

MOSLEM WOMEN AS PEACE MAKER; THE EXPERIENCE AND CHALLENGE IN INDONESIA¹

by

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INTRODUCTION

The interpretation and image of Islam lately has been distorted due to too many cases of war, conflict and violence that have been done in the name of Islam. However, it should be noted that the perpetrator in some wars and communal conflicts were not only Moslem, but the discrimination is addressed to Moslems as they have been recognized as the main actor. In case of Ambon-Maluku conflict, most of people assumed that this was conflict religious although it was not. The actors of conflict are differentiated based on their religions and named it specifically, *Acing* to identify the Moslem community members, and *Obet* (shortened of Robert) to Christian community members. Another symbol is '*pasukan putih*', to the Moslems, and '*pasukan merah*' to the Christians, as they bonded head with white or red ribbon. Misunderstood of Islam as an aggressive religion that against non-Islamic groups often associated with the involvement of third parties of the conflict that strengthen the Moslem group during the conflict. In Ambon-Maluku and Poso conflicts, it is assumed that conflict becomes more destructive after third parties engaged to support the Moslems; one of them was '*Laskar Jihad*'.

Character of the various conflicts after Cold War is now leading in form of communal conflicts. In conflict literature such kind of conflict is known as horizontal conflict, a conflict occurs between inter community inside the country. Horizontal conflict is also referred as identity-based conflict, conflict where the antagonists seem to be fighting for their identities such as ethnicity, religion, or socio-economic class. In many communal conflicts, the main issue driving the conflict in general is economic competition or political power struggle. The tendency that communal conflict escalation moving to aggressive violence once the issue is moved to issue of religious differences between the inter group on the conflict.

Inaccurate image of Islam as a religion that promotes terrorism, violence and war become stronger because of terrorist actions. The terrorists simply reinforce the already negative image of Islam in the world today. Terrorism is identified as Islamic agenda,

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although not many people who understand that the real terrorism as an engineering movement for Islamic platform that comes precisely from non-Islamic communities.

Moreover, authoritarian and dictatorial Islam leadership also have caused some distortion of Islam image. Leaders in Islamic States such as Gaddafi in Libya, Saddam Hussein in Iraq, and Hosni Mubarak in Egypt have been recognized as an enemy of the world because of the status quo of their powers in various ways exploited violence against the people.

Therefore, the main challenge of world's Moslem community is to straighten the misconception of Islam to be the truth as it is; Islam is a religion of peace that promotes peace and understanding among people of all faiths, and it strongly prohibits all forms of violence and aggression against all people. Hence, our main task as member of Moslem community is to develop peace by placing tolerance and justice as framework to interact to all people regardless of their faiths or races. Should the communal conflict facing us, as member of Moslem community we need to advance the process of conflict resolution by taking part in diplomacy and negotiation process peacefully, rather than accelerating weapon and violence.

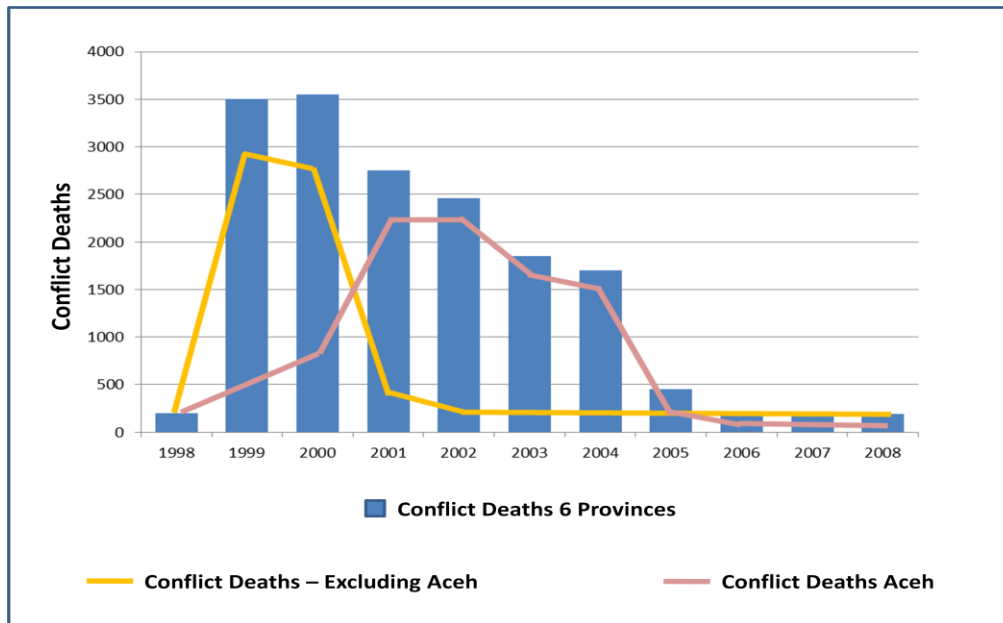
Moslem women as an element of Moslem community is expected to play significant roles in restoring Islamic image appropriately, as religion of peace that promotes tolerance and harmony. Facing war and conflict, Moslem women can perform their role optimally as contributors to move forward the conflict towards peace. If it can be said that by nature men are more aggressive and antagonist while women are gentler and protagonist, then the way of war or conflict is managed will be less violent and the environment less destructive if there are also women sitting in the peace process.

COMMUNAL CONFLICT AND MISNOTION OF ISLAM

Character of world conflict after the Cold War is dominated by communal conflict. It is the conflict that occurs among the communities who live inside the country. This conflict is also known as horizontal conflict. In Indonesia, only the GAM conflict in Aceh that is not considered as communal conflict, because it was a separatist movement to fight against the State. According to the report made by World Bank Commission of Conflict and Development, character of conflict that occurred in Indonesia in the period of 1999-2004 is violent communal conflict, which is undertaken by people with different background of identity (World Bank, 2010). Although in comprehensive understanding of the conflict configuration is shaped by the imbalance of economic and power that have been distributed among the community. However, interpretation of the conflict is more inclined to look at different aspects of social economic and political identity of the conflict actor. Thus, the communal conflict is likely to be misinterpreted its causal factor as just merely due to different aspect of identity of the people, such as religion, ethnic, race or economic aspects.

The violent communal conflicts have threatened the safety life of society, not only for those who live in the conflict areas but also the nearby areas of where violence occurred. In widespread, violent communal conflicts could disrupt the national security

as it is against human rights and the development process of the country. Studies have been conducted by the World Bank to six provinces of the conflict that occurred in the period 1998-2008, showed that large-scale deaths occurred when the period of communal identity-based conflicts increased, in the period 1998-2003, and further become reduced when the period of the declaration of peace has occurred (2003-2008).



In the case of violent communal conflict of Ambon-Maluku in 1999-2002, the parties involved into the conflict are identified as followed: Islamic community, Laskar Jihad, Christian community, Maluku Sovereignty Front (FKM/ RMS), NGOs, and the elites of both religious communities (Susan, 2009). Laskar Jihad is a volunteer organization of Salafy Muslim that under coordination by Ahlusunah Waljama'ah which is established in Yogyakarta. FKM is an organization that originally is established for the purpose of conflict resolution, lately began to bring issue of settlement Republic of South Moluccas (RMS). Laskar Jihad that initially come to assist communities in conflict in form of medical and education assistances for Moslems began to be involved as a conflict party on the discourse of anti-RMS. Such constellation of conflict then has been associated to the interpretation that the conflict as conflict of inter-communities in different religion.

As well Poso conflict (1998-2003), although the conflict was caused by contemplation of various political and economic problems, but while it was experiencing it got labeled as religious conflict between Moslems and Christians. The Red Ribbon (Christians) and the White Ribbon (Moslems) are identified as perpetrators of the violent escalation in Poso by bringing issue that against people who differ in religion means destruct of churches or mosques.

Such phenomena of communal conflicts has led to the mistaken and unfairness in the discourse of religious community. The worst is Moslem community is recognized

as the major agent of the destruction and violence during the conflict. One reason of such misunderstanding is due to the massive involvement of Moslems from outside the area of conflict, especially is Laskar Jihad group who actually joined at the instigation of solidarity, or other people as provocateurs who have profit interest on conflict.

GAM in Aceh conflict that have just ended after 30 years is identified as separatist or vertical conflict, because it occurs between people against the State. However still, the notion of Moslem as the perpetrator is more pronounced due to GAM objective that is to establish the Islamic state separate from the Republic of Indonesia. The people of Aceh who are very strong committed to Islam religion, then, be misunderstood as an Islamic community who adores violence.

WOMEN IN ISLAM

Islam puts women and man in equal position, or in another word, femininity and masculinity are two complementary sides of human. Women and men are part of parallel system of microcosm and macrocosm in order to create the systemic level function of religious communities. Sachito Murata, a Japanese scientist who explores the sources of Islamic texts on the cosmology approaches states that gender relation in Islam perspective is identical in the East Asian culture that is called the balance of *yin* and *yang* (Scimmel, 1992). Murata described more by quoting the lines of Rumi

*In view of mind, the sky is the man and the earth is the woman
Whatever dropped by the one, will be maintained by the other*

She interpreted with reference to the verses of Qur'an (Sura 41:12): *'To Me every heaven is revealed to each one its task'*, that God puts the heaven and the earth as a whole. As God commands, the sky gives to the earth and the earth relieves all of things that are God has hidden in it. Accordingly, due to its beauty and goodness of the earth, it has to be loved.

The concept that man and women are balanced and parallel, as the creatures of Allah SWT, should be appeared in daily interaction. Thus, the role and social status of Moslem women should not be experiencing in limited social, political and economy spaces. As the implementation of Islamic rules, women place should be in wide spectrum that enables them to play significant role. It is definitely as misinterpretation of Islamic thoughts whoever placing women in the second class and in limited of social, economic and political roles.

Historical records show that women participated in public life with the early Moslems, especially in time of emergencies. Women used to accompany the Moslem armies engaged in battles to nurse the wounded, prepare supplies, and serve the warriors and so on. The role of women is also very significant in Islam religion widespread. We are stunned over the role of Khadijah, the wife of Prophet Muhammad SAW who was the backbone for the strength and maturity of Prophet Muhammad SAW in receiving revelations from Allah SWT, and continue the revelation as Islamic

teachings to the people. We also cannot deny that Islamic law does come about owing to referral Hadiths through Aisyah, the youngest wife of the Prophet, who did as the resource person. Aisyah also holds a significant political role in the expansion of Islamic teaching. Another great woman in Islam history is Fatima Az-Zahra, the daughter of Prophet. Rasulullah described his daughter as a woman who can be trusted and she has been remained as *umm abíhâ*, means mother for his father.

Additionally, some Moslem Queens in the past have played important roles politically as their involvements to the decision-making process for government policies (Schimmel in Murata. 1992). The two examples are Radhiyah Sultanah of Delhi (1236-40) and her associates, Syajarat Al-Durr of Egypt (1246-49). The people have admired to their great poets in poetry, calligraphy and religious works.

In one Hadith mentioned that there was once a man came to the Prophet and said,

'O Messenger of God! Who among the people is the most worthy of my good companionship? The Prophet said: Your mother. The man said, 'Then who?' The Prophet said: Then your mother. The man further asked, 'Then who?' The Prophet said: Then your mother. The man asked again, 'Then who?' The Prophet said: Then your father. (Narrated by Bukhari, Kitab al-Adab no. 5971 is also Moslem, Kitab al-Birr wa ash-Shilah no. 2548)

The immediate meaning to this Hadith is that women in Islam are placed respectably.

Some feminists have criticized various aspects of gender relations in Islam, however, due to their Western radicalism perspectives. Gender balance for them is using the modern Western standard, in which according to Professor Murata such standard is derived from the Western Imperialism Ideology. In this context Murata explained that the disturbance of world is because under such influence of Western Imperialism Ideology that promotes masculinity to conquer the world in wildly (Murata, 1992). Therefore, it is no wonder there are many reformers of Western thought currently look for good to another variant of attitude that in fact on certain forms is in line to femininity attitude.

MOSLEM WOMEN AS PEACE MAKER

The misunderstanding of Islam and the Prophet Muhammad SAW tend to be experienced to those who know and learn Islam in partial. These people think that Islam, the Prophet and The Quran promote fighting, killing, war and terrorism, especially for reasons of differing faith or in order to establish Moslem rule. This is just a distorted what Islam about. The true is prophet Muhammad SAW is the Peace Maker. History proves that he often acted as initiator of peace. It is shown by his attitude and behavior that always avoid conflict and promote negotiation to solve problem. The negotiation process that is implemented by the Prophet was through the acceptance of vision and goal in the macro and long-term sight (Eastern Sun. 2007).

As we know the word of Islam is derived from Arabic *as-salam* which means to

be tranquil, at rest, to have done one's duty, be faithful, and at perfect peace (Ahmad, 2011). The noun derived from it means peace, greeting, safety, and salvation. From the beginning Islam as a religion is disseminated throughout the world through charity, moral, and peaceful. Indeed at the time of Prophet Muhammad SAW, fighting was often happening, but related to self-defense of oneself or in defense of others who are clearly oppressed, never as aggressors. In fact, although fighting still in progress, the atmosphere of tolerance and forgiveness are still keep remain highly. Given one example is when in the year 8 Hijiriah, Moslem forces led by Prophet Muhammad SAW move for liberating Mecca from the occupation of the infidel power. When the moving from Mecca arrived in a valley, the forces met with three troops of *Quraysh*, and one of them is Abu Sufyan who was not Moslem yet at the time. As supreme commander of the Mosliem forces, the Prophet Muhammad SAW threatened Abu Sufyan gently and did not perceive him as an enemy, which eventually encouraged Abu Sofyan to convert as a Moslem.

The notion of Prophet character indeed attached him as a peacemaker and it is noted since before he was appointed as the Prophet. From his youth life experiences are reflected that his character as a peacemaker is strongly committed to him in facing inter-ethnic conflicts. For example when the Black Stone of *Ka'bah* fell down by floods it was almost caused bloodshed among some tribes in Mecca, as they all feel have right to restore the Black Stone back to its original place. The young Muhammad suddenly proposed a brilliant idea to the inter-tribes who were in conflict. His idea is whoever entering *Haram* primarily on the next day he will be given the right to determine who will be entitled to restore the Black Stone. It turned out to the interest of some princes of Mecca, although eventually the young Muhammad as the earliest person who enter *Haram*. However for reason of protecting the name of princes as well as the value of Black Stone of Mecca, he put the stone on his *surban*, and asked all of the tribe chiefs who were in conflict to lift and bring him into the origin place of Black Stone. Hence we can see that the main value upheld by Prophet is togetherness, *Subhanallah!!* So no wonder the prophet has been awarded as Peace Loving Man.

From the standard set by Islam, violence is sinful and forbidden. Islam is very clear exalts gentleness and civility especially in dealing with people. According to Islam, gentleness and civility close to the nature of women. Women are identified to the *nafs*, which means soul or self. The highest levels of *nafs*, Quran states it as the soul of peace (Surah 89: 27-28). This clearly provides a basis consideration that Moslem women have capacity to be peacemaker because of they own high capacity of self or soul that love of peace.

Ironically, women are always identified as the victim in communal conflict or war. Not to few of Conflict Resolution experts criticized to such dichotomy that men as perpetrators of war and as well as the protectors, and contrarily women as housekeepers and victims (Al-Alie, 2000). According to them, either in communal conflict or war the role of women not just as passive victim ones, but rather some groups of women have been shown as active agents within the meaning in constructive way to create peace and negative line when they were involved as violent actors during the

ongoing conflict.

Opportunity for women to get involved, as peacemaker once conflict is on going is a great challenge. The demand of their existencies specially at the micro level (Track II) or the civil-based society track. Conflict resolution experts recently called for the effectiveness of diplomacy and negotiation through the Track II in war and communal conflict, shifting from the macro level Track I. Although civil society involvement in Track II for peace process does not play in direct role to the policy formulation, but the results of diplomacy and negotiation should be recognized as the critical influence in policy-making process for creating peace.

The experience of Indonesia' women role in Track I as peacemaker could be seen in Aceh conflict. Long before the UN resolution No. 1325 was passed, Acehese women ever held a large agenda meeting in February 2000 exploring peace issue. The meeting is known as *Duek Use Inong of Aceh* means Aceh First Women's Congress (Kamaruzzaman, in Conciliation Resources, [www.cr.org / our-work](http://www.cr.org/our-work)). The 437 women consist of various backgrounds and professions, such as housewives, teacher, farmer, lawyer, informal sector worker, doctor, midwives, students and others gathered for taking dialogue. Some of them were the victims because of losing family members, or having bad experiences of physical or psychological violent, such as intimidated, abused or raped. They shared pain or tragedy and strengthened their dreams for having peace by designing the future together. This was the first congress held in Aceh that bringing issue of peace and offering conflict resolution in peaceful strategy. The congress result was disseminated to related parties, including President Abdurrahman Wahid. The congress also lobbied to the various parties to bring issue of women involvement in peace process between government and GAM that is facilitated by Henry Dunant Centre. Unfortunately, women involvement was still disregarded during the peace process even until memorandum of agreement is signed in Helsinki on August 15, 2005.

In Track II indeed, it has been found that dialogue groups and problem-solving workshops that have been carried out by some women groups were particularly successful (eg d'Estrée and Babbitt 1998). Track II puts forward priority the method of dialogue and problem-solving meeting for achieving of win-win solution, in which women are highly needed as potential mediators considering that they have more emphatic ability. Psychologically, women strong character is protagonist, one character that takes higher into account to the interests of others. Contrarily, men character is psychologically inclined antagonist, which emphasizes the process of competition.

We can look to an example of women's role in Track II that has been undertaken in Ambon Maluku and Poso conflicts. Some community actions had been done under coordination of Gerakan Peduli Perempuan (GPP). The actions had been taken prior to the Malino agreement is managed. Member of GPP consists of Moslems and Christians women who were very proactive in communication and were often to become mediator to inter-group factions. In the case of the Poso conflict, some field reports stated that the decline of the violence scale occurred because of the flow of refugees from Poso who moved to nearby areas, such as Tentena. It has been noticed also that this was because of women who were successfully in forcing husbands and children to avoid from conflict,

emotion and violent action.

The role of women in diplomacy and negotiation Track I also has demonstrated significant effectiveness as part of the peace processor peace making. With regard to this issue, Hillary Clinton has told the UN Security Council 2010, that women's participation in the activities of peace is a 'necessity in a global security'. She said it also would support political stability, economic growth and human rights.

In fact, Nobel Peace Prize in 2011, given to three women who are considered instrumental in promoting the values of gender equality and non-violent struggle. They are the President of Liberia Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, a peace activist Liberia Leymah Gbowee, and movement activists Arab Spring of Yemen, Tawakkul Karman. Chairman of the Norwegian Nobel Committee, Thorbjørn Jagland, said the three women was considered appropriate to receive the prize for meritorious promote safety and rights women to participate in the work of peace, through non-violent struggle. "We will not be able to uphold democracy and lasting peace in the world, except the women had the same opportunities as men to give a contribution to the development of all sectors of public life," added Jagland in Oslo, Norway.

THE CHALLENGE OF MOSLEM WOMEN AS AGENT OF PEACE

Moslem women have great capacities to be the representative agent to reflect Islam as the religion that puts peace, justice and togetherness as main values. Accordingly, Muslimat should take action to correct the misunderstanding of Islam by promoting that Islam does not favor any misuse of power and war. Beyond the promotion, the Muslimat should continue into action to realize that Islam is a religion that recognizes pluralism, tolerance, and give priority to justice and solidarity. The action taken should be more in constructive role in preventing or anticipating the occurrence of communal conflict or war.

However, apart from their capacities to be potentially as peacemaker, Moslem women are not easy to be involved in the peace process. The main obstacle is the perspective that assumes conflict is male area and it is dangerous for women. Another obstacle is the ignorance of women capacity to maintain of their objectivity in threatening the parties who are involved in conflict. Looking to these obstacles, then it is the challenge for Moslem women to promote greatly of their capacities and act accordingly as to prove it.

As part of society member, Moslem women should promote the value of togetherness accordingly to Islamic way to interact to other member of society regardless of their religion, socio-cultural and political characters. The value of togetherness should be based on spirit of *Ukhuwah Islamiah* that is realized in wider sense to counter the misconception of 'for the sake of *Ukhuwah Islamiah* we execute the enemy'. We suppose to adore and imitate the spirit of *Ukhuwah Islamiah* delivered by Islamic thinkers such as Ahmad Wahib, Bung Hatta, and Gus Dur who put forward the values of pluralism (Sobary, 1998). The congregation (*umat*) in their views of *Ukhuwah Islamiah* is for all people, Moslem and non-Moslem. This is also to express the truth idea

that Islam is not an exclusive teaching, but rather as part of the unit political and cultural life of civilization. The main essence of *Uhkuwah islamiah* is the existence of a just life, without domination, and humane.

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