, *Islam, Law and Equality in Indonesia: An anthropology of public reasoning* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003). An important economic and political element of the independence struggle has been the dissatisfaction in Aceh towards the low returns of the revenues from oil and natural gas reserves discovered in 1971 in North Aceh. See Human Rights Watch and International Crisis Groups’ reports of the linkage between natural resources, economic interests of the military and human rights violations in Aceh.

³⁵ Troy Johnson, *Voices from Aceh: Perspectives on Syariat Law* (Hong Kong: Southeast Asia Research Centre, City University of Hong Kong, Working Paper Series No. 97, November 2007), and Edriana Noerdin, ‘Women in the Decentralized Aceh’, in Edriana Noerdin and Sita Aripurnami (eds), *Decentralization as a Narrative of Opportunity for Women in Indonesia*, (Jakarta: Women Research Institute, 2007), pp. 173–217.

³⁶ Gender Working Group (Kelompok Kerja Gender), *Evaluasi situasi perempuan tahun 2006 di Aceh* [‘Evaluation of the Situation of Women in Aceh Year 2006’] (March 8, 2007), p. 14. Many international organisations support initiatives that aim to ‘engender’ *shari’a* implementation, however it is important to note that there is not only one feminist interpretation of Islam. Normative boundaries of feminist interpretation seem to divide gender advocates.

³⁷ Edriana Noerdin, ‘Women in the Decentralized Aceh’.

religious leaders, who have a particular role in forming public opinion, as anti-Islamic, or non-Acehnese, behaviour.³⁸ Gender mainstreaming policies are promoted in this complex context, in which many other attempts to define norms of living a good life already exist. The aim in the following section is to provide a frame to locate the processes of norm production.

Proposing a frame to locate normativity

What counts as a person? Or what, given the contemporary order of being, can I be?³⁹

Judith Butler has argued that instead of being a man or a woman, it is necessary to replace the verb 'being' with a vocabulary of action – 'becoming' or 'doing'. Gender is a way of acting the body, yet one does not become gender through a free choice, as 'gender identity is governed by taboos, conventions and laws'⁴⁰ that operate within social practices. The aim in this article is to locate ways in which gender mainstreaming discourse and gender advocacy produce normative boundaries to bodies and desires to exist in the Acehnese context.

The distinction between sex (male/female), a matter of biology, and gender (masculine/feminine), a set of culturally and socially defined characteristics, has been central to a significant body of Gender and Development discourse, research on gender mainstreaming included, and this distinction is nowadays seen as a 'natural': 'sex is a natural, biological fact, but gender is a cultural, historical and linguistic production or achievement'.⁴¹ A common notion of gender is based on the idea of binary opposition of two sexes and exclusionary categories of man and woman are created. Based on this construct, one can only have one gender, never the other, or both.⁴² Andrea Cornwall, Sonia Corrêa and Susie Jolly (2008) argue, that Gender and Development discourse has not yet managed to disrupt the effects of the gender binary and heteronormativity, and further contend that the theoretical criticism of sex/gender divide and binary of sexes is yet to gain attention amongst the Gender and Development academicians and practitioners.⁴³

In the Indonesian context, in addition to the sex/gender (*jenis kelamin/ jender*) divide which has been an important part of the feminist discourse since 1990s,⁴⁴ a third concept, *kodrat* (natural character) is as important. The term *kodrat* refers to

³⁸ Johnson, 'Voices from Aceh', pp. 3–5.

³⁹ Butler, 'Undoing Gender', p. 58.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

⁴¹ Samuel A. Chambers and Terrell Carver, *Judith Butler and Political Theory: Troubling Politics* (Oxon: Routledge, 2008), p. 56.

⁴² Johanna Kantola and Johanna Valenius, 'Maailmanpolitiikka [World Politics]', in Johanna Kantola and Johanna Valenius (eds), *Toinen maailmanpolitiikka: 10 käsitettä feministisen kansainvälisen suhteiden tutkimukseen* [Other World Politics: 10 Concepts of the Feminist Research of the International Relations], (Tallinna: Vastapaino, 2007) pp. 9–34.

⁴³ Cornwall, Andrea, Sonia Corrêa and Susie Jolly, 'Development with a body: making the connections between sexuality, human rights and development', in Andrea Cornwall, Sonia Corrêa and Susie Jolly (eds), *Development with a Body: Sexuality, Human Rights & Development* (London: Zed Books, 2008), pp. 1–21.

⁴⁴ Some scholars locate the emergence of the word 'jender' or 'gender' into the Indonesian vocabulary after introduction of the English concept by Asia Foundation and Ford Foundation in early 1990s. These days it is an integral part of taught Women and Gender studies, and widely used by the women's NGOs. See for example, Rachel Rinaldo, 'Contesting Womanhood in Two Indonesian Islamic Organizations', *Antropologi Indonesia* 30:1 (2006), pp. 21–35.

the biological ‘facts’ or intrinsic nature of woman and man, which has also gained religious meanings as ‘God’s will’ and ‘creation of God’.⁴⁵ The concept ‘women’s nature’ is built on various localised ideals although they are portrayed as the norm and universal.⁴⁶ In the current context of public debates in Aceh, anyone using the word gender has to add that using the concept does not deny the existence of *kodrat*,⁴⁷ as those who are advocating for gender equality are ‘accused of being *anti-Islam* [. . .] *pro-secularism, Westernization, exclusive, radical, strange, naïve and denying the kodrat*’. These accusations have led some organisations, instead of referring to ‘gender equality/justice’, to refer to ‘equality between men and women’ or ‘women’s empowerment’, to avoid these accusations altogether.

In my analysis I draw from Judith Butler’s critique of the feminist use of the concept pair ‘sex/gender’ and her aim to denaturalise ‘hetero-reality’ of feminism.⁴⁸ For Judith Butler, the category of women achieves its stability and coherence only in the context of the heterosexual matrix, in which bodies become comprehensible through a stable gender pairs (masculine-male, feminine-female) that are oppositional to each other and made hierarchical through compulsory practice of heterosexuality.⁴⁹ This assumption of coherence of bodies requires processes of regulation, where certain behaviours and ways of life are constituted as ‘normal’ and ‘natural’ – against which all people are measured.⁵⁰ The concept ‘normative violence’, or ‘violence of norms’, refers to violence which takes place in the formation of subjectivities. An attempt to denaturalise gender aims to make this violence visible.⁵¹

This article uses two theoretical concepts as guidance: heteronormativity and normative heterosexuality. Heteronormativity refers to dominant social order and power that maintains heterosexuality as the norm and describes it as normal in culture, society and politics.⁵² I use the concept of normative heterosexuality to acknowledge the processes of normalisation *within* heterosexual relations, which is said to have been overlooked in attempts (that aim) to denaturalise heterosexuality, and sometimes assumed as monolithic and unchangeable system.⁵³ Focus on

⁴⁵ Bureau for Women’s Empowerment, *Apa itu gender: kesetaraan dan keadilan* [This is gender: equality and justice], Secretariat of the Province of the Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam, p. 1–3 and Sylvia Tiwon, ‘Models and Maniacs: Articulating the Female in Indonesia’, in Laurie J. Sears (ed.), *Fantasizing the Feminine in Indonesia* (London: Duke University Press, 1996), pp. 47–70 especially p. 48.

⁴⁶ Saskia E. Wieringa, ‘The Birth of the New Order State in Indonesia. Sexual Politics and Nationalism’, *Journal of Women’s History*, 15:1 (2003), p. 72; Saskia E. Wieringa, *Sexual Politics in Indonesia* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), p. 35; Siti Ruhaini Dzuhayatin, ‘Gender and Pluralism in Indonesia’, in Robert W. Hefner (ed.), *The Politics of Multiculturalism: Pluralism and Citizenship in Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2001), pp. 256–60.

⁴⁷ Zubaidah Djohar, ‘Meretas Keadilan, Membangun Keseimbangan’ [‘Opening up Justice, Developing Balance’], in Fajran Zain and Saiful Mahdi (eds), *Timang. Aceh Perempuan Kesetaraan* [Cuddling: Aceh, Women, Equality] (Banda Aceh: Aceh Institute Press, 2008), pp. 95–105.

⁴⁸ Moya Lloyd, *Beyond Identity Politics* (London: Sage Publications, 2005), p. 25.

⁴⁹ Butler, ‘Gender Trouble’, p. 208, footnote 6.

⁵⁰ Jean Carabine, ‘Heterosexuality and social policy’, in Diane Richardson (ed.), *Theorising Heterosexuality* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1996), especially pp. 59–60.

⁵¹ Butler, ‘Gender Trouble’, pp. xx–xxii; Chambers and Carver, ‘Judith Butler’, pp. 78, 81.

⁵² Leena-Maija Rossi, *Heterotehdas: Televisiomainonta sukupuolituotantona* [Hetero factory: TV Advertisements as Production of Gender] (Helsinki: Gaudeamus, 2003), p. 120.

⁵³ See for example, Devi Jackson, ‘Heterosexuality, Sexuality and Gender: Rethinking the Intersections’ in Diane Richardson, Janice McLaughlin and Mark E. Casey (eds), *Intersections Between Feminist*

normative heterosexuality acknowledges debates within the heteronormativity where some heterosexual practices are considered as non-normative and 'queer' or odd.⁵⁴ Instead of insisting a binary between normativity and non-normativity, I understand normativity as a sliding scale, and a product of continuous negotiation of norms that take place in various locations and historical moments.⁵⁵

Interconnections between postcolonial feminism and queer studies⁵⁶ provide important insights for both academic feminism and feminist activism. Postcolonial feminists and women of colour criticise how gender is made into a universal priority for feminism.⁵⁷ Moreover I argue that the feminist analysis of heteronormativity and gender norms remains Eurocentric if other localised processes of normalisation are not considered simultaneously, such as ethnicity, religion and class, just to name a few.⁵⁸ Importantly, recent feminist queer studies' debates seem to share a concern to universalise debates and subject position, moving towards emphasising broad-based study of lives lived outside of the conventional life narratives of family and reproduction, emphasising modes of resistance that survive between marginal subjects and dominant cultures, including neoliberal capitalism.⁵⁹ The focus is on liminal subjects, subjects that are excluded from the 'norms that govern the recognisability of the human'.⁶⁰ Although deriving from the critique on normative sexuality, queer critique has opened up its analytical framework to other forms of exclusion – although keeping analysis of sexuality as part of the analytical framework. This I refer to as the intersectional turn of queer studies. Instead of focusing solely on questions of gender and sexuality, the focus is on broad critique of 'multiple social antagonisms'. This approach, instead of deciding its focus in advance, analyses a wider field of normalisation in order to locate potential sites of social violence and then focuses on those hegemonic social structures by which certain subjects are rendered 'normal' and 'natural' through the production of 'perverse' and 'pathological' others.⁶¹

and Queer Theory (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), pp. 38–58. For example, Butler's work has been read as if it assumes stable 'system of heterosexuality', yet *Gender Trouble* refers to possibilities of resignifying heterosexuality and critiques Monique Wittig of assuming normative constructs as total and unchangeable. See Butler, 'Gender Trouble', p. 154. I thank Leena-Maija Rossi and her numerous articles in Finnish that provide light on this aspect.

⁵⁴ Ibid and Diane Richardson, 'Heterosexuality and social theory', in Diane Richardson (ed.), *Theorising Heterosexuality* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1996), pp. 1–20 especially, pp. 2–9.

⁵⁵ See for example, Abha Bhaiya and Saskia E. Wieringa, *Manual on Sexual Rights and Sexual Empowerment* (Jagori, APIK and Kartini Network, 2007).

⁵⁶ See narration of the history of queer studies for example, Turner, 'Genealogy'.

⁵⁷ See for example, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Ann Russo and Lourdes Torres (eds), *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991); Kimberley Crenshaw, 'Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color', *Stanford Law Review*, 43:6 (1991), pp. 1241–99; and Ann Phoenix and Pamela Pattynama, 'Editorial: Intersectionality', *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 13:3 (2006), pp. 187–92.

⁵⁸ See critique of Michel Foucault's *History of Sexuality* in Ann Laura Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things* (London: Duke University Press, 1995) and Ann Laura Stoler *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (London: University of California Press, 2002).

⁵⁹ See for example, critique on queer liberalism in David L. Eng, Judith Halberstam and José Esteban Muñoz, 'Introduction: What's Queer About Queer Studies Now?', *Social Text* 23:3–4 (2005), pp. 1–17.

⁶⁰ Judith Halberstam, 'What's That Smell?: Queer Temporalities and Subcultural Lives', *The Scholar and Feminist Online* (Issue 2.1, Summer 2003), {<http://www.barnard.edu/sfonline/ps/printjha.htm>}.

⁶¹ Eng et al, 'What's Queer', p. 1–3.

Thus, the critique of heteronormativity in this article is not about setting up an agenda for universal LGBT identity politics, but rather to critically examine the attempts to stabilise and universalise subject positions. The gay and lesbian transnational movement, also active at the Beijing conference, has been much criticised for having followed in the footsteps of the white Western women's movement in universalising its issues as a global mission. This discourse assumes, prediscursively, that homosexuals, gays, and lesbians are universal categories that exist everywhere in the world and are used to justify that mission to defend their rights *as* homosexuals and advance homosexuality as a group category and fixed identity.⁶² I apply this critique by arguing that pre-assuming universal analytical categories does not allow sensitivity to localised processes of normalisation and it keeps some forms of violence invisible.

These pre-assumed analytical categories could also be described as 'dubbing culture' or 'voice over'. These are concepts which Tom Boellstorff has introduced in his research as a 'metaphor for conceptualizing contemporary globalizing processes'⁶³ between modernity, nationalism, sexuality, and gay subjectivities in the Indonesian archipelago.⁶⁴ These concepts provide an interesting metaphor for tracing the processes where norms are continuously produced. I apply 'close reading' method in order to locate the norm and the subversion to the norm in policy documents and images. Sara Ahmed describes this process as:

reading which works against, rather than through, a text's own construction of itself (how the text 'asks to be read') [...] The disobedient reader [...] is a reader who interrupts the text with questions that demand a re-thinking of how it works, of how and why it works as it does, for whom.⁶⁵

This way of reading refers to methods that pay attention to the details (of texts, illustrations) in order to open up possibilities and produce interpretations that are breaking conventional meanings of sex, gender, and sexuality. Focusing on details allows sensitivity towards intersectionality of norms: how norms of sexuality and gender are located in the crossroads of class, social status, just to name a few.

Critical feminist scholars, according to Judith Butler, have a double task: first to show how knowledge and power constitute a way of ordering the world; and second, to follow 'the breaking points': moments of discontinuity, and sites where workings of power fail and subversion emerges.⁶⁶ For Butler, subversion is a political process of erosion working from inside the norm. It creates new possibilities for the expressions of enjoyable life and challenges to normative violence, heteronormative structures, and assumptions of kinship.⁶⁷ The rest of the article describes and reads closely the practices of producing gender knowledge. It analyses the normative descriptions of gender mainstreaming advocacy in the context of post-tsunami Aceh, and illustrates how subversion emerges from these

⁶² Joseph A. Massad, *Desiring Arabs* (London: The University of Chicago Press, 2007), pp. 160–3, 416.

⁶³ Boellstorff, 'The Gay Archipelago', p. 5.

⁶⁴ Ibid, but also Tom Boellstorff, 'Playing Back the Nation: *Waria*, Indonesian Transvestites', *Cultural Anthropology*, 19:2 (2004), pp. 159–95 and Tom Boellstorff, 'Gay and Lesbian Indonesians and the Idea of the Nation', *Social Analysis*, 50:1 (2006), pp. 158–63.

⁶⁵ Sara Ahmed, *Difference that Matter: Feminist Theory and Postmodernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 17.

⁶⁶ Butler, 'Undoing Gender', p. 215.

⁶⁷ Chambers and Carver, 'Judith Butler', pp. 129, 134.

norms. The next section takes a closer look at the normative ideals that are produced by policy documents and advocacy materials on gender.

Negotiations around gender in Aceh

Without exception, both the central government and Acehnese provincial government define gender equality as equality between men and women. The term ‘gender’ is used as it was at the Beijing conference in 1995, namely only in the context of heterosexual binary of men and women.⁶⁸ Working within the heteronormative framework, gender advocacy provides a space for feminist interpretations of Islam, pushing the normative boundaries that govern heterosexuality with contextual readings of the Qur’an.⁶⁹ The formal implementation of *shari’a* law in Acehnese governance and legislative processes means that any arguments for gender mainstreaming and gender equality, to gain any respect in public, have to be based on the interpretations of the Qur’an and the *hadith*. However, it is important to note that women activists and gender experts do not share one vision of what gender sensitive or human rights based *shari’a* implementation should be, and that they attempt to challenge the normative borders actively. The normative boundaries of public debates on gender are where the limits of the dominant and publicly expressed interpretations of Islam are located at.

The key components of promotion of gender equality are the production of ‘gender sensitive’ information for ‘gender responsive’ programme planning, and the promotion of sex-disaggregated statistics. Data is produced using indicators agreed in the Beijing Platform for Action, Millennium Development Goals, CEDAW and through sector specific gender analysis. The ‘ultimate goal [is]: the full engagement of women and men as equal partners in the social, cultural and economic development of Aceh and Nias’.⁷⁰

Production of knowledge created at different government structures is distributed to the Acehnese population by experts and consultants using community meetings (such as focus group discussions). One of the commonly used concepts is ‘socialisation’ which has a particular history in the context of Indonesia, and was commonly used by the President Suharto’s New Order regime. Government programmes and plans to ‘develop and modernize’ rural parts of Indonesia were introduced to rural populations through open community meetings. New ways to

⁶⁸ Butler, ‘Undoing Gender’, p. 182; see Baden and Goetz, ‘Who Needs’ for detailed discussion on the debates on the concept gender in Beijing.

⁶⁹ See further on examples M. B. Hooker, *Indonesian Syariah. Defining a National School of Islamic Law* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2008), pp. 25–6, and Greg Fealey & Virginia Hooker (eds), *Voices of Islam in Southeast Asia* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2006), pp. 148–9, 348–52, and Danial, *Seri Makalah Diskusi 1: Islam, CEDAW dan Perlindungan Hak Perempuan* [Discussion Paper Series 1: Islam, CEDAW and Protection of Women’s Rights] (United Nations Development Fund for Women, East and Southeast Asia Regional Office, 2008).

⁷⁰ Agency for the Rehabilitation and Reconstruction of Aceh and Nias (BRR), *Policy and Strategy Paper: Promoting Gender Equality in the Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Process of Aceh and Nias* (2006). Nias refers to an island south of the island of Sumatra and part of the province of North Sumatra that suffered from earthquake in March 2005. Between 2005–2009 the reconstruction efforts for both Aceh and Nias are coordinated through BRR.

‘conduct conduct’ include emphasis on ‘capabilities, self-reliance and mental endurance of women’.⁷¹ This is done by emphasising community participation and the establishment of issue-based groups and committees, whose main task is to hold meetings to prepare plans and proposals to receive gender funds, and to monitor their implementation. Although the emphasis is on potentiality of ‘communities’, expert knowledge and positions (such as trained facilitators, community volunteers or civil society organisations) are required to secure the success of the process.⁷²

The above examples illustrate the processes of institutionalisation and normalising gender mainstreaming approaches into governance, and suggest further linkages between gender mainstreaming initiatives and neoliberal governmentality. In the following, in order to illustrate the ideals that exist in the current gender mainstreaming discourse, and the subversive reading that can challenge the notions of ‘universalism’, I will analyse the brochure ‘What Is Gender’ produced by the Bureau for Women’s Empowerment in Aceh. The material is produced to ‘socialize *shari’a* Islam and the concept of gender’ to government officials and Acehnese women through women’s empowerment centres. The two green figures that appear in the middle comprise the official logo used by the State Ministry for Women’s Empowerment, and the Bureau for Women’s Empowerment, in Aceh.⁷³



Image 1. Cover of the brochure ‘This is gender’ Bureau for Women’s Empowerment, NAD.

The two green stick figures can be identified as male and female figures appearing in modern Muslim dress (man’s hat, woman’s long dress and veil, and the green colour of the figures). This idealised picture not only portrays an ideal religious identity, but also an ideal character of a citizen (Acehnese/Indonesian); the dress suggests an economically stable, urban middle-class couple, and a

⁷¹ Office of the State Minister for the Role of Women, *Indonesia National Plan of Action: Follow-up of the Fourth World Conference on Women, 4–15 September 1995*, pp. 3–4.

⁷² On the relationship between community-based organisations and neoliberalism in the Indonesian context see for example, Tanya Murray Li, *The Will to Improve: Governmentality, Development, and the Practice of Politics* (London: Durham University Press, 2007).

⁷³ Since 2008, the tasks of the Bureau for Women’s Empowerment is covered by the Agency for Women’s Empowerment and Child Protection.

monogamous nuclear heterosexual relationship. It reinforces the idea of uniform and uniformed citizens, an image which erases religious, social, economic, and ethnic differences.⁷⁴

One of the recurrent themes in gender mainstreaming documentation and national development plans is the emphasis on the ‘harmonious equal-partnership’ between men and women.⁷⁵ This language focusing on harmonious partnership between men and women is also part of the UN World Conference on Women discourse, and of the ‘harmonious family model’ (*keluarga sakinah*) promoted by Aisyiah, women’s wing of the second biggest Muslim organisation in Indonesia.⁷⁶ The declaration of Mexico, the first UN Conference on Women in 1975, stated that the family is a basic unit of society, and that men’s active participation in the family is advocated, combining home and work possibilities for both partners.⁷⁷ Similarly, since 1993, Indonesian policy documents have actively emphasised the role of both men and women ‘as citizens and human resources for development’. It is the responsibility of both men and women to ‘build a healthy prosperous and happy family along with the nurturing of children, adolescents and youth in the effort to fully develop the Indonesian character.’⁷⁸ The marriage law from 1974 defines ‘family’ and ‘household’ as the same. ‘Family’ is defined as a formal monogamous marriage of a man and a woman, ‘blessed’ with a small number of children, and husband as the head of the family.⁷⁹

The construct of the ‘family’ as father, mother, and two children, inhabits the modern official spaces where the ideal Indonesian citizenship is built.⁸⁰ What is remarkable about this construct is that the family is not considered a private sphere, but a part of the rhetoric of nation-building and religious piety aimed at producing Indonesian citizens as modern Muslims. Women and men are seen as productive and reproductive human resources and key elements in the ‘development’ process. However, the gender ideology of the New Order period (1965–1998) is described as ‘state ideology of motherhood.’⁸¹ Krishna Sen has argued that in the early 1990s there was a shift from women as ‘wife and womb’ into women as reproductive workers.⁸²

⁷⁴ See further on uniforms for example, Saya S. Shiraishi, *Young Heroes: The Indonesian Family in Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University, Southeast Asia Program, 2000 [1997]) and John R. Bowen, *Muslims Through Discourse: Religion and Ritual in Gayo Society* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993) on introduction of Indonesian dress in the 1930s.

⁷⁵ Siaahan, ‘The Politics of Gender’, p. 9.

⁷⁶ See for example, Pieternella van Doorn-Harder, *Women Shaping Islam: Reading the Qur’an in Indonesia* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006), pp. 114–5.

⁷⁷ United Nations, *World Conference of the International Women’s Year: Declaration of Mexico on the Equality of Women and Their Contribution to Development and Peace* (United Nations, E/CONF.66/34, 2 July 1975), para 5.

⁷⁸ Krishna Sen, ‘Indonesian women at Work: Reframing the subject’, In Krishna Sen and Maila Stivens (eds), *Gender and Power in Affluent Asia* (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 44.

⁷⁹ Sylvia Tiwon, ‘Reconstructing Boundaries and Beyond’, in Juliette Koning, Marleen Nolten, Janet Rodenburg and Ratna Saptari (eds), *Women and Households in Indonesia: Cultural Notions and Social Practices* (Richmond: Curzon Press, 2000), p. 73.

⁸⁰ Shiraishi, ‘Young Heroes’, p. 164.

⁸¹ Madelon Djajadiningrat-Nieuwenhuis, ‘Ibuisism and priyayization: Path to power?’, in Elsbeth Locher-Scholten and Anke Niehof (eds), *Indonesian Women in Focus: Past and Present Notions* (Leiden: KITLV Press, 1992 [1987]), pp. 43–51 and Julia I. Suryakusuma, ‘The State and Sexuality in New Order Indonesia’, in Laurie J. Sears (ed.), *Fantasizing the Feminine in Indonesia* (London: Duke University Press, 1996), pp. 92–119.

⁸² Sen, ‘Indonesian Women’, p. 45.

The two figures in the logo are each stretching one arm upwards which can be seen in two ways. Firstly, their bodies seem to draw the profile of a house, suggesting ideals of harmonious partnership and family life. Interestingly, there are no children on this cover page or in the logo, so as to differentiate the Ministry's logo from the logo of the National Family Planning Board which has similar two figures forming a house with two children inside. However, the back cover of the brochure shows a picture of children attending a religious ceremony, accompanied by a printed prayer for equality between boys and girls in the future. Secondly, the upwardly stretching arms suggest the idea of reaching higher and higher towards 'development', 'progress', 'advancement', and 'better future'.

During the celebration of *Hari Ibu* in 2006, the Garuda Bird, the national symbol of the Republic of Indonesia, was used to represent the joint responsibility of women and men in the process of nation-building:

Bird Garuda⁸³ that carries the spirit and the soul of Pancasila [five principles of the Constitution of Republic of Indonesia], cannot fly high if it only uses one of its wings, that is the male wing. Garuda Pancasila can only fly through the clouds if it's two wings, male and female, flap together and have synergy. Let us unite power, potential and energy which we have together.⁸⁴



Image 2. Garuda, the national symbol of the Republic of Indonesia.

As already mentioned, both the local and the central government bodies use internationally agreed indicators to compare the 'quality of women' within Indonesia, regionally and globally. The most important indicators are Gender Development Index (GDI) and Gender Empowerment Measurement (GEM). These indicators are criticised generally.⁸⁵ For example, the notion of political participation as formal representation of women in national politics omits other types of political participation and forms of politics, such as decision making in other governance structures, participation in civil society and community-based

⁸³ Garuda, a mythical bird and a mount of Vishnu is a national symbol of Republic of Indonesia. The bird grips a scroll with a text 'unity in diversity, and has a shield on its chest representing the five principles of the constitution: belief in one God, just and civilised humanity, unity of Indonesia, deliberative democracy, and social justice.

⁸⁴ President of the Republic of Indonesia, Presiden Republik Indonesia, *Sambutan Peringatan Hari Ibu ke-78* [Speech on the commemorating 78th Mother's Day] (2006).

⁸⁵ See for example, Saskia E. Wieringa, 'A Reflection on Power and the Gender Empowerment Measure of the UNDP', in Saskia E. Wieringa (ed.), *Workshop on GDI/GEM Indicators, The Hague, 13-18 January 1997* (Institute of Social Studies, Report 1-19, 1997), and Saskia E. Wieringa, 'Measuring Women's Empowerment: Developing a Global Tool', in Tanh-Dam Truong, Saskia E. Wieringa and Amrita Chhachhi (eds), *Engendering Human Security: Feminist Perspectives* (London: Zed Books, 2006), pp. 211-33.

organisations, and the active role women play in the Qur'an reading groups interpreting Islam and their Muslim identities.⁸⁶

The 'fact' that women do not appear in 'public' (namely formal politics and formal labour market participation), is compounded by representations of 'women's domestication' in the private sphere. 'Housewife' as a concept emerged in the vocabulary of Indonesian archipelago through Dutch colonialism, and has always been an unfamiliar concept to the majority of Indonesian people, due to their economic circumstances and the importance of female labour.⁸⁷ Furthermore, the division between the private and the public are perceived differently in many rural societies. When public and private are defined as a dichotomy between household/family and public participation (in politics or formal labour market) it ultimately refers to urban-based middle class and ignores women's active participation in the Qur'an reading groups, farming and various other 'family activities', which can also be considered as 'public affairs'.⁸⁸ Underlying the gender indicators, there is an assumption of a monogamous nuclear family model with one husband and one wife, none of which necessarily corresponds with the ways in which lives are organised around production, consumption, and reproduction.⁸⁹

According to the official state discourse, gender mainstreaming as a policy aims to ensuring the quality of the female workforce which is essential for the 'national development', economic growth and welfare, on which the economic welfare of families depends.⁹⁰ The focus on the labour market and economy points towards measuring people's worth according to their ability to participate in the economic development. It further seems that focus on both women and men is highest during so called 'reproductive years' or on adolescents who are about to enter this 'natural' phase in their lives. The ideals of family seem to have a connection with the state discourse during the New Order period which focused on 'Five Duties of Women'. These duties illustrate the importance of marriage and giving birth to children as a qualification for a membership of society. Women are generally not considered as adults until they have married.⁹¹

To sum up, heterosexual nuclear-family and the stability of bodies and their desires is presumed and produced as the norm.⁹² It also seems that gender mainstreaming documentation paints an ideal picture of women and men who are well educated, healthy, and who contribute to the national (economic) development as labour force and biological mothers and fathers in formal heterosexual

⁸⁶ See for example, van Doorn-Harder, *Women Shaping Islam: Reading the Qur'an in Indonesia* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006).

⁸⁷ Elsbeth Locher-Scholten, *Women and the Colonial State: Essays on Gender and Modernity in the Netherlands Indies 1900–1942* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2000), pp. 70–1.

⁸⁸ See for example, Lila Abu-Lughod, 'The Marriage of Feminism and Islamism in Egypt: Selective Repudiation as a Dynamic of Postcolonial Cultural Politics', in Lila Abu-Lughod (ed.), *Remaking Women: Feminism and Modernity in the Middle East* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), pp. 243–69 especially p. 260.

⁸⁹ See for example, Siapno, 'Gender, Islam, Nationalism'; Chandra Jayawardena, 'Women and Kinship in Aceh Besar, Northern Sumatra', *Ethnology*, 16:1(1977), pp. 21–38.

⁹⁰ President of the Republic of Indonesia, *Instruction of the President of the Republic of Indonesia number 9 year 2000 concerning gender mainstreaming in the national development*, p. 1, Office of the State Minister for the Role of Women, 'Indonesia National Plan of Action', pp. 3–4.

⁹¹ Sharyn Graham, 'Negotiating Gender: Calalai' in Bugis Society', *Intersections*, 6 August (2001), p. 13; see also Saskia E. Wieringa, 'Ibu or the Beast: Gender Interests in Two Indonesian Women's Organisations', *Feminist Review*, 41 (Summer 1992), p. 110.

⁹² See for example, Bhaiya and Wieringa, 'Manual on Sexual Rights'.

monogamous families. The ideal picture of both men and women in central government's documentation becomes integrated with the ideal of 'Indonesian character'. However, in Aceh it includes a special focus on the ideal of Muslim citizenship, living in accordance with *shari'a*, leaving space for multiple voices of feminist interpretations of the Qur'an. The next section takes a closer look at the ruptures and negotiation that take place within the framework of gender advocacy or promotion of gender equality: how on one hand the documents miss certain bodies, and on the other, how a close reading of these documents provides new possibilities for reading the Acehnese society differently.

Subversion that emerges from within

In this section, I take a closer look at the subversion that emerges from within the gender mainstreaming and gender advocacy in Aceh. Gender reporting from Aceh has been criticised of 'coca-colonisation' or 'cut-and paste' policy making. Deleting the name of the region or the references to the tsunami or the conflict would make it impossible to tell the context the documents have been produced for. Further, the promotion of gender equality takes place in a complex context where international financial organisations, donor agencies, and multinational corporations while funding initiatives to promote gender equality and women's rights, simultaneously frame 'development' and 'reconstruction' within the wider context of economic liberalisation, with a focus on improvement of workforce, and access to markets.

Remarkably, none of the government's gender mainstreaming policy documents problematise the impacts of the liberalisation processes of creating 'investment environment' for foreign investments or exploitation of natural resources, that have contributed towards the violent conflict in the province. This despite the fact that Bureau for Reconstruction and Rehabilitation states in its gender equality strategy, that

a community is not a collection of equal people living in a particular geographic region. It is usually made up by individuals and groups who command different levels of power, wealth, influence and the ability to express their needs, concerns and rights⁹³

and thus offers a framework to widen the analytical focus from gender to intersectionalities. However, indicators in all key gender mainstreaming documents focus on the inequalities between men and women within the given structures and systems, not on differences between women. Thus, it leaves intersectional sensitivity hanging in the air.

For example, Solidaritas Perempuan Bungoeng Jeumpa Aceh, Banda Aceh-based women's organisation, has documented the negative impacts the Asian Development Bank's infrastructure loan to reconstruct the cement facility of the Pt SAI-Lafarge in Lhoknga. Impacts have included worsened security situation due to presence of army and police, lack of drinkable water in the villages surrounding the cement factory, and reproductive health problems such as miscarriages for the female factory workers.

⁹³ Agency for the Rehabilitation and Reconstruction for Aceh and Nias, 'Policy and Strategy Paper', p. 21.

Moreover, when violence against women is primarily framed as domestic violence (*kekerasan dalam rumah tangga, KDRT*), it leaves other kinds of violence out of the picture, including violence that is committed by conflict parties, state apparatus (police, and judicial system), or religious norms that control especially women's bodies and sexuality. Socialisation of the law on Islamic dress has included arrests, public humiliation (cutting hair, caning punishments after Friday prayers) by the *shari'a* police.

The focus on women's rights *vis-à-vis* men's rights in relation to inheritance, role in the family and public decision-making, when put into the current normative context in Aceh, can also read as an attempt to challenge the increased textual readings of the Qur'an that attempt to 'domesticate Acehnese women'. Such reporting can also be read as an attempt to respond to the existing stereotypes of Muslim societies in the post 9/11 and 'war on terror' contexts.⁹⁴

An important element of the discourse on prosperous families is that the 'household' referring to an economic unit, and the 'family' referring to kinship relations, is assumed to be one and the same. Furthermore, it is assumed that people belonging to the same family, share one household. This perception ignores the prevalence of migrants and those who fled Aceh seeking political asylum or employment in Malaysia. There are purely 'female villages' that have emerged as a result of conflict and disappearance, killing and displacement of male members of the community.⁹⁵ The image of nuclear family also excludes and makes invisible domestic workers, mostly women and girls, who perform domestic chores in urban middle-class households.⁹⁶

Furthermore, the cover picture of the brochure 'what is gender' leaves out other potential interpretations of Muslim identity and all non-Muslim identities, and minority ethnic identity groups, such as the ethnic Chinese community, the biggest non-Muslim community in Aceh. Further, there is silencing of: conflict widow(ers), polygamous relationships (formal/informal); same-sex/bi-sex practices; joint family structures or single-headed households (be it women, men, or *waria*⁹⁷); disabled or people outside of reproduction/production; or people to whom parenthood is social rather than biological (especially in complex post-tsunami and conflict context many children are adopted by their extended family members). Further, people who are considered less-Acehnese or non-Acehnese, or otherwise suspicious due to the local conflict dynamics, are generally missing. An exception to this is the gender document of the Aceh Peace-Reintegration Board, which directly refers to discrimination of conflict victims and 'susceptible people', and the BRR gender equality strategy, that specifically refers to the isolation and discrimination of (tsunami) widows and widowers.

⁹⁴ See for example, Laura Shepherd, 'Veiled References. Constructions of Gender in the Bush Administration Discourse on the Attacks on Afghanistan Post-9/11', *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 8:1(2006), pp. 19-41.

⁹⁵ See detailed reporting by Amnesty International, or Human Rights Watch.

⁹⁶ Tiwon, 'Reconstructing Boundaries', p. 83, footnote 14. See also Sen, 'Indonesian Women'.

⁹⁷ Waria, a word for male to female transgendered people, derives from the words *wanita*/woman, and *pria*/man. See for example, Dèdè Oetomo, 'Gender and Sexual Orientation in Indonesia', in Laurie J. Sears (ed.), *Fantasizing the Feminine in Indonesia* (London: Duke University Press, 1996) and Benedict R. O'G. Anderson, "'Bullshit!' S/he said: The Happy, Modern, Sexy, Indonesian Married Woman as Transsexual", in Laurie J. Sears (ed.), *Fantasizing the Feminine in Indonesia* (London: Duke University Press, 1996).

In the following section, I elaborate on how dominant concepts that frame advocacy on gender equality: sex, gender and sexuality, and notions of motherhood, are challenged. The first example is from the context of the celebration of the international women's day (IWD) in 2007 in Aceh for which the Gender Working Group had prepared a gender analysis of the reconstruction and rehabilitation process. The analysis pointed out the missed opportunities of the past reconstruction efforts and demanding clear focus on women's concerns, particularly ending the violence against women.⁹⁸ The report was handed over to the Governor after the long march across the town. The Association of *Warias* joined them along with banners 'warias are also human beings'.⁹⁹

This request to be included into the category of 'human' during the IWD celebration subverts the framework of women's day celebration and post-tsunami reconstruction efforts in several distinct ways. Firstly, it challenges the feminist practices of reading bodies through the heteronormative matrix. It also can be seen as an attempt to question the naturalness of the concept of 'woman' or 'female' solely belonging to the female bodies. Although publicly visible, *waria* remain unintelligible within the gender mainstreaming framework and most public policies. *Waria* as a group is mentioned in official documentation only in the social work regulations attempting to find 'cures for social problems' such as sexual transmitted diseases (particularly HIV/AIDS), and the elimination of prostitution. None of the organisations working on gender issues have included *waria* as a category in their gender analysis.

Finally, it raises the question of normative boundaries of the advocacy to end violence which has not given attention to the violence against the LGBT community in Aceh.¹⁰⁰

While insisting on segregating public spaces into same-sex spaces in order 'to protect people's morality', the construction of dominant moral norms opens up potential spaces for same-sex relations. However, the likelihood of people moving publicly beyond the heterosexual norms, or support non-normativity publicly is unlikely, due to the common interpretation of homosexuality and cross-dressing as a sin. There have been cases of torture and sexual abuse of two gays in Banda Aceh by police in 2007 and openly hostile anti-gay mail has been posted on the Gender Working Group's email list in 2008 and 2009.¹⁰¹

The second example focuses on the discussions around the *Hari Ibu*. The dominant interpretation of the day has focused on women's roles as wives and

⁹⁸ Gender Working Group, 'Evaluation of the Situation of Women in Aceh'.

⁹⁹ AK News, 'Perempuan Aceh Minta Keadilan.' [Acehnese Women ask for justice] {www.acehkita.com, 8 March 2007}.

¹⁰⁰ It is important to note, however, that the same public visibility is not available for other groups within diverse LGBT community in Aceh. See further on unequal visibility Boellstorff, 'Playing Back' and Saskia E. Wieringa, 'Communism and women's same-sex practices in post-Suharto Indonesia', *Culture, Health & Sexuality*, 2:4(2000), pp. 441–57.

¹⁰¹ See further for example, Amnesty International, *Indonesia (Aceh): Torture of gay men by the Banda Raya police* (ASA 21/004/2007) and Asian Human Rights Commission, *INDONESIA: Brutal torture and sexual abuse by the Banda Raya police* (AHRC-UAU-060–2008). Further, the law on pornography was passed in December 2008 in which necrophilia, bestiality, oral sex, anal sex, and lesbian and gay sex is defined as 'deviant sexual intercourse'. The law has been strongly opposed by several civil society organisations, including the LGBT activists.

(biological) mothers.¹⁰² Motherhood is seen as the *kodrat*, or women's destiny or natural biological role. The discourse of '*Ibu bangsa*' (mother of nation) highlights the responsibility of women to prepare the next generation of citizens.¹⁰³ In the Acehnese context, motherhood is valued both in nationalistic and religious discourses.¹⁰⁴

The 'naturalness' of biological motherhood within formally registered marriage is not found only the official state discourse. This same 'naturalness' is repeated within the wider gender advocacy, where most of the attention on health related concern is on women's reproductive health. Significantly, biological motherhood and reproductive health are the only contexts where woman's sexuality is discussed; sexual pleasure does not appear in any of the discussions.

The strong state discourse on motherhood, or *state ibuism*¹⁰⁵ has made some women's activists allergic to the ceremonies that have been imposed by the state particularly during the Suharto's 30 year long regime. The dominant gender ideology relies on the idea of motherhood as biological. Parenting is implicitly seen as biological and natural part of the *kodrat* – the God given natural roles for men and women. However, after the *Hari Ibu* in 2007, some Gender Working Group's email list members raised their concern of the narrow understanding of the concept 'mother' or 'motherhood' and called for wider understanding of motherhood as societal phenomena.¹⁰⁶ Historically, within the wider Indonesian context, the meaning of motherhood has included multiple mothering, care by domestic workers, co-wives, grandparents, aunts and older siblings.¹⁰⁷ The narrow understanding of parenting through reproduction also omits other forms of social parenting and varied guardianship arrangements due to the impacts of the long armed conflict and the tsunami. It further 'others' those women who have become mothers after a rape or relationships outside marriage, or those women who for various reasons, either do not choose or cannot become biological mothers.¹⁰⁸

Finally, a subversive reading of the logo and the Garuda bird (figures 1 and 2), questions the naturalness of the notions on normative sexuality. We are used to seeing the stick figures representing male sex and female sex, and further, the two genders. Judith Butler's critique of the stability of sex and gender releases the stick figures from these pre-assumptions; what appears to be male and female are simply dresses that signify the binary of male/female. Secondly, the way in which the Indonesian state has codified the representation of the Garuda bird, contrasts remarkably with how the bird is represented for example, in Balinese Hindu temple stone carvings. In the official state version, Garuda has two wings and its beak is pointed towards right. In the temple carvings, Garuda has multiple wings and the

¹⁰² Indonesian-English Dictionary, {www.indodic.com} accessed in December 2008, see also Kaleen E. Love, 'The Politics of Gender in a Time of Change: Gender Discourses, Institutions and Identities in Contemporary Indonesia', PhD Thesis, Department of International Development (Oxford: Queen Elizabeth House, Oxford University, 2007), p. 115.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p.114–5.

¹⁰⁴ Siapno, 'Gender, Islam, Nationalism'.

¹⁰⁵ See Blackburn, 'Women and the State'; Suryakusuma, 'The State and Sexuality'; Sen, 'Indonesian Women at Work' and Djajadiningrat-Nieuwenhuis, 'Ibuisim and priyayization'.

¹⁰⁶ Gender mailing list, 7 January 2008.

¹⁰⁷ Blackburn, 'Women and the State', p. 141.

¹⁰⁸ Documentation of discrimination faced by 'single mothers' is done extensively by several local women's organisations focusing on violence against women and legal assistance.

beak is directed towards front forming an *yonic*¹⁰⁹ triangle. The wings have no gender markers, and the yonic triangle can be read as representing female sexuality and non-reproductive sex organs.¹¹⁰ Indonesian state has not only gendered the image of Garuda, but it has also purified its meanings from non-reproductive female sexuality and replaced it with a masculinised and militarised bird, resembling other eagle images used as national symbols.

Conclusion

This article has attempted to illustrate the ways in which advocacy on gender mainstreaming and gender equality continuously reproduce and challenge the normative ideas of human lives in Aceh. Without exception, the concept gender is constructed as a binary of two sexes and organisations differ in their perspective and sensitivity to lives that are lived outside heterosexual nuclear family.

Production of norms is a dynamic site of contestation which while producing the norm creates simultaneously potentiality for subversion that challenges the dominant interpretations. The notions of gender norms in Aceh are moulded from many directions, including the religious and political powers. Based on my reading, gender mainstreaming is not a policy approach that exists in vacuum or produces gender ideology in isolation, but rather a discourse that is integrated with religious frames and different layers of governmentality (local, national, international) and has linkages to national, international, debates on gender norms, and it's linkages to neoliberalism, paternalism and nationalism, and theology.

What do multiple interpretations of concepts do to gender mainstreaming policies and feminist activism? This could point towards agenda that continuously keeps challenging the meanings of concepts and search for silenced and invisible lives; or towards opening up analytical frameworks to recognise the multiplicity of genders and sexualities and recognising non-normative lives in wider sense as 'worth living'. Drawing from postcolonial feminist and recent queer critiques, I argue that advocacy that solely focuses on gender and/or sexuality, reduces human bodies and their desires to simplistic, stick figures.¹¹¹ These representations remain blind to other forms of violence, such as global economic and political frameworks that define 'building back better' primarily as rebuilding economy, infrastructure and revitalisation of human resources. Subaltern bodies that are not in the position to speak remain invisible.¹¹²

Gender mainstreaming policies promoted in the context of Aceh provide a blueprint or map of how Acehnese society and culture is asked to be read. Gender policies produce a 'voice over' for their audience (other experts, donor agencies,

¹⁰⁹ *Yoni* is Sanskrit and which as been translated to mean divine passage, place of birth, womb, but also vagina and non-reproductive sex organs.

¹¹⁰ I thank Giti Thadani for the introduction to the feminist reading of the Hindu temple carvings and garuda bird in Bali in November 2008. See further, for example, Giti Thadani, *Sakhiyani: Lesbian Desire in Ancient and Modern India* (London: Cassell, 1996).

¹¹¹ I thank Christine Sylvester for pointing this out at the BISA workshop in Manchester 2008. See further, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, '“Under Western Eyes” Revisited: Feminist Solidarity through Anticapitalist Struggles', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 28:2(2002), pp. 499–535.

¹¹² See Amanda Wittman's article in this issue regarding neoliberal state and gender mainstreaming.

beneficiaries) This process requires translation from one language and cultural order to another and in the process of ‘dubbing’, gender mainstreaming retells the story of bodies and desires with the vocabulary that is intelligible, or comprehensible to dominant understandings of gender. The dubbing or voicing over cannot not totalise the discourse, as discourse is in constant process of change and contestation. When observed carefully, however, the voice is sometimes out of sync and the viewer is reminded of the alternative cultural logics that are performed at the same time with the norm.

Stories of Acehnese resistance to central government policies are well reported by earlier studies on Aceh. Subversion of a norm is not necessarily direct action against the norm, but sometimes conforming to the norm to use the emerging space for other purposes. What may seem to be conformity may be alternatively understood as strategy to use power and turn the norm against itself in favour of other agendas.¹¹³ In the current context, conforming subversion (playing along with heterosexual norms), provides more spaces for bodies and their desires than open resistance to the norm, or claiming non-normative identity.

Humanitarian organisations have reported cases where communities refusals to take part in gender assessments, requests to be paid for the time spent on the exercise demanding that organisations pay attention to existing economic injustices. This has been regarded by some experts as negative and as a sign of aid dependency. The refusal creates cracks in experts and researchers assumed ‘right to know’, and the assumption of communities’ already existing consent to voluntary participation. It further points towards the urgency to respond to lived experiences of political, social and economic injustices, which remain unsolved, if the analysis does not relate itself to wider economical restructuring, or ecological exploitation that is conducted, and supported by same organisations that promote women’s rights, and gender equality.

This article does not provide any solution to the question ‘what is better for Aceh’. The desire to fix and suggest alternatives too quickly might result simply ‘wishing for new tricks’, whereas sometimes showing how ‘stuck we are’ could open up new possibilities for hearing.¹¹⁴ This article ends with a suggestion that feminist activism and academic practice has to continue critiquing the positions where feminism(s) are spoken from and where feminist knowledge is produced. And finally, to engage in broader critique of the processes of economic, political and social normalisation, arising from ‘micropolitics of context, subjectivity and struggle’ and ‘linked with larger, even global economic and political frameworks’,¹¹⁵ including the economic paradigm that attempts to define what is ‘better’. Better is never better for everyone, as it may well remain worse – for some.

¹¹³ Siapno, ‘Gender, Islam, Nationalism’, p. 198.

¹¹⁴ Sara Ahmed, ‘A phenomenology of whiteness’, *Feminist Theory*, 8:2 (2007), pp. 149–68, especially p. 165.

¹¹⁵ Mohanty, ‘Under Western Eyes Revisited’, p. 501.