UNIVERSITY OF AMSTERDAM

UvA-DARE (Digital Academic Repository)

Silent struggles

Women education leaders' agency for peacebuilding in Islamic schools in post-conflict Aceh

Lopes Cardozo, T.A.; Affiat, R.A.; Zaman, F.; Irawani, M.; Srimulyani, E.

DOI
10.1080/17400201.2022.2052826

Publication date
2022

Document Version
Final published version

Published in
Journal of Peace Education

License
CC BY-NC-ND

Link to publication

Citation for published version (APA):
Lopes Cardozo, T. A., Affiat, R. A., Zaman, F., Irawani, M., & Srimulyani, E. (2022). Silent struggles: Women education leaders' agency for peacebuilding in Islamic schools in post-conflict Aceh. *Journal of Peace Education*, *19*(2), 158-181. https://doi.org/10.1080/17400201.2022.2052826

General rights
It is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), other than for strictly personal, individual use, unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

Disclaimer/Complaints regulations
If you believe that digital publication of certain material infringes any of your rights or (privacy) interests, please let the Library know, stating your reasons. In case of a legitimate complaint, the Library will make the material inaccessible and/or remove it from the website. Please Ask the Library: https://uba.uva.nl/en/contact, or a letter to: Library of the University of Amsterdam, Secretariat, P.O. Box 19185, 1000 GD Amsterdam, The Netherlands. You will be contacted as soon as possible.

UvA-DARE is a service provided by the library of the University of Amsterdam (https://dare.uva.nl)

Download date:18 Nov 2026

JOURNAL OF PEACE EDUCATION
2022, VOL. 19, NO. 2, 158–181
https://doi.org/10.1080/17400201.2022.2052826

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

OPEN ACCESS Check for updates

Silent struggles: women education leaders' agency for peacebuilding in Islamic schools in post-conflict Aceh

Mieke T.A. Lopes Cardozo[a], Rizki Amalia Affiat[b], Faryaal Zaman[b], Maida Irawani[b] and Eka Srimulyani[c]

[a]Department of geography, planning and international development studies, Amsterdam insititute for social science research, University of Amsterdam, Amsterdam, Netherlands; [b]Independ Researcher; [c]Department of social welfare, Ar-Raniry State Islamic University, Banda Aceh, Indonesia

ABSTRACT

This article engages with an under-researched field that specifically looks into the gendered nature of women education leaders' agency in the context of Islamic boarding schools in post-tsunami and post-war Aceh province of Indonesia. The key aim of this paper is to understand various ways in which Acehnese women educators' negotiate and navigate restricted, gendered and religiously orthodox spaces. We analyse the role of grassroots education actors in processes of societal transformation and peacebuilding through a gender-specific lens, to explore our contextual understanding of agency through a cultural political economy approach, complemented with insights from critical and decolonial peace education. By presenting the often silenced and marginalized stories of women leaders, educators and grassroots actors, we explore their views and experiences in – consciously or unconsciously – transforming or reproducing existing (in)equalities and potential conflict-triggers in contemporary Aceh.

ARTICLE HISTORY
Received 10 February 2022
Accepted 9 March 2022

KEYWORDS
Post-war Aceh; gender; teacher agency; women leadership; Islamic schools; peacebuilding

1. Introduction

The first time I decided to establish the first dayah *ever in the village, a locally respected man asked me, "you're a woman, how dare you?" Ummi Hajar, Central Aceh*

We met Ummi Hajar during our field research at her *dayah* in an interior part of Aceh province in Indonesia. *Ummi* means 'mother' in Arabic but is an honorary title for a woman in Aceh who owns a *dayah*. *Dayah* is an Acehnese term for an Islamic traditional school. They have strong historical roots within the Aceh region as centers of education in the pre-colonial era. Her statement illustrates the contradictory and restricted space for manoeuvre for women leadership, not only within the *dayah* school's surrounding community, but also in Acehnese society at large. In this article, we aim to engage with the often untold stories of Ummi Hajar and other women grassroots educators situated in the unique context of Aceh.

CONTACT Mieke T.A. Lopes Cardozo t.a.lopescardozo@uva.nl

© 2022 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.
This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way.

Situated in Aceh's post-conflict setting, this research focuses on the education sector, increasingly recognized as a crucial space for sustainable transformations of post-conflict and post-disaster societies (Anonymous co-authors and Author A 2017). While education has been claimed to have the potential to support the empowerment of marginalized groups in society (Freire 1970), education systems and actors can also work to (re) produce inequalities and foster tensions (Bush and Saltarelli 2000). By connecting research on education and peacebuilding to gender studies, this research focuses specifically on the role of women educational leaders as agents of societal change – or reproduction – in the context of Islamic education and society in Aceh province, Indonesia. We aim to analyse women's roles in *dayah* through a critical, postcolonial and decolonial-inspired lens on peace education, that pays sincere attention to local context in relation to larger cultural and political realities as embedded in broader (inter)national development strategies (Zembylas 2018), as well as 'power, local meanings, and enabling voice, participation and agency through the peace education process' (Bajaj 2015, 154). We understand peace education as an 'ensemble' (Robertson and Dale 2015, 150) influenced by numerous cultural, political and economic dimensions and moments that operate beyond intra-classroom dynamics.

We examine an understudied realm within peace education; religious boarding schools called *dayah* in Aceh (or commonly referred to as *pesantren* in the rest of Indonesia, Anonymous Author 2013; Husin 2013). Secondly, and zooming in, we are interested in looking at the agency of women educators and women education leaders (school principals, or head teachers) in navigating and managing the strategically selective and unique spaces of these schools, in relation to their contextual, multiscalar surroundings. We want to come to an understanding of how these women educators negotiate gendered power dynamics and set social relations, and what role they play in educating for peace in the unique context of Aceh. In particular, we studied the *dayah* or Islamic traditional schools, composed of two kinds: *dayah* established and led by an *Ummi* (a woman religious leader) and *dayah* established and led by a male *ulama*, with segregated institutional settings for boy and girl students, with women teachers managing the girls' part of the dayah. Women (and sometimes men) who run the daily management and teach in the *dayah* are called *teungku inong*.

The primary participants in this study constituted women religious leaders (*Ummi*) considered as being 'leaders' of the *dayah* and in some cases of the surrounding communities, together with women teachers in these schools (*teungku*). In addition we engaged with women academics and activists working in the area of gender justice and peace in Aceh, men village leaders or *dayah* leaders and representatives of government institutions working with the *dayah* system. The *dayah* are influential within Acehnese society and politics due to their religious and moral authority, despite facing challenges against modernity and social changes, and as educational institutions, they play a part in broader

peacebuilding processes. Amidst these events the women and women leaders of these educational spaces may seem 'quiet' in the public arena, but when observed closer, we found that some were actively working to express their opinions and negotiate with different stakeholders, albeit in a different way compared to their male counterparts with more public influence.

In the remainder of the paper, we continue by first briefly setting out the key theoretical inspirations that guided our study and analysis, connecting these to the mostly qualitative and ethnographic methodology undertaken. Secondly, we situate the women's/girls' schools and their women leaders and teachers, and analyse their respective roles, within Aceh's post-war cultural, political economy (CPE) context. We then move on to share and discuss the diverse stories of the women *dayah* leaders and teachers in light of our conceptual understanding of women education leaders and teachers' agency in relation to the CPE context. After, we illustrate how gendered power dynamics play out in the governance of the *dayah* schools, through unequally distributed funding mechanisms in combination with the influence of ex-combatants in local politics. Following this, we analyse how unequal funding distributive mechanisms by the government-run Dayah Education Agency impacts on the daily functioning of the schools, leaving women-led and smaller scale *dayah* in marginalized positions. Finally, we share several stories of the ways in which *dayah* institutes and their leadership were confronted with and responded to direct and indirect forms of community hostility and violence; and we provide concluding reflections where we connect back to our theoretical and conceptual inspirations.

2. Situating *Dayah* in Acehs historical context

Aceh is a distinct region in the Indonesian archipelago due to its strong and autonomous geo-political history. This was acknowledged from the recorded history of Sultan Ali Mughayat Syah in the 1520s and the notable series of wars that followed during the Dutch invasion in 1873, when Aceh was a regional political and commercial power (Reid 2006). Being the last region in the archipelago to fall into the hands of Dutch colonialism it remained with the reputation as a dissident region (Morris 1983). This specific history, along with political and class division after Indonesian independence, fed into subsequent phases of various violent conflicts, culminating in the 1976 declaration of GAM (Gerakan Aceh Merdeka/Free Aceh Movement) against the centralised New Order regime (Aspinall 2014).

The devastating December 2004 tsunami finally forced GAM and the Indonesian Government to hold peace talks in Helsinki after several previous failed attempts. On 15 August 2005 a peace agreement – formally known as the Helsinki Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) – was finally signed by both parties, ending 29 years of armed conflict. Aceh was brought into an unprecedented phase of post-disaster reconstruction and peacebuilding efforts with the

aid of international donor agencies, recorded as the largest unprecedented humanitarian response in history (Anderson and Rosado 2013; Kweifio-Okai 2005). In the agreement, GAM gave up their demand for a special autonomy status.

Islamic values are embedded in Aceh culture, and at the centre of the socio-political aspects are the *ulama*. They have socio-political relations with the rulers, and *dayah* has played a central role in the community's education deeply rooted in Acehnese history. Hence, *ulama* are considered as the guardians of society and their involvement with the community could take form in political activities (Saby 2005). However, these relations are often more advantageous to the politicians, with *ulama* having an inferior position used as a means to achieve certain political objectives for political parties (ibid., 129–131).

Against this backdrop, there has been a lack of focused studies on the role of women *ulama* or women in *dayah* communities in Aceh, despite the fact that women have been notably important during the effort for peace talks and humanitarian aid. We examine how the constrained context of GAM political power in the post-conflict power dynamics and the patriarchal values of traditional *dayah* still provide ways for women (leaders) to find their own narratives to negotiate their roles.

3. Theoretical inspirations and methodological reflections

Our team of authors has felt inspired by a quote from the feminist Muslim scholar Mahmood (2011) in her answer to the question 'What challenges did you face in your research and coming to terms with what women are doing in Egypt in the mosque?' Saba Mahmood replies:

> I went there with a set of assumptions that I am now criticizing – that they are conservative and haven't given much thought to what they are doing. I was just amazed at how conscious they were and what they were struggling with. It was an eye-opening experience to me.

For us, this reveals a level of (self-)critical reflection and a sense of wonder that we have similarly experienced in our study on women leaders in Islamic (boarding) schools in Aceh.

Being a diverse research team in terms of disciplinary expertise, our nationalities, and cultural-religious backgrounds, we all have had distinct experiences and reflections throughout the process of undertaking this research. With this paper we wish to share with the reader our 'eye-opening experiences', as Mahmood recalls, through analysing the stories and strategies of a group of women that are rarely heard. Driven by a feminist approach to our scholarly work, and being part of a trans-disciplinary team of researchers, our theoretical journey reflects as much our own diversity as well as our wish to portray the diversity of the experiences of women, and women leaders, in Aceh. In this

section we first introduce an interdisciplinary analytical framework that inspired our critical ethnographic methodological approach (discussed thereafter). The research questions guiding our approach were:

(1) How can we understand the influence of structural and contextual factors on female education leaders' agency and gender (in) equality/justice?
(2) Through what strategic discourses and practices are female education leaders (un)able to conceptualize and pursue a socially just and peaceful Acehnese society?
(3) How do female education leaders' reflect on the impact of their strategies on processes of transformation or reproduction of the post-war context?

Critical peace education (Bajaj and Brantmeier 2011) and decolonial peace education (Zembylas 2018) require a nuanced understanding of and engagement with context, power dynamics and social relations, and a correspondingly layered (form of) analysis. Therefore, this study draws on Sum and Jessop's (2013) work on Cultural Political Economy (CPE) and Robertson and Dale's (2015) *critical* application of this to *education* specifically (hence, accordingly abbreviated as CCPEE). A CPE analysis distinguishes itself from political economy analysis, by emphasizing a cultural turn and paying attention to the cultural and semiotic dimension of identities, motivations and perceptions, facilitating a deeper understanding of how women educational leaders identify, believe, hope, strategize, and (re)act in a certain setting and for certain purposes. In addition, the CCPEE enables an analysis of the multiscalar politics of education to understand the work of education actors as being positioned in a complex and highly interconnected cultural, political and economic arena. Education (institutions, or systems) are not analysed as disconnected research subjects in isolation, but rather as nested within sectors and systems beyond the education sector, and below and above the state level. We view the inclusion of the cultural and semiotic dimensions in our analysis as indispensable in Aceh's context of complex religious belief systems. In addition, we value a CPE approach as it enables exploration of the intersection of discursive with material realities (Anonymous authors 2017), which are needed to understand the full spectrum of complexities of women leaders' agency and how these are connected to collective and individual senses of identity (see also Jokela-Pansini 2016).

Building on the CPE approach, we find further connections to debates on critical peace education (Bajaj and Brantmeier 2011) and decolonial peace education (Zembylas 2018), as these emphasise the importance of engaging with locally rooted forms of knowledge and scholarship. A decolonial lens theoretically complements a CCPEE analysis, by amplifying voices that have historically been muted and providing guidance in how to read and interpret practices of actors by considering their knowledge, narratives, and beliefs (Shirazi 2011). In our work, we apply this by 1) reflecting on our positionality

as insider/outside researchers (see below), 2) engaging with often underrepresented theorists from non-Western contexts (while not claiming to do full justice to that attempt), and 3) by representing the voices of women education leaders in the context of (conflict-affected, patriarchal) Aceh in academic debates on the potential and challenges of education for peace and social justice.

Guided by these considerations, we aim to contribute new insights into debates on the nexus between gender and critical peace(building) education. For our research, the most pertinent understanding of (women's) agency is the work of Mahmood (2001) on women's religious movement and activities in Egypt. She develops a view on agency that rather than a substitute for resistance to relations of domination, is conceptualised as a capacity for action that historically specific relations of subordination enable and create. Mahmood introduces the concept of *docile agency*, which is especially relevant in the context of Aceh and other contexts where there are patriarchal, religious traditions such as Islam (Mahmood 2001, 2013). According to her work, in analysing human agency within structures of subordination, feminists have sought to understand how women resist a dominant male order by subverting the hegemonic meanings of cultural practices and redeploying them for their own interests and agendas. This raises important questions as to how women contribute to reproducing their own domination or how do they resist or subvert it (Mahmood 2005).

Fida Adely (2012), based on her research in Jordanian schools, also notes that, despite male dominance in the reality of Islamic religious authority, women have significant capacity for influence and agency amongst their peers. We see the contribution of this among women in *dayah* as Abu-Lughod cautiously said: 'we should learn to read in various local and everyday resistance the existence of a range of specific strategies and structures of power' (1990, 53). Attention to the forms of resistance in particular societies can help us become critical of partial or reductionist theories of power (Mahmood 2005). Docility and docile agency as a concept enables a more contextually, and historically grounded understanding of a spectrum of possible ways in which agency is enacted and, sometimes in articulate or in more covert ways, expressed (Mieke T. A. Lopes Cardozo & Eka Srimulyani 2018).

Without enforcing a western 'universalist' perspective of gender justice, or women educators' agency, we build on the idea that in the specific context of post-conflict and post-tsunami Aceh, women navigate as cultural brokers in a complex arena in which local and foreign/Western discourses (on gender, development, peacebuilding) interact and drive situated models of 'creative agency' . We also attempt to open up an exploration of the agency of those women that did not or could not directly speak up and to understand the intimate interaction between an Islamic traditional pedagogy and the social system within the *dayah*, through a culturally and gender informed analytical lens. By highlighting the experiences of the less articulate, we aim to move away

from the focus traditionally placed on dialogue in postcolonial peace education, in order to acknowledge the social contexts in the *dayah* which may render speech amongst women leaders to be 'compulsory, performative, or serve a site of discipline regulated by surveillance' (Shirazi 2001). Building on this, Adely (2019) argues that blanket assumptions of female oppression in postcolonial contexts actually 'impedes a genuine interrogation of traditional hierarchies of knowledge and fails to take intersectionality seriously'. Through our observations and analysis of more 'silent' means of enactment and communication of their daily life and actions, we aim to 'translate' how these women enact their capacity for action in relation to their strategic selective contexts of the *dayah*.

3.1. Methodology and positionality

Considering its exploratory nature, this study draws on a mix of primarily qualitative methods, inspired by a reflective ethnographic approach, including: (semi-structured, in-depth) interviews; focus group discussions; (participant) observations of key meetings/events involving women educational leaders and teachers; document analysis; and a collection of photos taken during fieldwork visits to the schools and communities. In total, we spoke in-depth and often on multiple occasions with 15 women leaders/*Ummis*, 9 women and 1 male teacher, 2 groups of students, 2 community leaders, 8 activists and experts and 3 policy-/decision-makers. Notes on the stories and realities we encountered were constantly taken throughout the process, with consented interviews being recorded and observations being photographed whenever appropriate and possible. In this paper, we use pseudonyms for the names of the *dayah*, communities and respondents.

The first part of the field research was conducted in Aceh Besar, Bireuen, West Aceh and Central Aceh in May 2014. These areas were selected based on a number of criteria. Firstly, all four areas were affected by the three-decade long independence struggle and conflict, and Bireuen was also among the strongest bases of the Free Aceh Movement, which was relatively dominated by an Acehnese ethnic majority. Bireuen itself is located in the north coast of Aceh while Aceh Barat is in the west coast area. Central Aceh consists of more mixed ethnic groups, with roots in Gayo, Acehnese, and Javanese culture and located in the interior highland area where the Gayo ethnic group forms the majority. Currently, Bireuen holds a strong reputation as the 'city of *santris*', with the largest and most famous *dayah* located in this area. To broaden the context and diversity of our data collection, we continued with two additional fieldwork periods in October 2014 and October 2015 in Banda Aceh, Bener Meriah, Aceh Selatan, and Subulussalam.

As our research was conducted before the covid-19 global pandemic outbreak in 2020, the situation afterward is beyond our scope of analysis. Aceh is reportedly to have been mildly affected, and despite the national lockdown

measures to contain the virus spread, it does not, however, significantly disrupt people's activities in Aceh. We argue that under this strained circumstance, the *dayah* itself is an already relatively self-reliant and well-guarded ecosystem consisting of disciplining external visits and visiting guests, with clinics and locally food sources are generally available or accessible. Women leaders and teachers in *dayah* are well-versed in their social reproduction roles of managing daily activities, with agility to various situations particularly due to their previous exposure to conflict. Therefore, we view their stories which we captured in 2014–2015 and the analysis of their struggles as relevant and contextual.

Access into the *dayah* was established through prior networks of one of our (Indonesian) team members, who had held relationships with the women *dayah* leaders over numerous years. We accessed additional *dayah* through the careful building of trust with institutions described above, which were approached by two of our (Indonesian) team members who conducted the majority of the data collection. Two non-Indonesian members of our team built on their prior research on the education system and teachers' roles more generally in relation to Aceh's conflictive past.

To gain deeper insights into their daily life and stories, our two researchers stayed for one week at one of the most famous *dayah* in Bireuen. This was conducted in addition to visiting other *ummis* and *teungku inong* from another *dayah* within the district. During the short stay we directly engaged with the *teungku inong* and the students. We shared a room with a few *teungku inong* and their students, participated in the daily congregational prayer (*salat*), sat-in classes of Islamic classical textbook (*kitab kuning*), and joined their daily activities.

While all team members self-identify as women, the team is diverse in terms of our nationality and ethnicity, cultural-religious backgrounds, age and academic disciplinary backgrounds. Together we designed our methods and engagements in the communities, inspired by an ethics of care (Robinson 2011; Mountz et al. 2015) and informed by the deep contextual understanding of our two Acehnese, and one Indonesian co-authors. We are aware of different positionalities in issues of race, language and institutional resources in which Knowledge as a theoretical production is too-often based in the English-speaking so-called 'global North' and knowledge as local insights is based in the so-called 'global South'. In mitigating some of the issues of power relations among the researchers, we consciously reflected and have agreed upon ways that the research process reflects our mutual support and equal positions in regards to our roles and contributions.

Our ethical reflections guided a constant reflective process regarding the safety and anonymity of the participants in the study, their willingness and consent to take part in the study, and the relevance of our work for the women and men who did so. Working from an ethics of care has also meant that we have implemented slow scholarship (Berg and Seeber 2016), as our respective

commitments and the global pandemic meant that we had to connect and disconnect for periods of time, and take time to check in with everyone's lives, concerns and priorities.

Finally, as alluded to above, we view an ethics of care also as guiding our theoretical inspirations (consciously engaging with non-western authors), methodological approaches of engaged ethnography and by representing often untold stories from Acehnese women educators. Within this ethics of care, we analysed the data based on our deliberation to the relationship that we have built with the women leaders and teachers who had welcomed and given us trust to research them. As we shared stories and participated in their activities during fieldwork, our analysis reflects the respect and acknowledgement we have for their docile agencies within their specific context and surrounding communities. It is by informing how they navigate their Islamic teachings and perspective of peace in the face of social, economic and political challenges in Aceh that we convey their capacity for action in diverse settings without juxtaposing them to the mainstream Western narratives of women's agency.

4. Analysing the conflict-affected cultural political economy context of women educators and leaders in Aceh

Acehnese culture is largely matrifocal and traditionally, women owned houses and land while most adult men would travel to trade. Thus, husbands often have a marginal position in decision-making within families, even when other men are in the house (Siegel in Nowak and Caulfield 2008, 29). Many of the foreign gender specialists coming to Aceh during the early years of post-conflict had no prior knowledge of this local context (Siapno 2009). Rather than acknowledging the localities of women's crucial role in traditional society, a foreign gender and development approach was introduced as a template unfamiliar to Acehnese communities, using stereotypical gender roles towards women in the global South and their image of victimhood. This resonates with Assie-Lumumba's (2006) observations for the African context where formal secular education as implemented by colonial powers largely undermines local women's ways of knowing and learning, as well as African cultures and knowledge production. As a result, the sudden introduction of the Western narrative of 'human rights' and 'gender equality' by international organisations (see also Verma 2014) has received mixed responses from Acehnese people.

The inducement of gender equality to development and reconstruction programs in Aceh after 2005 did contribute positively to raising awareness for the social, economic and political activities of both women and men in terms of more equal opportunities. This enabled wider participation in an overwhelming number of reconstruction projects, mostly driven by international donors, focusing on sustaining peace, transitional democracy and fostering economic development. However, the way in which externally introduced gender discourse was implemented varied

between women activists connected to NGOs – many whom are well-educated and exposed to a broader social, political, and economic environment – and women working at the grassroots level, including in the *dayah* and villages, who often have less opportunities to collaborate and mingle outside of their immediate communities (Afrianty 2015).

In 2006, Aceh was granted special autonomy through the Law on Governing Aceh – which then promulgated the renewed enactment of *Sharia* Law – and allowed the formation of local parties. One controversial part of the law included the imposition of veiling, which faced criticism from various NGOs and media, who considered the regulation a result of Islamic conservatism and GAM politicians mutually reinforcing control over women's bodies through the politics of obedience. Consequently, the issue has become an important discourse on the problem of gender equality in Aceh. However, Pirmasari (2020) argues the practice of disciplining women bodies through the *Sharia* regulation in Aceh as part of Western colonial legacy and stereotypes, perpetuating the subjugation of women as a uniform social identity. This implies that the issue is not a result of conservative Islamic teaching to suppress women, but a result of complex historical interactions between powerful actors in maintaining social order and gaining social, political, economic influence.

Women education leaders in *dayah* we met were not openly critical of masculine politics. However, rather than viewing this as passive submission to masculine politics, we note how Acehnese women education leaders demonstrate social and political agency in the strategic realm. Roles of the *teungku inong* and *ummi*, in *dayah* resonate with what Hakim Williams (2013) calls 'decolonising praxis of care'. Williams examines the role of teachers in a Trinidadian secondary school where profound relationships with their students, demonstrated through listening, dialogue, critical thinking, reflection, are crucial to peace and trust in schools. For Williams, decolonization in postcolonial peace education 'excavates a legacy of hierarchy and exclusion and sows the seeds of healing, participation, empowerment and co-envisioning a sustainable and just [. . .] peace aimed at upending postcolonial structural violence (ibid).'

In *dayah*, as part of the Islamic traditional school system, strict norms and discipline are strongly applied, putting teachers in an authoritative position towards their students. However, we found examples in a Bireuen *dayah* where these authoritative teachers demonstrated 'praxis of care'. Unmarried *teungku inong* shared a room with students and integrated with them on a daily basis by teaching, selling foods, and other activities. As a consequence, both *teungku inong* and students created mutual bonds of respect. Discipline and rules remained intact, but they engaged in mutually caring conversations and social relations. Despite the obligation for submission and respect for students towards their teachers, *teungku inong* employed power *with* instead of power *over* their students, through democratic, horizontal relationships instead of complete hierarchy.

In Aceh, women religious leaders (*Ummis*) are generally less visible in 'official' public or political life, and women that live and work in the Islamic *dayah* schools are often regarded as marginal actors. Their community-based institutions are run 'behind closed doors', away from the limelight of politics or the public sphere. The enclosed nature of such Islamic schools, which are often boarding facilities, can be connected to the broader notion of so-called 'Santri-Ibuism' or a caring motherhood function in society. Bearing these historical framings of Indonesian women's expected 'ibuism' in mind (Author B 2012), our study aims to take this debate forward into a more nuanced understanding of the roles and societal expectations of women leaders of *dayah*, in relation to the historical, post-war context and contemporary enactment of *Sharia* law.

For women living and working in the *dayah*, their agency must be seen in relation to the chances they have had to interact with or get involved in (training) programmes or political engagements in the broader community or beyond (Author A & B 2018). Based on conversations with our research participants, villagers instead often seem to turn to the *dayah* for clues and opinions regarding complex and challenging social matters, as for generations they have been the core of communities' social and political resilience.

In terms of their public engagement, women in *dayah* articulate their roles as part of religious service and devotion insofar as they adhere to prescribed gender norms. To some of the more visible *teungku inong*, their efforts in political participation or starting a dayah can be likened to what Lara Deeb (2006) calls 'gender jihad'. 'Jihad' here, as derived from Arabic language and Islamic teaching, has the original meaning of a form of physical, mental and intellectual struggle to express religious devotion at both personal and public level. Deeb uses this concept to explain the strategies used by one women's religious group in Lebanon carrying out social work as a form of 'jihad' in public spaces, demonstrating to their male counterparts that women can perform and manage public activities well through social volunteering and helping communities, thus implicitly challenging the patriarchal conception of public service.

5. Sharing the stories of the *Dayah* women education leaders

5.1. A story of women leadership in a challenging patriarchal religious community context

It was a cloudy afternoon when we traveled across the mountains and winding roads that circled the famous Laut Tawar Lake in Central Aceh, arriving at an old village at the lakeside. We approached a modest unfinished building where Ummi Hajar and her husband humbly greeted us. We sat together on the carpet with no formal distance and they talked to us like the usual coffee farmers greeted their guests: with casual and genuine hospitality.

Ummi Hajar was straightforward, communicative, with a fine sense of humor. She was the first in her village to build and lead a *dayah*, in 2000. She would never have received any government support without a good relationship with her previous *dayah* leader, who used to be the head of *ulama* council in the nearest district, and encouraged her to register her *dayah* in order to receive funding to support it. Her *dayah* was inaugurated in 2007, but still had not received funding from the government agency. During the inauguration, a male local respected figure in the area questioned her in public; she recalled him asking her, saying: 'can you please explain where you are from? How come women establish *dayah* in this area? How dare you?' The raising of such questions highlighted the patriarchal system embedded in the cultural and social life of local communities, which has limited women's access to leadership positions within these structures.

Despite this public interrogation, Ummi Hajar remained unafraid to set her own goals and pursue her work in a challenging and restrictive structural environment. She mentioned how she strives for and supports women leadership without any exception, as long as the women have capacity and willingness. She related that: *'The Prophet told us to give the work to those who are capable, and he did not mention that it has to be men. Allah says that He will not give us a challenge we cannot bear, so why can't women be leaders if they are capable?'*

In 2010, she finally received funding of 100 million IDR (equalling about 7000 US$) from the Dayah Body to build the *dayah's* classrooms, and was helped by her husband who allowed her to convert a part of his coffee plantation to establish the school. Since the beginning, she has been persistent, vocal, and respected in her village. However, when we conducted the interview in 2014, she had not received any more funding to support her modest *dayah*. During our interview with Ummi Hajar a male *dayah* leader, Teungku Ilyas, came to seek advice from Ummi Hajar. Rather than feeling awkward seeking advice from Ummi Hajar about his *dayah*, he acknowledged the need for more women as leaders, reflecting that

> women are more patient and I am sure if women become leaders, the area is becoming peaceful. Aceh, which experienced conflict before, should have a female as a leader so Aceh could be more peaceful. The majority of our leaders have high egoism, while females are more open in receiving suggestions.

While these reflections perhaps portray another – contrasting – biased view on gendered roles in society, we observed how Ummi Hajar's strong leadership did open up a space for a male colleague to openly support and seek advice from the woman leader.

Another relevant example is *Teungku Putroe* in Bireuen, who had been teaching during the conflict. She had directly witnessed gunfire and grenade explosions around her neighbourhood between GAM and the Indonesian security personnel, leaving a profound impact in her role as both a dayah leader and a peace activist. Once during the Ramadan period, the *dayah* students were breaking the fast together. She quickly ordered everyone to

lie down during the congregational prayer and to recite the prayers aloud. After the peace agreement, she became active in one of the organisations that provided political education for women and engaged in the peace curriculum program for *dayah*.

We share the stories of Ummi Hajar and Teungku Putroe as strong leaders within their own *dayah*, and observe how they steer through power dynamics and fixed social relations in the 'ensemble' (Robertson and Dale 2015) of religious peace education in Aceh by extending their struggle for peace into their communities. Understanding this is key to comprehend how these women educators contest, oppose or reproduce power hierarchies in their work as educators (Zembylas 2018). Now we turn to a discussion on the role of political and economic governance for a broader range of *dayah* institutes in Aceh.

5.2. Women's roles in the political and economic governance of the Dayah

In 2007, the Aceh government established the Aceh Dayah Education Development Agency (Badan Pembinaan Pendidikan Dayah/BPPD) or Dayah Body. Its aim is to maintain and develop Islamic education based on local education policy (Qanun No. 5/2007). In 2014, there were 471 *dayah* throughout Aceh – both traditional (*salafi*) and modern – separated into categories type A, B, and C with a total 91,407 students. The formalisation and categorisation of *dayah* reflects not only the priority of post-conflict Aceh to streamline financial assistance for *dayah* across the region, but also demonstrates the cultural, political and economic reorganisation of Aceh society. The implementation of partial *Sharia* Law, and *dayah* reliance on funding allocation ranking and political affiliates (often former GAM members) reflects the growing dominance of institutional and legal approaches towards Islam in Aceh. This is partly a reaction towards the unprecedented openness of Aceh to various forms of information, donor influence, and other external influences from post-conflict programmes, some of which are associated with contradictory values such as liberalism and feminism. Competition over government funding among *dayah*, especially new or struggling *dayah*, has placed other factors into consideration. For *dayah* led by women, the constraints are even tougher.

An example of the change we observed in terms of *dayah* governance since the peace agreement in 2005 is a search for new economic resources, concomitant to a self-identified move towards 'modernization'. Dayah Mujahidin in Bireuen, widely reputed for its strong Islamic classical tradition, decided to establish branches in many parts of Aceh. This was a response to the need to adjust to growing 'modernization', and an increasing number of middle class parents wanting their children to have religious schooling at a prestigious *dayah* with modern education. With funding support from the Dayah Body, the Dayah Mujahidin established an Islamic Academy, while Dayah Madani Islam – a branch of Dayah Mujahidin – established schools from elementary to high school level. Despite embracing students to come and study Islam regardless of their socio-economic background,

the running of the *dayah* and the opening of new schools also means business, with the family of the *dayah* leader benefitting financially and having more resources than the teachers they employ.

The 'modernisation' of the financial running of the *dayah* is still accompanied by a patriarchal, religious-inspired construction of gender and teaching methods towards female students that largely reproduces a closed system of opportunities. Generally, *dayah* might encourage their women students to pursue a role as a religious teacher in a *dayah*, or in exceptional cases to establish a *dayah* school for women themselves, together with teaching about domestic duties as a wife and a mother. Nevertheless, there also have been instances of women *dayah* students who pursued graduate studies at State Islamic Universities, such as the one in Banda Aceh, with some of them becoming lecturers at the Institute for Islamic Studies at a local university (Institut Agama Islam).

In relation to respective roles and responsibilities, as well as power hierarchies within the *dayah*, we observed differences between the *Ummis* and the *teungku*. While an *ummi* usually gains her position due to being the daughter of a *dayah* owner, or by marrying the owner or his son/grandson, a *teungku* (teacher) is usually a former student of the *dayah* and has no family ties with the *dayah* owners. The *teungku* have a direct responsibility for the students' daily wellbeing, yet they are often expected to work for very low wages, or even voluntarily. Almost all of the women *teungku* we spoke to stated that they worked voluntarily for seeking the blessing of God and devotion to the *dayah*.

In one well-known *dayah*, Ummi Fatimah, the daughter-in-law of the *dayah* owner, stayed in her house in the *dayah* complex, with her family where she received guests. She barely held any practical roles in the dynamics of the teaching process. The women *teungku*, on the other hand, stayed in the dormitories, shared their rooms with students, and were responsible for both the teaching process and the well-being of the students. They were unpaid, unless the school received teachers' incentives from the Dayah Body – usually a very small amount of funds to be shared between all teachers. However, the *dayah* allowed them to earn extra income by cooking for students and washing students' clothes. Some teachers such as Teungku Anisa and Teungku Fadila earned and saved a significant amount of money, which they spent for their *Hajj* pilgrimage to Mecca and three visits for *Umrah (pilgrimage to Mecca outside the Islamic calendar month of Hajj)*, in total spending around 100 million Rupiah (about 7000 US$). *Hajj* is an obligation of faith in Islam for those who could afford, and for *dayah* communities, sacrifices are made to achieve this special spiritual journey to be granted the title *hajji*. This can be done by saving money and attaining institutional financial support. Thus, the ability for *teungku inong* to conduct pilgrimage may reflect this support, and not necessarily their overall financial capacity.

In this complex, there were several new buildings for dormitories and classes: Ummi Fatimah told us these were the result of a donation from Italy after the tsunami. Among them, one old dormitory built on wood was clearly aging.

Behind this was a public kitchen with old wooden poles and an unflattened soil floor. Teungku Husna's mother shared a room here with two students. However, Teungku Husna told us implicitly there was no money to treat her mother's disease, especially as the medicine cost hundreds of thousands of rupiah and had to be consumed regularly.

Money shortages did not seem to be an issue elsewhere, showing a large discrepancy between the distribution of resources and funding between the various schools. Right in front of Dayah Madani Islami, three new houses were undergoing construction, already erected with decorative designs and pillars. Three of them were the homes of the Dayah Hidayatullah leader's family. This school holds the status of being a Type-A Dayah, which means that the *dayah* has a high grade level compared to many existing *dayah* in Aceh, a relatively large number of students, and a new integrated curriculum between Elementary, Middle and High School. Besides the funding they received from the Dayah Body, they also charged tuition and monthly fees for enrolment of the 1300 students living there.

Tengku Hafni, a teacher from Dayah Mujahidin told us that her research on the Dayah Body indicated that the institution had misused the money for non-allocated activities. When asked why there was no demand for accountability, she justified the act as '*already approved by the Ulamas*' (religious leaders). This lack of transparency around financial support was illustrated further in other ways. For example, Ummi Fatimah informed us that they should have received 1 million IDR (about 70 US$) per year for each *teungku*, but that they often received less. Similarly, the large scale Dayah Madani Islami proposed an incentive for 126 *teungkus*, but the Dayah Body only approved funding for for 22, resulting in 22 million IDR that was divided between 126 teachers, with each *teungku* receiving only around 175,000 per year (roughly 17 US$).

Unequal distribution of funding from the Dayah Body applied to most of the *dayah* that we included in our research. Most complaints were related to the small amount of funding that the schools received to pay teacher's salaries, as well as the unfair and lack of clear categorization of the *Dayah* types (with type A comprising bigger institutions and considered of higher quality, and receiving more funding than type B and C). In addition, respondents spoke of manipulation of documents. For example, a returned document might state the amount that had been received by the *dayah*, but in fact the amount would be lower than what they had originally signed for. Abi Zakaria, now leading one of the oldest *dayah* in Aceh, complained: '*It was not fair, they compare this Dayah which has 2000 students and around 100 teachers with other Dayah, which only has 300 students, but they put those also in the category of Type A*.'

Ummi Nurlaila, the owner and leader of a *dayah* in Aceh Besar, expressed her disappointment towards this kind of bureaucracy. She emphasised the reality that those who receive funds often were male with significant relationships with the authorities, or the dominant political parties.

> The government today does not provide any explanation of the priority list. So far they give assistance to dayah with more students, but they do not empower the quality needed for individuals. There is an influence from the powerful leaders, and most of them are male. Because up to now we have been waiting for assistance for years. Because we are women, we are less heard. [. . .]. So whoever [is] strong, they win. [. . .] Each year we submit proposals, but no response, except if we have connections to them.

Applying a CPE lens, we observe how the complexities and interconnections between (local) politics and gendered power hierarchies directly play out in terms of financial and material realities for the *dayah* schools and teachers, especially those in the woman-only institutes. Women leaders of the *dayah* are at the bottom of this contestation, where – based on the anecdotal evidence from our interview participants – they have to compete with their male counterparts to gain legitimation, qualification and funding. While the women religious leaders (*Ummis*) and women school leaders often receive less financial gains for their schools (or themselves), for the women teachers it is expected to live without wealth, as this is seen as part of finding God's blessing. This connects again to what we described above as *Santri-Ibuism*, or a socio-culturally expected 'motherhood' function adopted by women educators, which often translates into not being paid for their educational work. These financial and material concerns do not merely reflect gendered hierarchies, they might be an obstacle to their critical engagement with the education system and their position within it as agents for peace.

5.3. Politics of daily life in Dayah

> *The community's character is hard so we need to educate them in a soft way. Sometimes when we preach, someone would sleep over there. We must not directly reprimand her, or even scold her. Maybe she was tired after working at the paddy field or taking care of her family. So if we reprimand someone in front of the crowd, it would embarrass her. [. . .] My strategy is, I raise my voice and ask questions to the congregation, so when they answer, the person who sleeps would wake up.*
>
> Ummi Juwairiyah.

Ummi Juwairiyah is a relative of the founder of an established *dayah* in Bireuen. As an elderly figure, she had travelled around the sub-districts since the conflict period, preaching to mostly women audiences, and in doing so meeting with people who were traumatized by the conflict. Her statement above reflects her ability to grasp women's daily experience and their socio-economic conditions. She also adapted to community attitudes; as a woman, she positioned herself to be less authoritative than male *ulamas*. While most male *ulamas* have a more imperative position, she had her own strategy to embrace and adapt to the community. '*We need to learn their ways, how they talk, how they act, for one to*

three months to understand, then start to preach. We cannot just talk about punishment or prohibitions. People wouldn't like that, they would leave,' she added.

Through listening to and analysing the stories told by the women working and living in the *dayah*, their politics of daily life revolve around managing the *dayah* as a household. Their daily activities not only reflect the women leaders and teachers' devotion to the school, but also to some degree reveal their sense of autonomy, social relations, and dealing with hierarchies of power. Many of the *teungku's* daily activities depend on their relation with the *dayah*. These include teaching students, managing and monitoring the *dayah*, coordinating and communicating with the *dayah* leaders, taking care of family members, the children and the broader community, shopping for daily needs, visiting sick people and attending local social events (such as funerals). In addition, they can support their sustenance by various economic activities, for instance: Teungku Inong in Dayah Madani Islami washed the students' clothes and cooked for them; Ummi Maimuna designed pin ribbons and sold those; Teungku. Annisa sewed her own decorated veils; Ummi Hajar in Central Aceh owned a small coffee plantation; while Ummi Nurma in Aceh Barat owned a small farm managed by herself and her students.

There are also emerging examples wherein the *dayah* leaders – including women – entered the political arena by joining the legislative election in several areas in Aceh in the 2009 election and 2017 elections. To illustrate how in some cases, the strategically selective context (Jessop 2005) of the *dayah* institute can also enable women's socio-political agency, we now turn to share the story of Ummi Nurma, a bold, well-articulated leader in her community. Media exposure and her network with many women activists at both the local and national levels attracted a prominent GAM member and politician to visit her *dayah* prior to the 2016 local elections. Ummi Nurma strategically made use of the relative independence she gained as a religious leader to employ her agency in daily interactions with community members. She graduated from the biggest *dayah* in Aceh, and then decided to establish her own. Unusually, she was not from an aristocratic *dayah* family and she married a craftsman instead of a fellow *dayah* graduate. Ummi Nurma took part in numerous political activities and was involved in a wide spectrum of political activities: she supported the Aceh freedom movement, joined a local political party, ran for local parliament, and had been involved in the Ulama Consultative Assembly. After sensing the injustice within the current political system, she decided to quit politics altogether and focus on her *dayah* where she has the freedom to articulate her concerns in her daily teachings.

Her students included adult men from the nearby village – a unique occurrence – as elsewhere, women are rarely permitted to teach Islamic classical texts to adult men. Here the *dayah* serves as a space that enables women's political activism, firstly because of Ummi Nurma being relatively independent without

patriarchal and family ties, and as such being able to engage in socio-political activities outside of the dayah, which is often prohibited to women working in more conservatively run *dayah* (Anonymous co-Authors 2018). Secondly, and similar to an argument made by Bhimji (2009) about women attendees of mosques in the UK, this and similar examples illustrate how religious spaces such as *dayah* can also facilitate women's agency, in terms of gaining authority and respect as religious leaders and teachers, in relation to the communities that they serve, strengthening their positions as agents for peace (Author and co-author 2016). The following section takes a closer look at the ways in which women leaders navigate challenging situations in relation to their surrounding communities.

5.4. Women leaders' responses to community hostility and violence

Dayah Darul Arafah in Aceh Besar was subjected to accusations of Christianization. This school struggled with a small number of mostly conflict-affected students (50). The complex was built with new facilities such as a clinic, hall, classes, library and dormitory. It received numerous accusations by the surrounding community of perceived missionary activities, mostly due to the fact that it was built with the post-tsunami support of the Rotary Club. As a consequence, the Dayah Darul Arafah faced the social stigma of being associated with a Christianization mission and lacked support from the community – who were reluctant to participate in the *dayah's* public activities or send their children to study there. This resulted in a lack of funding and teachers.

Despite this situation, women teachers in the *dayah* continued working together with teachers and counselors from state universities to deal with students from conflict-affected backgrounds, many of whom had behavioural problems. They also struggled to refute the rumors of Christianization but decided to counter by inviting community members to discuss and witness their Islamic teachings. Asma, one of the teachers, explains,

> the teachers were shocked and felt disappointed. Why did those people label us while they didn't get any facts from the field? So we gave inputs to the teachers during meeting, if later a guest came to see, let them see that we do not do any of the accused, the curriculum these women teach is just like what the usual teachers outside teach as well, because our religious teachers here came from Aceh Besar and the neighbouring village.

In another instance, one male teacher interviewed in South Aceh had received a call to prepare for mobilization to the town of Singkil, in defense of the Muslim communities against a potential conflict after the burning of a local church. Several respondents confirmed how text messages were spread to call up men to 'fight' a perceived threat of Christianization. Ummi Nurma, the well-known *dayah* leader in West Aceh responded to the heated issue by communicating with her colleague in Singkil via cellphone, advising the person not to be provoked to

violence and mobilization. She used the Singkil case as an example to not quickly trust information that might lead to conflict, emphasizing to her teenage students to always avoid violent acts. Ummi Nurma also communicated updates on the situation and emphasised the importance of calm through calls with her friend, a sub-district *dayah* head in Subulussalam. Abi Zakaria, a male *dayah* leader in a neighboring district, said that when any provocative information came to light, he asked the students not to respond, and instead to focus on their studies.

Yet, while these *dayah* leaders developed strategies within their schools or direct networks to resist and mitigate violence, there was no public statement from any *dayah* to calm the issue. Hence, instead of leading a peaceful narrative in the public debate, both male and women *dayah* leaders avoided a public response. Reluctance by the *dayah* leaders to engage in public debates on such sensitive issues is understandable to some extent considering the tense relations with the communities discussed above in relation to heresy accusations. However, William's praxis of care (2013) highlights the value of women in *dayah*, aligned with traditional Islamic teaching of the caring role of women as mothers, sisters, or daughters. Advice and wisdom from *ummis on* religious matters affecting local communities are warmly accepted, as part of their role in caring for society.

Applying our analytical CPE lens onto our analysis of the church burnings, the suspicion about Christianization, and on accusations of heresy on the part of some of the *dayah* Islamic schools, we observe how the earlier mentioned 'cultural turn' in political economy thinking, and the consequent engagement with discursive selectivities and semiotic factors, is indispensable for a full understanding of the materialized (observable and invisible) consequences and lived experiences. More concretely, this means that in order to understand better why *dayah* leaders would develop certain strategies of resistance to violence – mostly within their schools and trusted networks – and decide against speaking out publicly, we need to inform our analysis by understanding the complexities and intersections of exclusionary 'purification' discourses, that instills a sense of paranoia against 'the other', together with an understanding of power plays over communities and resources, and the impact of the schools geographical locations.

Interestingly, we found discussions about heresy were less prevalent in the border districts. In a border area close to Medan, a city with a reputation to be contrary to the '*Sharia*', local politics is concerned more strongly with *Sharia* implementation, especially targeted on women's behaviour. In the South-western and South-eastern border districts (i.e Subulussalam, Singkil and South Aceh), local politics are more focused on issues related to Christianization, as a response to their proximity with North Sumatra regions with Christian majorities. Finally, as our research engagement has taken place over a longer period of a few years, we also observed how media intensified the focus of both provincial and local politics on these issues of religious tensions, and how accusations of Christianization seemed to particularly influence the *dayah* included in our study in the period of 2014–2016. Since these complex contextual realities inform these educators' (un)

conscious strategies in relation to peacebuilding processes, a thorough analytical exploration of the various economic, socio-cultural and political dimensions and injustices (Anonymous author & co-author 2016b) is indispensable for an understanding of the potential for educators to navigate between reproductive, restorative or more transformative realms of (in)direct action.

6. Concluding thoughts – navigating restricted and gendered spaces

The key aim of this paper was to understand various ways in which Acehnese women educators' navigate restricted, gendered and religiously influenced spaces (Mahmood 2001, 2011), and participate in the peace process. Guided by theoretical inspiration drawn from the work of, amongst others, Mahmood, Robertson and Dale, Sum and Jessop, Bajaj and Zembylas – on the complex interconnections between gender, agency and hierarchies of power in/through peace education at multiple scales, we attempt in our work to reflect on the complexities of women leaders' enactments of compliance and resistance in relation to restrictive gendered spaces in Acehnese, religious boarding schools. We acknowledge that women's stories and lived realities in the *dayah* must be understood within their own contextual realms, if we aim to understand more about the variations in more silent or covert forms of agency, as women negotiate their space to manoeuvre in restricted spaces. By sharing the stories of the mostly silent (or silenced) struggles of women in the *dayah*, we aim to counter existing oversimplified interpretations of an 'average Third World Woman' (Mohanty 1984, 337).

We found several key aspects that impacted on the experienced space for manoeuvre available to women leaders in the context of peace education in Aceh. Firstly, the connections to their direct communities, as well the women's relative position of status and power as a (religious) figure in the community, mattered in terms of a felt sense of agency to engage outside of the space of the boarding schools, e.g. in terms of religious service to the broader community or in local politics. Secondly, we found how women's kinship and relations to male family members (in power) often mattered in terms of the relative space for manoeuvre, for instance, for decision-making processes in the *dayah*. Moreover, we found how structurally embedded unequal distribution of financial resources often has the most negative impact on *dayah* run by women leaders. In addition, these low levels of income and scarce resources in the boarding schools, result in (additional) income generating activities by women teachers in addition to their teaching duties, which in some cases was unpaid and seen as part of their religious service to the community. Finally, we observed how both men and women leaders of the Islamic boarding schools have to negotiate and operate within a highly tense context, characterized by unaddressed underlying root causes of the prior conflict, including, for instance, religious tensions and wealth inequalities.

While we further build on colleagues' and our own application of Cultural Political Economy in critical peace education (Higgins and Novelli 2020; Author and co-author 2016a), in this article we expand the theoretical framing with insights from critical feminist scholars on agency and debates on critical and decolonial peace education (as detailed above). Both CPE and critical and decolonial peace education underline the importance of understanding peace education in its respective context. This allows a view of the Acehnese religious educational spaces as being nested within a post-war and tense contemporary context, to understand the highly restricted spaces women education leaders operate within, and recognize the value and courage of those women that employ creative forms of agency. Our hope is that by sharing and engaging with these mostly untold stories of women educators, religious and community leaders, we contribute to the debates on critical and decolonial forms of peace education from the unique context of Aceh, Indonesia. Finally, we hope to inspire colleagues in the broader field of peace education to similarly engage in self-reflective practices, an ethics of care and forms of slow(er) scholarship which guided our team-work and collaborative publications, and in our view enhanced our ability co-construct and explore together 'worlds and knowledges otherwise' (Escobar 1970).

Acknowledgments

Left out for anonymous peer review

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Notes on contributors

Dr Mieke Lopes Cardozo is Senior Lecturer in Education and Inclusive Development at the Amsterdam Institute of Social Science Research. Mieke's academic research, teaching and supervision focuses on the role of education in processes of peacebuilding, regeneration, social and gender justice and inclusive development in the contexts of Sri Lanka, Aceh/Indonesia, Bolivia, Myanmar and Higher Education in the Netherlands.

Rizki Amalia Affiat is Researcher and a Co-founder at the research foundation Intersectional Gender Research Advocacy and Learning (InteGRAL) based in India and Indonesia. She worked as a researcher in several projects at International Center for Aceh and Indian Ocean Studies (ICAIOS) from 2012-2018. Currently in InteGRAL she is conducting a research on gender, masculinity and peace-building in Southeast Asian region.

Faryaal Zaman is an independent researcher who worked with ICAIOS in 2016, where she focused on the role of education in peacebuilding processes in Aceh. Currently she works as a sustainability professional, helping to drive the private sector towards regenerative, inclusive development. She maintains a deep interest in the intersections of sustainable peacebuilding processes with education, gender and religion.

Maida Irawani is a program specific researcher at Kyoto University Center for Southeast Asian Studies (CSEAS) and affiliated researcher to International Centre for Aceh and Indian Ocean Studies (ICAIOS). She has been involved in several research collaboration projects focused on female education leadership and female livelihood in post-tsunami Aceh. Currently, she manages a heritage survey project in Indonesia and Maldives.

Eka Srimulyani is a professor of sociology at Ar-Raniry State Islamic University Banda Aceh from the department of social welfare. She is also a senior researcher at the International Centre for Aceh and Indian Ocean Studies.She researched as well as authored several works on Muslim women, education, peace building, and such especially within the context of Acehnese and Indonesian society.

ORCID

Eka Srimulyani http://orcid.org/0000-0003-2855-987X

References

Abu-Lughod, L. 1990. "The Romance of Resistance: Tracing Transformations of Power through Bedouin Women." *American Ethnologist* 17 (1): 41–55. doi:10.1525/ae.1990.17.1.02a00030.

Adely, F. 2012. ""God Made Beautiful Things": Proper Faith and Religious Authority in a Jordanian High School." *American Ethnologist* 39 (2): 297–312. doi:10.1111/j.1548-1425.2012.01365.x.

Adely, F. 2019. "Decolonizing Our Questions/decolonizing Our Answers." *Gender and Education* 31 (4): 452–457. doi:10.1080/09540253.2018.1533925.

Afrianty, D. 2015. *Women and Sharia Law in Northern Indonesia: Local Women's NGOs and the Reform of Islamic Law in Aceh*. New York: Routledge.

Anderson, B., and C. Rosado. 2013. "Searching for the Impacts of Community-Driven Development and Livelihood Projects in Post-Conflict Aceh, Indonesia, 2006-2010: Seven Case Studies in 2013." Paper presented at 4th Biannual International Conference on Aceh and Indian Ocean Studies (ICAIOS) Malikussaleh University, Lhokseumawe, Aceh.

Anonymous references. 2009, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016a/b, 2017, 2018.

Aspinall, E. 2014. ""Special Autonomy, Predatory Peace and the Resolution of the Aceh Conflict." Chapter. In *Regional Dynamics in a Decentralized Indonesia*, edited by H. Hill, 460–481. Singapore: ISEAS.

Assie-Lumumba, N.T. 2006. "Higher Education in Africa: Crises, Reforms and Transformations." CODESRIA Working Paper Series.

Bajaj, M. 2015. "'Pedagogies of Resistance' and Critical Peace Education Praxis." *Journal of Peace Education* 12 (2): 154–166. doi:10.1080/17400201.2014.991914.

Bajaj, M., and E. J. Brantmeier. 2011. "The Politics, Praxis, and Possibilities of Critical Peace Education." *Journal of Peace Education* 8 (3): 221–224. doi:10.1080/17400201.2011.621356.

Berg, M., and B Seeber. 2016. "The Slow Professor: Challenging the Culture of Speed in Academia." University of Toronto Press.

Bhimji, F. 2009. "Identities and Agency in Religious Spheres: A Study of British Muslim Women's Experience." *Gender, Place and Culture* 16 (4): 365–380. doi:10.1080/09663690903003850.

Bush, K. D., and D. Saltarelli. 2000. *The Two Faces of Education in Ethnic Conflict: Towards a Peacebuilding Education for Children*. Florence: UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre.

Deeb, L. 2006. *An Enchanted Modern: Gender and Public Piety in Shi'i Lebanon*. Oxford: Princeton University Press.

Escobar, A. 2007. "Worlds and Knowledge Otherwise." *Cultural Studies* 21 (2–3): 179–210. doi:10.1080/09502380601162506.

Freire, P. 1970. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. London: Penguin Books.

"Government of Aceh, Official Website." Accessed 26 July 2019: http://dpd.acehprov.go.id/index.php/news/read/2016/10/24/13/kiprah-dan-kontribusi-badan-pembinaan-pendidikan-dayah-aceh.html

Higgins, S., and M. Novelli. 2020. "Rethinking Peace Education: A Cultural Political Economy Approach." *Comparative Education Review* 64: 1. doi:10.1086/706759.

Husin, A. 2013.Leadership and authority: women leading dayah in Aceh. In: Smith, B.J., & Woodward, M. (Eds.). (2013). Leadership and authority: women leading dayah in Aceh (1st ed.). Chapter 2. London, Routledge. doi:10.4324/9780203797518.

Jessop, B. 2005. "Critical Realism and the Strategic-Relational Approach." *New Formations* 56 (40): 40–53.

Jokela-Pansini, M. 2016. "Spatial Imaginaries and Collective Identity in Women's Human Rights Struggles in Honduras." *Gender, Place & Culture* 23 (10): 1465–1479. doi:10.1080/0966369X.2016.1204998.

Kweifio-Okai, C. 2014. "Where Did the Indian Ocean Tsunami Aid Money Go?" *The Guardian*, December 25. http://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2014/dec/25/where-did-indian-ocean-tsunami-aid-money-go

Mahmood, S. 2001. "Feminist Theory, Embodiment, and the Docile Agent: Some Reflections on the Egyptian Islamic Revival." *Cultural Anthropology* 16 (2): 202–236. doi:10.1525/can.2001.16.2.202.

Mahmood, S. 2005. *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Mahmood, S. 2011. "Interview in Relation to the Movie *the Light in Her Eyes*." published online. http://thelightinhereyesmovie.com/resources/interview-saba-mahmood/

Mahmood, S. 2013. "Azazeel and the Politics of Historical Fiction in Egypt." *The Journal of Comparative Literature* 65 (3): 265–284.

Mieke T. A. Lopes Cardozo & Eka Srimulyani (2018): Analysing the spectrum of female education leaders' agency in Islamic boarding schools in post-conflict Aceh, Indonesia, *Gender and Education*, DOI: 10.1080/09540253.2018.1544361

Mohanty, C. T. 1984. "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses." *Boundary* 2: 333–358. doi:10.2307/302821.

Morris, E. E. 1983. "Islam and Politics in Aceh: A Study of Center-periphery Relations in Indonesia." Doctoral diss., Cornell University, Southeast Asia Program.

Mountz, A., A. Bonds, B. Mansfield, J. Loyd, J. Hyndman, M. Walton-Roberts, R. Basu, et al. 2015. "For Slow Scholarship: A Feminist Politics of Resistance through Collective Action in the Neoliberal University." *ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies* 14 (4): 1235–1259. https://acme-journal.org/index.php/acme/article/view/1058

Nowak, B. S., and T. Caulfield. 2008. "Women and Livelihoods in Post-tsunami India and Aceh." Asia Research Institute Working Paper (104).

Pirmasari, D. A. 2020. "To Veil or Not to Veil? Islamic Dress and Control over Women's Public Appearance." *Journal of Gender Studies* 30 (2) 1–14.

Reid, A. 2006. *The Blood of the People: Revolution and the End of Traditional Rule in Northern Sumatra*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Robertson, S. L., and R. Dale. 2015. "Towards a 'Critical Cultural Political Economy' Account of the Globalising of Education." *Globalisation, Societies and Education* 13 (1): 149–170. doi:10.1080/14767724.2014.967502.

Robinson, F. 2011. *The Ethics of Care: A Feminist Approach to Human Security*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press. Project MUSE. http://muse.jhu.edu/

Saby, Y. 2005. *Islam and Social Change: The Role of the Ulama in Acehnese Society*. Bangi: Penerbit Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.

Shirazi. F. 2001. The Veil Unveiled: The Hijab in Modern Culture. Gainesville: University Press of Florida.

Shirazi, R. 2011. "When Projects of 'Empowerment' Don't Liberate: Locating Agency in a 'Postcolonial' Peace Education." *Journal of Peace Education* 8 (3): 277–294. doi:10.1080/17400201.2011.621370.

Siapno, J. A. 2009. "Living through Terror: Everyday Resilience in East Timor and Aceh." *Social Identities* 15 (1): 43–64. doi:10.1080/13504630802692903.

Sum, N., and B. Jessop. 2013. *Towards a Cultural Political Economy: Putting Culture in Its Place in Political Economy*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing.

Verma, S. (2014). Women in Higher Education in Globalised India: The Travails of Inclusiveness and Social Equality. Social Change, 44(3), 371–400. 10.1177/0049085714536801

Williams, H. M. A. 2017. "Teachers' Nascent Praxes of Care: Potentially Decolonizing Approaches to School Violence in Trinidad." *Journal of Peace Education* 14 (1): 69–91. doi:10.1080/17400201.2016.1245656.

Zembylas, M. 2018. "Con-/divergences between Postcolonial and Critical Peace Education: Towards Pedagogies of Decolonization in Peace Education." *Journal of Peace Education* 15 (1): 1–23. doi:10.1080/17400201.2017.1412299.