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Of Warrior Women, Emancipist Princesses, “Hidden Queens” and
Managerial Mothers – “discovered” in the course of writing my Ph.D.
dissertation.



Section of Ship Cloth, Kalianda district, Lampung, South Sumatra, C19th.

A preliminary note.

Many thanks to Paul Permadi, Joko Santoso and the staff of the National Library, Jakarta, who provided information and assisted my quest for sources on Malahayati in 2001 and 2002. In February 2002, Pak Joko, whose house had been flooded, negotiated the water-filled streets from one direction and I from another to collect the photocopies I had requested six months earlier. Regarding the damage to Aceh’s archives as a result of the tsunami, the Jakarta floods now seem to have been an eerie premonition of what was to come – and another reason to finally complete this paper.

In April 2002, I presented a paper for Murdoch University’s Pubtalk Series. The paper considered selected iconic and archetypal representations of Indonesian women of legend and history in art, film and contemporary discourse. A parallel Japanese representation of one of the themes proposed, drawn from Akira Kurosawa’s 1958 film, *The Hidden Fortress*, was also engaged. The following essay has been developed from the original presentation, extending a short article “Laksamana Keumalahayati, the Seafaring Woman of Aceh” written for a *Women and the Sea* supplement of the Greenwich Maritime Museum Newsletter. Following the earthquake and tsunami of December 26th, 2004. I, like many others, must lay some ghosts to rest across the rim of the Indian Ocean basin. I cannot deal with all in this way, but must chose one place and group of people to represent many. This essay is a timely reminder of a golden era in the history of Aceh and a tribute to the resolute spirit of its people from whom the forces of nature have now stripped so much of their culture. In many ways, this spirit of negotiation and resistance lies at the heart of the foundation of modern Indonesia.

My focus in this essay is the sixteenth century Acehnese Admiral, Laksamana Keumalahayati, or Malahayati as she is popularly known, and the four seventeenth century Acehnese Queens, beginning with Ratu Tadj al Alam. Tadj al Alam became Queen in 1641, following the death of her husband, Sultan Iskandar Muda, formerly the prince Dharma Wangsa. Laksamana Keumalahayati, whose official duties spanned the century from

1585 until 1604, was briefly allied with Dharma Wangsa in the Acehese fight to resist the ongoing maritime and mercantilist conquistadorial ambitions of the Portuguese and depose Sultan Muda Ali Riayat Shah, the son of Sultan Ala al-Din Riayat Syah, whom she had served faithfully for many years.

The last of the Queens, Ratu Kamalat Syah, was deposed in 1699 (1109 H.) after a long struggle with internally powerful factions of religious ulamas and wealthy commoners involved with shipping and trade. Using a conservative interpretation of the Islamic *fatwa* to claim that “an Islamic state cannot succeed if it is governed by a woman” against her, they argued that Kamalat Syah’s occupancy of the throne challenged the authority of Islam. This Arabic Qu’ranic interpretation differed from that derived from the *Kitab At-Tibyan* the Acehese interpreted S’yariah, and created a praxis with existing customary rules (*adat*) from which basis the kingdoms of Aceh Darussalam and Aceh Besar developed their state law, the *Kanun Mahkota Alam* (Teuku Ainal, H. & Aly, M., n.d.:292). There was also historical precedent for the rule of women Sultans in Islamic Sumatran states. Puteri Lindung Bulan of Benua Teuming reigned for sixty-five years (1333-1398 M.) and Ratu Nihrasiyah Rawangsa Khadiyu of Samudera Pase for twenty-eight (801-831 H; 1400-1428 M) (Bianpoen, C., 13/2/2000). Islam and custom were adjusted to permit the use of women as soldiers, as representatives of the state and members of governing councils.¹ The deposition of Queen Kamalat Syah marks the first and only time that a religious decree, issued directly from Mecca, was used to bring down a ruler in the archipelagic sultanates which later became modern Indonesia.

Some aspects of the personal histories of these women are reminiscent of the mythical warrior woman, Srikandi, a favourite character from the Hindu epic, the *Mahabharata*, well known throughout Indonesia. Srikandi was determined to become the wife of the Pandawa prince, Arjuna, despite the fact that he was already married to Dewi Sumbadra. Srikandi vowed to stand by Arjuna in battle, impressing him with her loyalty and courage. This she did in the Bratayuda War, slaying his enemies; later she was murdered by poison. She is the archetypal “Warrior Woman” of South and South-East Asian legend. Contemporary Indonesian “*Surrealis*” painter, Lucia Hartini, depicts her representation of Srikandi in the canvas of the same name, dated 1993. Dressed in the blue cloth worn by members of the womens’ armies who historically protected the Sultans of feudal Central Java, Lucia paints herself as Srikandi, who is also, in this instance, sympathetically, Megawati Sukarnoputri. Lucia’s Srikandi stridently repels the critical and doubting eyes of society which had formerly rendered many of its women prisoners of tradition. She herself has seen, is aware and no longer ignorant. Thus she has courage.



Lucia Hartini, *Srikandi* (1993), oil on canvas, 150 cms x 150 cms.

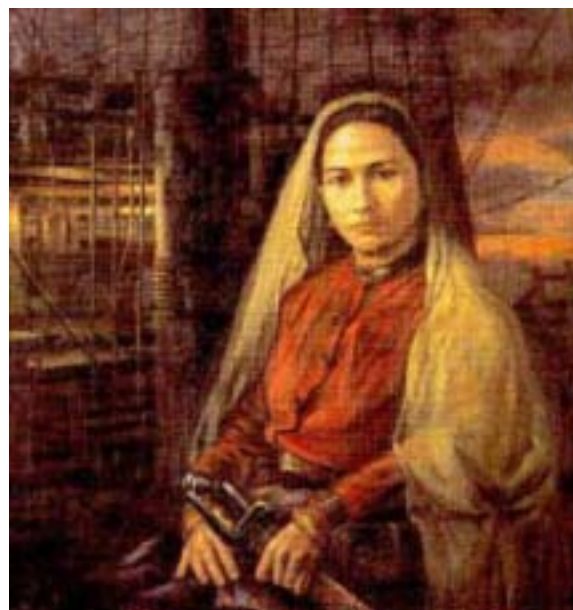
The iconic women represented by Lucia Hartini in her paintings since 1985, have been intimately connected with the artist's self-actualisation and personal growth. But one can also argue they are part of a project shared by a number of Indonesian cultural producers to rehabilitate alternative female archetypes drawn from the strong, feisty, and uncompromisingly capable women of Indonesian history and legend, placing them once more within the domains of art, film and contemporary discourse - including the political. But questions are also raised within these recuperations. Lucia Hartini's *Srikandi* is not realistically modelled; she is represented as being half way between *golek* puppet and woman, signalling that her self-actualisation as a warrior is not yet complete.

Indonesian artist Arahmaiani's 1996 performance at the Asia Pacific Triennale engages similar themes. Costumed as a "modern" "traditional" Balinese woman, she tries valiantly to protect her culture from the onslaught of consumerist globalism. Her skills and the armaments of heritage seem decorative and puny by comparison. They remind us of the Balinese *puputan* of 1906 when mostly unarmed Balinese families, in a last desperate attempt at resistance, ran bare-chested towards the heavily armed Dutch at Badung. The artist's weapons are newly manufactured as toys within the system they seek to challenge. Arguably they are already compromised, signalling that the performer has little choice but to carve for herself a suitable space within a wider system if her culture is to survive and give strength. Arahmaiani's response is an emotional one, but her analysis is political.



Arahmaiani, Brisbane (1996).

Yet ironically, it was the “imaginary” portrait of *Laksamana Keumalahayati* (1994), the “Seafaring Woman” of Aceh, by one of Lucia’s male peers, the hyper- realist painter Dede Eri Supria, and the character of the enigmatic Princess Yuki Akizuki from Kurosawa’s film *The Hidden Fortress*, which led me to look more closely at the particular aspects of the conceptual jigsaw puzzle of emancipist female media representation in Indonesia raised by the images created by its contemporary artists.ⁱⁱ In doing so, I discovered the amazing story of Aceh’s golden centuries.



Dede Eri Supria, *Laksamana Keumalahayati* (1994), oil on canvas, 80 x 70 cms.

Beyond the mythic, there is an element of historically based socio-cultural recuperation in these works. In Aceh, the armada of Sultan Alkahar which attacked the Portuguese in Malacca (Melaka) in 1568, included female troops. Some accompanied their husbands in battle; others were the fiancées and widows of soldiers and seamen killed previously. While some accounts suggest these fighters included slaves, others indicate that most were actively recruited.ⁱⁱⁱ They fought on foot, on horseback and later, with elephants. However, it seems that Malahayati suggested the creation of an exclusively female army, the *Armada Inong Bale* of Aceh Besar (Sufi, R., n.d.:31). These 2,000 women were professional field soldiers on land and sea, voyaging elsewhere in Sumatra and later to Sunda and Java in the military service of their Sultans. Their contribution was valued. From the era of Sultan Muda Ali Riayat Syah (997-1011 H; 1604 -1607 M) onwards, a special regiment of female troops also guarded the Sultan's palace (Teuku Ainal, H. & Aly, M., n.d.:297).

A chance dinner conversation with veteran Indonesian women's rights campaigner and journalist Carla Bianpoen, revealed the existence of the so-called *Sultanes Oubliees* or "Forgotten" Queens of Islam (Mernissi, 1993), four of whom ruled Aceh in the century following the era of the brave and clever Admiral with her military and naval pedigree and her diplomatic skills. By all accounts, theirs was a golden age of prosperity achieved through diplomacy, skill in trade, justice, sound economic management and care for their citizens' welfare. Yet detailed histories of their reign and achievements are scanty for primary sources are almost non-existent, making it difficult to sort mythologising storytelling and literary poetic licence from historical research and analysis: many differing versions exist. Readers also encounter constant variations in translations of names and titles. The Dutch historian Van Zeggelen was able to trace Keumalahayati through old Malay manuscripts because she was sometimes referred to by her familiar name, Malahayati or just "Hayati" (Sufi, R., n.d.:11).^{iv} Dates are given according to the Islamic calendar (H), and othertimes, according to the Christian European one, (M.) – but rarely consistently as both. I apologise for my inconsistencies in this respect. Also, as I am unable to read Portuguese, Arabic or Dutch, and have no familiarity with Acehnese Malay or Gayo, I am at the mercy of Indonesian and English interpretations of available sources.

Furthermore, most of the histories of Aceh of this period have a military and naval focus. They are colourful accounts of battles, victories and defeats, recording the deeds of those holding power written by authors who came largely from nations which later colonised Sumatra.^v Very few are social histories. Of these, I discovered only four which examined the lives and socio-political roles of Laksamana Keumalahayati, the Acehnese Queens and the nineteenth century resistance fighters like Cut Nyak Din and Cut Meutia in any depth – despite their status as Indonesian National Heroes. The few glimpses into the richly varied brocade of Acehnese life in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries emerge in the eyewitness accounts of foreign seafarers, traders, envoys and administrators, those servants of trade, religion and Empire who awoke to find themselves in a strange and magnificent land (Davis, J., 1625; Lancaster, Sir J., 1940, cited in Said, M., 1961:134-137).

Indonesian historian Ijas Sutan Pamenan's (1959) study of the Queens is informative rather than hagiographic. He marshalls early Portuguese and English sources and several Dutch colonial sources, attempting to cross-reference many varied accounts and perspectives when developing his specific focus on the sixty year rule of Aceh's female Sultans. Pamenan analyses their success and speculates at length on the reasons for their demise. In a series of articles documenting women's initiatives in Aceh during *Reformasi*, Bianpoen (2000) attempts a sketchy contemporary corrective, focusing on the achievements of the Queens and the Acehnese women of the period, while noting, with regret, their much-diminished legacy in modernity. Her research provides the background information for three reports on the February 2000 *Duek Pakat Inong Aceh / All-Acehnese Womens' Conference*, none of which were published in the major Indonesian daily papers of the time, but which appeared instead in *The Indonesian Observer in English* (Bianpoen, 13/2/2000; 28/2/2000; 12/3/2000).

This was the first time ever that over five hundred Acehnese women from different backgrounds representing different organizations committed to the needs and aspirations of women had met together to decide on their path to achieve peace, justice and a resolution to the long-standing conflicts in Aceh which were ruining their lives. Feminist activist Chusnul Mar'iyah (2000), aided by the *Reformasi* groups she established in the years prior to the Presidential elections of 1999, also devoted much energy to an examination of womens' situation in Aceh, to endemic violence and to womens' standing in relation to Islam and the application in practice of S'yariah law.^{vi}

In the early sixteenth century, Aceh was a large triangular-shaped and prosperous region located on the northern tip of the island of Sumatra, guarding the western gate of the Indonesian Archipelago.^{vii} The politics, culture and economy of the kingdoms of Aceh –including that part of Indonesia which is now called Sumatera Utara - had long been formed through interaction with foreigners. Their rulers and people participated in sophisticated and long-standing networks based on maritime trade, religious affiliations and political negotiations. These networks had developed over the centuries between the numerous kingdoms and principalities of the South and South-East Asian region. However, the arrival of the Portuguese and their eventual conquest of Malacca in 1511, signalled to the Acehnese across the narrow straits separating the kingdoms that here were foreigners whose aims might extend beyond trade and negotiation to outright warfare and territorial acquisition. The Portuguese endeavoured to gain a monopoly on the supply of spices, timber, textiles and other desirable commodities through trade with the region, and then maintain their advantage through conquest. Retrospectively, these motives appear to have been partly shared by the Dutch and English who were now visiting the region with increasing frequency. Initially, the latter appeared interested only in obtaining trading licenses and guarantees of Acehnese assistance in their quest to contain the Portuguese and damage their power in Europe.^{viii} The ensuing conflicts with the Portuguese continued throughout the sixteenth century until the last quarter of the seventeenth century - by which time Portuguese mercantilist and then colonial ambitions had been replaced by those of the Dutch and the English. Within this historical framework, we may piece together a little of the lives and much more about

the astonishing careers of Laksamana Keumalahayati and the succession of Queens who held power in Aceh from 1641 until century's end.

From various traditional oral and written sources, it seems Malahayati distinguished herself in battle, then persuaded the Sultan to create the *Armada Inong Bale*, an armed regiment entirely comprised of women (Van Zeggelen, 1935, Zainuddin, H. M., 1961, cit. Sufi, R., n.d.:31). She was appointed its commander. Like many Acehnese women soldiers, Malahayati's husband died in one of the fierce battles of resistance against the invading Portuguese. It seems probable she created the *Inong Bale* to avenge his death. Citing a manuscript dated 1254 H. (1875), kept at the National University of Malaysia, Sufi states that Keumalahayati was a descendant of the first Sultan of Aceh Darussalam. More importantly, her father and grandfather were both Admirals who had served Aceh in the ongoing struggles against the Portuguese (Sufi, R., n.d.:30). Impressed with her skill and courage, and trusting her more than he was able to trust another man, the aging Sultan Ala al-Din Riayat Syah appointed Keumalahayati to the position of Admiral of his fleet in the last years of the sixteenth century. Given his age, the Sultan realised that internal manoeuvrings to remove him would be a feature of his reign. He chose to entrust strategic positions of great state responsibility and power to women, such as Malahayati and Cut Limpah, head of the Royal Secret Service. (Van Zeggelen, 1935, cited in Sufi, R., n.d.:31)

By 1602, having been tested in battle on land and sea, where her victories included gaining the upper-hand against several groups of Dutch ships (Cornelis and Frans Houtemans in 1599, and then, those of Van Caerden in 1601), Laksamana Keumalahayati not only coordinated the sizeable Acehnese fleet, but was successfully supervising Aceh's harbours, including Banda Aceh Darussalam, Daya and Pedir.^x Although some of Keumalahayati's actions appear piratical, they were considered fair retaliation against the insulting and privateering tactics of the foreigners.^x Her aim had been to safeguard Acehnese sovereignty, and her use of force was always allied with diplomacy. She impressed many of the foreigners visiting Aceh and her reputation spread abroad as far as Europe. The Englishman John Davis, captain of a Dutch ship which visited Aceh at the time, reported that the Acehnese fleet consisted of one hundred galleys, some with a capacity of four to five hundred men. He observes that the commander of this navy "was a woman Admiral, Mala Hayati, whose name is much vaunted" (account of John Davis cited in Jacobs, J. 1894). Thomas Braddell (1851) claims that some of the Acehnese ships were bigger than those then made in Europe. Over the centuries, their loads have been strikingly woven into the famous ship cloths of South and West Sumatra where bales of cargo, trees, people, cattle, horses and elephants are distinguishable (Maxwell, R., 2003:5-7).

Following her success in restoring the kingdom's originally combative relationship with the Dutch, Keumalahayati became increasingly involved in the administration of Aceh's foreign policy. She had also been placed in charge of Protocol at the palace: by now, her brief was now not dissimilar to that of the U.S. Secretary of State, now also held by a woman, Condoleezza Rice. Next to appear on Aceh's shores were the British in June 1602, when James Lancaster arrived with a letter from Queen Elizabeth I for the Sultan.

English interest in Aceh had been further prompted by news of the two Acehnese envoys who had travelled to the Dutch court earlier. The Sultan was most desirous of this connection, being fascinated by accounts he had gleaned from captains, seamen and traders of a tiny country governed by a woman which, nevertheless, exerted great power in Europe and across the seas.^{xi} The Queen's letter respectfully mentions "Laksamana Radjah Meukeut", which most historians have interpreted as a reference to Malahayati. Like the Dutch, the English were interested in the tin and pepper trade. Before meeting with the Sultan, Lancaster arranged an introductory meeting with the Admiral. She was accompanied by the watchful eyes of her deputy, Cut Limpah. The meeting was conducted in Arabic and interpreted through a Jew accompanying Lancaster's party (Jacobs, J., 1894).^{xii}

The British envoy stressed the importance of trade connections between England and Aceh. Lancaster also encouraged Keumalahayati to maintain hostilities towards the Portuguese and Spanish – "our sworn enemies" - although, at that time, there existed an uneasy peace between the Portuguese and the Acehnese (Lombard, D., 1986:319-322). Keumalahayati then permitted Lancaster, as representative of the Queen of England, an audience with the Sultan, who subsequently received the envoy with the admiral seated at his side. He guaranteed the English rights to a share of the lucrative pepper trade. Following as it did hard on the heels of Aceh's negotiations with the Dutch, this agreement was interpreted by the Portuguese as manifest favouritism. They retaliated by attempting to seize an island off the coast. Their intention was to build a fortress, a trademark strategy they deployed elsewhere in South and South-East Asia when local resistance was encountered. But once more the Portuguese, now the sworn enemies of the Acehnese, were overpowered by the Admiral and her forces who imprisoned their captives within their own fort. To this day, there are Acehnese in this region who claim Portuguese descent, as there are those in Banda Aceh Darussalam whose origins might be Turkish, Indian, European or African (Personal communication, Acehnese staff, Perpustakaan Nasional Indonesia, Jakarta, 2002).

There followed an uneasy truce, and trouble continued after the old Sultan's newly appointed co-regent, his son Ali Riayat Shah, murdered his father in 1604. In the first years of his reign, the new Sultan could not manage the problems besetting Aceh – amongst them massive flooding and the hunger and pestilence which followed - besides those he had created himself (Sufi, R., 1995:24). Yet he maintained the women's army, both in the field and as palace guards, placing two new women admirals, Leurah Ganty and Cut Meurah Inseuen, in charge of both. In 1606, the Portuguese launched another concerted attack. Only then was Malahayati able to persuade the Sultan to free his popular older cousin, Darma Wangsa, from jail where he had been placed awaiting trial for criticising the young Sultan's rule. Together, Darma Wangsa and Malahayati succeeded in driving the Portuguese away from Aceh. Other accounts claim the new Laksamanas also conspired against the disastrous young Sultan whose behaviour they regarded as stupid and immoral, several histories crediting them with Darma Wangsa's release (Teuku Ainal, H. & Aly, M., n.d.:287).

In 1607 (1016 H.), Ali Riayat Shah died and Darma Wangsa became ruler. As Sultan Iskandar Muda, he managed Aceh skilfully and well, establishing economic prosperity and encouraging trade.^{xiii} He was also expansionist: his Sultanate gained footholds and forged alliances in various of the Malay Peninsula, in West and South Sumatra, and in Sunda and parts of Java. In particular, Sultan Iskandar Muda drew on connections established through a previous Sultan, reviving the Acehnese alliance with Turkey. Once again with their assistance, Sultan Iskandar Muda increased the size and sophistication of the ships and armaments of the Acehnese fleet, especially canon, so keeping the Portuguese, Dutch and English largely at bay. However, after a resounding naval defeat in 1629, “the Acehnese lost control of most of the principalities on the Peninsula, while its claims to north-eastern Sumatra were challenged by the maharajahs of Minangkabau and the Sultan of Johore”, somewhat weakening the navy and the economy (Sufi, R., 1995:72-73; Vlekke, B.H.M., 1959:121, cited in Ahmad, n.d.:76). In relation to the status of women, Iskandar Muda continued to value female skills, maintaining and modernising both the womens’ armies, although the palace army was now selected from young unmarried women. Once again, he appointed a woman general as commander in charge. Iskandar Muda reigned until December 1636 (1045 H.), but died under suspicious circumstances (Dutch sources cited in Sufi, R., 1995:83 suggest he was poisoned). He was succeeded by his adopted son Iskandar Thani, as the great Sultan desired. On Iskandar Thani’s death in 1641 (1050 H.), the Sultanate passed to his wife, Sri Ratu Tadj al Alam Permaissuri, the biological daughter of Iskandar Muda.

Queen Tadj al Alam then ruled for thirty-four years, until 1675 (1086 H.). She was followed by three princesses whose dynastic provenance in relation to the Acehnese Sultanate seems somewhat unclear (Pamenan, I. S., 1959:17). Because rule by women had been conventionally considered unwise according to Islam, the Acehnese initially doubted the wisdom of rulership by Queens. Facing difficulties finding a suitable successor, those religious advisors close to the throne placed Tadj al Alam on probation as ruler for two years, during which time the Dutch, rather than the Acehnese, wrested control of Malacca from the hands of the Portuguese for the first time in one hundred and thirty years, and Queen Tadj al Alam studied statecraft (Pamenan, I. S., 1959:44-46). Meanwhile S’yariah and the *Kanun Mahkota Alam* were adjusted to suit the reality of rule by a woman (Teuku Ainal, H. & Aly, M., n.d.:292). Pamenan (1959:14) cites several Dutch sources who record that the Acehnese were soon well pleased at home by their Queen. Economic prosperity, the growth in shipping related to trade, an international perspective and the provision of education and a strengthened judicial system were all achieved during the reigns of Ratu Tadj al Alam Syahfaddin, Ratu Nur al Alam Nakiat addin Syah and Ratu Inajat Syah Zakiat addin Syah. Most of the Dutch colonial authors note the praise heaped on all, remarking on the fairness of the trading systems they instituted and their skill at managing relations amongst the diverse nations now plying the Malacca Straits. They comment favourably on the excellent quality and novelty of the goods traded.

Pamenan (1959:72-73) writes that Ratu Tadj al Alam was highly regarded for her wisdom, her literary skills and her exemplary concern for the welfare and rights of her subjects. Although the boundaries of the expanded

Acehnese Sultanate (empire) established under Iskandar Muda were progressively eroded during her reign, Tadj al Alam's obvious power at home and her diplomacy prevented the occupation of Aceh and controlled the presence of foreign powers on Acehnese soil. She maintained the women's armies, using them as frontline troops guarding the coast of Aceh, the city of Banda Aceh Darussalam and the palace in case of invasion. Although alarmed when the Dutch drove the Portuguese from Malacca, so gaining control of the world trade in tin for eight years, Tadj al Alam realised it was better to concede the remaining distant territories of Aceh as she was unable to control them militarily. These smaller kingdoms had begun trading directly with the increasingly aggressive Dutch via the V.O.C. Thus it was better to limit the power of the V.O.C. at home; and take advantage of the absence of the Portuguese who had lost their layover between India (Goa) and China (Macau). The Acehnese and the V.O.C. then managed to banish the Portuguese to Maluku; establish Batavia as the central Dutch base in the Archipelago rather than Banda Aceh Darussalam; and open the entire region to trading parties from many other parts of the globe.

As a counterweight, the Acehnese also sought to maintain cordial relationships with the English. In one celebrated instance, Tadj al Alam ceded a valuable pepper concession in West Sumatra to the British to punish Dutch privateers who had blockaded a pepper-loading port near the area concerned. The V.O.C. were neither present, nor in control; thus Tadj al Alam gave the trading concession to the British in exchange for negotiating the release of Acehnese prisoners held captive by the Portuguese in Goa, India (Pamenan, I. S., 1959:48-49). Through the intelligence so gained, she acquired much valuable information regarding British interests in India, where the English were busy establishing trading monopolies on textiles and tea. Tadj al Alam was able to devise effective strategies for future Acehnese negotiations with the English, establishing the tactic of playing the V.O.C. off against the British East India Company. Queens Inajat Syah Zakiat and Kamalat Syah both used this strategy as a major diplomatic ploy when dealing with foreign powers subsequently.

Tadj al Alam concentrated on developing governance, education through the Madrasahs, domestic production, civilian shipping and trade. She expanded the role of the Legislative Council established by Iskandar Muda. This Council was comprised of seventy-three people of whom sixteen were women (Teuku Ainal, H. & Aly, M.A, n.d.:287-288, Bianpoen, C., 13/2/2000).^{xiv} Structurally, the model for this body seems to have been the Parliament of Elizabethan England, which had excluded all women except the Queen. However, in Tadj al Alam's Aceh, women were officially recognised and represented in most walks of life. By contrast, Bianpoen remarks that by 1999 *Reformasi*, seems to have made little difference to the vast under-representation of women in Acehnese legislative body. During her short-lived reign, Queen Nur al Alam Nakiat addin Syah, 1086-1088 H., 1675-1678 M., again advised by the chief Ulama, Qad Malikul Adil Syek Abdur Rauf Syiahkuala, retained women councillors, heeded the welfare of her people and revised the justice and administrative system. She also strengthened the power of the Sultanate, thereby securing the hold of the Queens on the throne of Aceh (Teuku Ainal, H. & Aly, M., n.d.:287-294).

Despite obvious pressures exerted by the sophisticated operations of the V.O.C. (van Leur, 1934, cited in Pamenan, I. S., 1959, 110-11; de Klerck, E. S., 1912, cited in Pamenan, I. S., 1959, 12) and the colonising ambitions of the Dutch and English who by now were increasingly practising strategies of divide and rule among the various Sultanates and territories of the region (Schrieke, B. O., 1924, cited in Pamenan, I. S., 1959:12), Hurgronje claims that Aceh's progressive downfall during the reign of the last Queen, Ratu Kamalat Syah, was the result of long-standing religious intrigues directed at her on the grounds of gender.

Pamenan (1959:96-98) expands this view, arguing that Kamalat Syah was no longer able to rule effectively, because public opinion had turned against the moderate line towards foreign powers preferred by the Queens. Quite simply, the Acehnese wanted a male leader on the throne once more. He suggests that aspects of gender and its popular perception were beginning to count against rule by women. He remarks that the age, shape, behaviour and mannish voice of the third Queen, Ratu Inajat Syah Zakiat had made her less popular than her predecessors in the eyes of Acehnese and foreigners alike, spoiling her chances of successful negotiation and reducing the kingdom's prosperity! As an example, he cites her refusal of British requests to build a fort in Aceh, fearing it might well be used against the Acehnese. The British had recently been driven from Banten and Silebar, and were looking for suitable sites for colonies (Marsden, W., 1811:449, cited in Pamenan, 1959:93-94). It is more probable however, that Inajat Syah Zakiat recognised the real-politik of her age was different from that a century prior, when Malahayati was able to turn the tables on the Portuguese, beat them in battle and lock them up in their own fort without danger of immediate reprisal. By 1684, it is likely the British would have enlisted Dutch assistance to invade Aceh instead, preferring retaliation to negotiation.^{xv}

Yet Pamenan also acknowledges that Inajat Syah Zakiat's physical unattractiveness and masculine manner neither marred her linguistic and managerial skills, which were impartially admired, nor destroyed her diplomatic abilities. Although Inajat Syah Zakiat lost the last remaining territory beyond Aceh Darussalam and Aceh Besar, her real achievement was the regional multi-national friendship and trading league she created to offset and moderate the impact of Dutch power (Pamenan, 1959:95). She strengthened ties with the Islamic world, maintained the upkeep of mosques built in the time of Iskandar Muda and Queen Tadj al Alam, and funded *surau*. She intended Aceh's youth to grow up devout in their Muslim faith, the better to withstand the ever more numerous foreigners of different religious belief and cultural practice now swarming in the region (Pamenan, 1959:96).

Pamenan suggests that, despite Ratu Kamalat Syah's skill in playing the British East India Tea Company off against the V.O.C., scorn at her wish to marry a harbourmaster to the commander of the palace army as a solution to her perceived weakness in the face of foreign powers, and public mistrust of her persona and abilities further damaged Aceh's political stability and economic prosperity. Kamalat Syah's ten year rule was conducted in an almost permanent state of *fitnah*: her authority had been undermined from the start. Following the death of Qad Malikul Adil Syek Abdul Rauf, who had advised each of the Queens in turn, Kamalat Syah's enemies seized the

chance to use religion as the excuse to remove her from the throne. A new group of Ulamas and powerful and wealthy traders persuaded international Arab interests to send an envoy from Mecca bearing a *fatwa* claiming that Ratu Kamalat Syah's rule as head of an Islamic state was in conflict with the teachings and authority of Islam (Pamenan, 1959:97-98). Because the particular stream of Islam which had always found the rule of women in an Islamic state untenable was now inextricably linked to international trade, the lifeblood of Aceh, Kamalat Syah's demise in 1699 (1109 H.) is a clear example of the combined power of religion, trade, transportation and prejudice as global actors affecting a local situation. However, Pamenan (1959:6 & 98) also states categorically that Aceh's final collapse came at the hands of the male rulers who succeeded the last of the Queens.

By now, the South-East Asian archipelagic world had changed forever. The European powers no longer disguised their ambitions to colonise territories whose autonomous Sultanates and Kingdoms they had previously respected, nor the fact they were prepared to fight for the chance to control the regional nexus of the great maritime trading networks formerly held by the Acehnese. By 1819, even the fledgling American nation was dragged into the new scramble for empire and influence in Sumatra. However the enthusiasm of some for these adventures remained prudently muted. In 1786, Captain Francis Light, sensing the mood of the Acehnese, remarked that he preferred a settlement at Pulau Pinang (Penang in present-day Malaysia).^{xvi} His report to the British Crown via the Governor of Bengal observes the following estimation:

Acheen is a good road but no place of security against an enemy there. The country is fertile beyond description and very populous. The inhabitants rigid and superstitious Mohammedans, sullen, fickle and treacherous (*sic*). To form a settlement there, of safety and advantage, a force sufficient to subdue all the chiefs would be necessary.

(Light, F., cited in Snouk Hurgronje, Transl. A.W.S O'Sullivan, 1906, Vol. I:viii-ix).

Other European reports echoed these views.

Not surprisingly, such prejudicial statements resemble much criticised contemporary statements by President George Bush regarding Saddam Hussein and various terrorists. It seems the potential colonisers had met their match! The Acehnese and their terrain determined that the territorial occupation of Acehnese land by foreigners would be no picnic! Until the catastrophic events of 26/12/2004, the pattern of continuously waged wars of resistance became set as an integral part of the Acehnese experience and habitus. But this time, the power of nature has achieved in one fell swoop what centuries of conflict has not. The Acehnese have had to accept the presence – albeit in the very different guise of humanitarian relief effort – of all those former would-be and actual invaders and colonisers, plus more.^{xvii} Little wonder a time limit has been set on the presence of foreign troops in Aceh.

Psychologically and socially, as well as physically, environmentally and historically, the Acehese loss is now immense.

Several questions arise from a study of the role of women leaders in Aceh in the C16th and C17th. Why was there such a rapid decline in the number of women rulers; why the gradual decline in women's power in the domain of active service at such high levels in the state; and why the increasingly unfavourable distortions in their historical representations and assessments (Mernissi, 1993)? Religious imperatives and generations of male colonial historians have virtually written the Acehese Queens out of existence, but their contribution is recorded in a handful of Acehese and Malay manuscripts, and in the oral traditions of the region. It is tempting to deduce that this decline in women's power and status happened because, in most cases, the countries in which such women held office eventually became the colonies of others. Moreover, the power dynamics of empire, democracy and socialism increasingly favoured males as heads of nation states - at least until comparatively recent times. It is equally interesting to note just where women have re-emerged as Heads of State: in the new nations which have arisen from the earlier kingdoms of South and South-East Asia, such as India, Sri Lanka and Indonesia, in New Zealand - and in Britain, which became part of Europe, rather than aloof from it.

It took the success of Indonesia's struggle for Independence in which the Acehese played such a unique and crucial role before Laksamana Keumalahayati's story was restored to the prominence it deserves, and many years again before her deeds and her efforts to maintain the independence of her country were commemorated. Nonetheless, one can conjure forth the drama of the Admiral's life story and speculate upon its importance. As for the four Queens, the golden age which they created must be remembered with hope, even if their successes have been dulled by scholarly neglect and rendered almost mythical by Aceh's present tragedy. The few remaining objects and in-situ primary sources which formerly cast a light on Aceh's spectacular Renaissance past have now almost certainly been substantially damaged or destroyed. We are left instead with an epic story from which various themes emerge for consideration as conclusion. Of these, I have selected that which relates to the intersection of gender with religion and state power, for it remains of great current importance in the social and political reconstruction of Aceh.

Historically, if women gained secular power and became rulers of Muslim states, it was because they were the spouses, daughters or sisters of Kings assuming the throne on their deaths, there being no other suitable, nor dynastically qualified surviving male successor. Laksamana Keumalahayati, Ratu Tadj al Alam and her daughter, Ratu Inajat Syah Zakiat all gained favour and then power on this basis. Yet the fact that they existed and were recorded as successfully managing that specific and volatile nexus of religion, power and custom which constitutes statecraft in the Islamic world, has been overlooked. More often than not these women were deemed constructive, just and exemplary rulers and administrators. And in the Christian world, even the women pirates of this same era who plied the Mediterranean and the

Caribbean were extremely effective in their chosen profession.

The significant difference between these so-called “Pirate Queens” and Malahayati is that the former operated outside the laws of their home countries rather than within them. I am not aware that Queen Elizabeth either directly sought the advice of women buccaneers - much less bestowed upon any of them either a title or national office. However, it is certain her advisers and various nobles at court heeded the informed opinions of the spymasters whose rings included women spies who sought out and couriered information internationally. Those who plied the seas, chasing trade and influence, including those engaged in piracy, were just one source of this intelligence. Arguably, the calculated and stateless lawlessness of the “Pirate Queens” has more in common with the exploits of subsequent female Acehese resistance fighters like Cut Nyak Din and Cut Meutia than with the state sanctioned actions of Laksamana Keumalahayati and Cut Limpah. However, the central issue for all concerned whose authority constituted the state.^{xviii} For instance, Laksamanas Leurah Ganty and Cut Meurah Inseuen, employed by a ruler whose regime was proving disastrous to the Acehese state, usurped their Sultan’s authority and released his rival, Darma Wangsa, who subsequently assumed the throne. But as Muslims, each of the Acehese female heroes had inspirational models, drawn from their own history and religion.

Writing about Islamic women in Arabic Islamic states in *Soultanes Oubliees*, Fatimah Mernissi (1993) argues that, for centuries, the problem for women in Islam has involved more than a transgression of the boundaries between postulated territories of operation. As perceived by Muslim men, the difficulty for women in marriage and in wider society, relates to an excess of the sovereignty of will exercised by a woman in competition with the will of the man to whom she owes obedience, rather than with a disavowal of women’s intelligence which is accepted and admired (Mernissi, 1993:177). For many Islamic men, *nushuz*, the private rebellion thus implied, is synonymous with *fitnah*, social disorder, and so best avoided.^{xix} Kamalat Syah was deposed because she could not control the disorder wreaked by those who intrigued against her, and because she showed no signs of arranging a suitable hereditary successor.

Speaking of A’isyah, the Prophet’s widow, translator of the scriptures, and resistance fighter, who was the first Muslim woman to claim and assume a political career, Mernissi (1993:85) writes that A’isyah also confronted this same gender-based territorial logic. A’isyah transgressed the boundaries between the territory of women and that of men by entering the mosque and inciting those present to rise up against Ali. She subsequently led men into battle. Because war is regarded as the privilege of men and belongs to the territory outside the harem, beyond the veil, the consequence of A’isyah’s actions was linked with *fitnah*, with disorder and destruction by Islamic conservatives – regardless of the just nature or otherwise of the battles concerned. In this way, the *hadit* that “an Islamic state will not succeed if it is led by a woman” may well be limited, for the state may have decided that a particular war is both necessary and just, as did the Acehese on numerous occasions during their golden era.

Since 1990 in Indonesia, the socially conservative interpretation of such long controversial and much translated *hadits* has been thoroughly

interrogated by Neo-modernist Islamic scholars and Womens' Rights activists, who have disputed their validity, particularly in the light of Indonesia's history.^{xx} The application of *hadits* concerning the authority of men over women depend on whether interpretations suggest that women are to be dominated or protected, and the marital and familial status of the women concerned. In the case of women like A'isyah - a mature woman who had been widowed young - it is quite possible she may by this time have owed no direct allegiance relationship-wise to any man, but would definitely have welcomed the protection of her male colleagues in battle.

Significantly, in Dede Eri Supria's portrait of *Laksamana Keumalahayati* - a representation developed from archival research and popular accounts - the Admiral with her direct level gaze is depicted aboard ship wearing a thin transparent open veil. Several early writers mention the shock received by a group of visiting envoys from Mecca when visiting the court of Sultan Iskandar Muda. There they beheld the women of the palace army, bare-shouldered, unveiled and armed. The evident difference between the women of the palace army and those of the court and the harem was obvious. The same surprise is evident in descriptions of subsequent Arabic visits to the court of the devoutly Islamic Inajat Syah Zakiat (Pamenan, I. S., 1959:95). Yet the visitors from the Holy Land were pleased by the magnificence of the Acehnese courts, the prosperity and welfare of the Acehnese and by the strength of their faith.

We are reminded that the womens' armies of Aceh, be they *Inong Bale* or within the palace, were comprised of widows and the fiancées of fallen soldiers, young women who had been promised in marriage at an early age. Circumstances threatened to place many of them beyond the pale, but the Acehnese states of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, needing available peoplepower for their self-defence and ongoing economic and territorial expansion, adjusted Islamic law to cope with this social situation, so assisting womens' welfare. For four centuries, the Acehnese placed the needs of their Islamic state first, and so favoured the stream of Islamic thought permitting the accommodation of women as leaders.

In Indonesia, the name A'isyah is synonymous with an early modern social welfare organization for women which promoted education for girls. Nyi Ahmad Dahlan established A'isyah as the female wing of the Muhammadiyah movement, founded by her husband in 1912.^{xxi} The aim of Muhammadiyah was to free Islam of *adat* customs so that "the Indonesian Muslim could, unhampered, adapt himself to the rapid evolution of the modern world" (Vrede-De Stuers, 1960:65). For women, this introduced many hundreds of girls to a "club culture" which, by 1924, included playing sport (Vrede-De Stuers, 1960:66-67). The initiatives taken by Raden Adjeng Kartini on behalf of upper-class women had rapidly spread to a wider constituency. The female wing of Muhammadiyah confirmed the historical reality of many millions of Indonesian women seeking to support their families - that womens' place is also outside the home. Thus education was perceived as enhancing womens' opportunities in this respect. For many, the veil was seen as offering protection in the uncertain and rapidly changing domains of modernity.^{xxii}

An idealised traditionally postulated Islamic state was ruled by two authorities. These were the caliphate, bearers of divine authority invested in a

religious elite, and the parliament, representing the *ammamate*, the masses, seen potentially as the bearers of disorder (Mernissi, 1993:185). When these bodies were seen as fundamentally contradictory, and without balance, *fitnah*, defined as disorder and destruction, might emerge to fill the power vacancy created. This is so whether or not women like A'isyah were involved in the fighting or not. According to logic rather than belief, Mernissi (1993) argues that fitness to exercise state power should be the deciding issue, not the gender of the contenders. Despite great difficulties, including natural disasters occasioned by hurricanes and flooding, three of Aceh's four Queens mostly satisfied this criteria, presiding over a period of great prosperity, advance and relative peace (Bianpoen, 2000). Religious decree in the form of a *fatwa* brought from Mecca was used to end the rule of the fourth Queen because it was popularly felt she was mismanaging Aceh's interests. And even then, *fitnah* was instigated because the populace knew of no other way to effect change and dismiss an unpopular and erratically effective ruler. Thus religion was used to justify popular disapproval and effect change, suggesting also that a tide of anti-female prejudice had begun to flow in Aceh, bolstered by conservative trends within Islam internationally and by a similar change in European attitudes. Displays of power – including that of religious belief – rather than wealth and prosperity became de rigeur. Banda Aceh Darussalam, the fabled “Flower of Aceh” became “The Verandah of Mecca” for it was that part of Aceh closest to the Holy Land of Islam.

Were these changing attitudes encouraged by the many changes in the political construction and territorial composition of kingdoms which were becoming states elsewhere in the world? The Acehnese were faced with the real might of European colonial expansion and imperial ambition, the negotiation of which threatened to consume their energies completely. Increasingly, they strengthened alliances based on religion against the European powers. Yet their struggle to prevent invasion and occupation eventually clipped the shining wings of Iskandar Muda's empire and the previous glory of the Queen Ratu Tadj al Alam's proto-typical enlightened state. Perhaps it was simply too early for notions which might blossom into something resembling democracy, to have much chance in this scenario. The late seventeenth and eighteenth century Acehnese desired different qualities in their rulers, but unlike the populace of modern Indonesia, post-*Reformasi*, the mechanism of multi-party democratic elections did not exist. Disastrous means were used once more to replace rulers and those holding power. Aceh crumbled and Sumatra was carved up between the Dutch and the British. While Islam considered rebellion by the masses a potentially destructive example of the individual exercise of *nushuz* or sovereign will multiplied, regardless of gender, the invaded and occupied Acehnese now channelled their discontent into constant campaigns of rebellion and resistance, led by different chiefs. Many hundreds participated in collective individual acts of disorder and destruction, much of it from below, thus enacting the situation most feared by traditional Islamic Sultanates.

Like democracy and the rule of representative parliaments elected by the people, the pursuit of citizenship for men and women in modernity as defined by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and supported by many emerging nations, was initially regarded as a threat in some Islamic states for this reason (Mernissi, 1993:177). However, this was not so in

Indonesia in the latter stages of Dutch colonial rule (Lindsey, T., 1999). In fact, in revolutionary Indonesia, collective acts of organised rebellion were desired by leaders of the movement for independence, as well as by the broad mass of the people. Ironically, this is a major reason why the seemingly destabilising patterns of resistance in Aceh contributed so much to the struggle for Indonesian independence in 1945. Aceh's guerrillas gave birth to the army of the new Indonesian Republic, yet the dynamic of Aceh's history has made it an uneasy member of the Indonesian nation. The war between GAM (the Free Aceh Movement) and the Indonesian army has dominated many aspects of Acehnese life until now. Will this also change in the face of Aceh's reconstruction after the recent earthquake and tsunami?

Indonesia's experience since *Reformasi* has shown many of its culturally syncretic and social management aspirations to good advantage. In many respects, and despite the civilian organizations which emerged or were strengthened during the *Reformasi* movement, the events of 1998 and the downfall of Suharto still largely conformed to the earlier model of *fitnah* and intervention which deposed the state's leader. This time, however, unarmed students and civilian groups took the place of military troops. President Megawati Sukarnoputri's management of the 2004 party and Presidential elections, in which she was voted out of office, marks a sea-change in Indonesia's political structure, culture and management, since the collapse of the Suharto regime. As with Laksamana Keumalahayati and the Acehnese Queens, it is important that Megawati's presidency existed, even if the nation has voted for a male President once more. Unlike her Acehnese predecessors, Megawati's era has been well documented, as was Gus Dur's before her. The new President, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, has promised to strengthen the administrative institutions of state management, clamp down on corruption and find new solutions to old problems. Once again, Aceh has emerged as the pivotal moral, political and social crucible of Indonesia.

At the beginning of this new Christian, Chinese and Islamic New Year, one can only wish all those engaged in rebuilding their lives, their society and infrastructure the best of good fortune, while recognising that for many hundreds of thousands, the cultural fabric of their lives has changed forever. For that, wisdom and compassion in all its forms must be the response of fortunate humanity to their suffering, for that will be real for many years to come.

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Endnotes

ⁱ Soldiers paid for the first three months of duty from their own pocket, but were provided with weapons by the Sultan. If a campaign lasted longer than three months, the state paid for the rest (Pamenan, I.S., 1959), suggesting that fighting men and women in Aceh were somewhere between a warrior class and modern field soldiers.

ⁱⁱ In *The Hidden Fortress*, Princess Yuki Akizuki spends her childhood hidden in a cave in the forest dressed as boy. She and her elderly uncle protect the family fortune of golden bars secreted within logs of wood, until two deserters and a Ronin all headed towards her now

enemy occupied fiefdom appear. Entrusted to their care, she begins the dangerous journey to reclaim her throne. She must maintain her boyish disguise and refrain from speech, lest her true identity be realised. She passes as the mute water boy of the party of travellers and cares for their horses. Eventually, she is able to win back her palace, her throne and maintain her authority as ruler. She now dresses and speaks as a queen, but draws on all she has learnt from her former apprenticeship as a poor, disadvantaged and distinctly powerless youth.

This paper does not engage with conjecture suggesting that Laksamana Keumalahayati and the Acehese Queens were men in disguise, although many Acehese of the period queried the femininity of the third queen, Inajat Syah Zakiat, whom they refused to believe was the daughter of Queen Nur al Alam Nakiat by her second husband. Over forty when she ascended the throne, Inajat Syah Zakiat had spent many years in the palace army. She was not only skilled as a fighter and manager, but was also a clever linguist, fluent in Portuguese, Dutch, Malay, English and Arabic. The likelihood that Laksamana Keumalahayati was male rather than female has been raised on the basis of studies revealing that the famous fifteenth century Chinese Admiral Zheng He was a eunuch (Wilford, J., 2002) – a somewhat spurious and highly deductive argument. However, Malahayati was a widow when she founded the Inong Bale, precedents for which existed elsewhere in the archipelago. She had already distinguished herself as a soldier in the field before she took to the sea. Local Acehese and Malay sources are very clear regarding both Malahayati's gender and her lineage, although, according to Pamenan (1959), neither seem clear in the case of Inajat Syah Zakiat. However, to query the gender and the sexuality of the women concerned diminishes their achievements by deflecting historical analysis into the realms of conjecture where there are no extant sources available to support these suppositions. I prefer to argue that, for these women, the job was the thing.

ⁱⁱⁱ Snouk Hurgronje (1906:Vol. I:vii-viii) claims the Acehese engaged in piracy and man-hunting, a history which governed their later behaviour towards the many Europeans and Americans seeking pepper trading concessions in Sumatra. The celebrated incident involving Malahayati and Cornelis Houtemans transpired because Houtemans refused the Sultan's demands that he give over his ship and crew to serve the forthcoming Acehese attack on the Portuguese in Malacca. These "acts of violence and treachery" continued into the era of Dutch colonisation when he was writing – traits which he suggests, made the Acehese ungovernable.

^{iv} Similarly, the "Pimpinan kapten Yang Mulia yang gagah berani, Ragamacota who confined the Portuguese to Malacca" referred to by Queen Elizabeth I in her letter delivered by Sir James Lancaster to Sultan Ala al-Din Riayat Syah, may be translated as the Laksamana Radjah Meuk(e)ut(a) / Admiral of the King of the Realm. The Laksamana mentioned by Queen Elizabeth may well have been one preceding Laksamana Keumalahayati, but the fact that the English Queen was aware of Malahayati's distant exploits and status is recorded in English sources of the period (Marsden, W., 1811). The name of Sultan Ala al-Din Riayat Syah is also recorded as Sultan Saidil Mukammil Alauddin Riayat Syah or just Sultan Mukammil. A similar range of variants can be found for all the Sultans and Queens mentioned in this account. For instance, Sultan Iskandar Muda was known by five different names in the course of his life.

^v Snouk Hurgronje makes his bias clear in the Introduction to Volume I of *The Acehese*.

^{vi} Indonesian feminists are united in their hatred of violence: beyond issues related to gender equity and potentially personally problematic for many, given animist belief, cultural practice and the size of the army in Indonesia, women and children non-combatants have also been seen as the perpetual victims of war. Situations of split loyalties apply. The effect of violence on the lives of women and children in Aceh is raised in Aryo Danusiri's documentary *Kameng Gampoeng Nyang Geulawa / Village Goat Takes a Beating* (2001). Yet making compassionate and politically effective inroads into this situation has been notoriously difficult. During *Reformasi*, Chusnul Mar'iyah and the Women's Coalition for Justice and Democracy campaigned among the political parties for "32 per cent affirmative action". They wanted all parties to feminise their candidates one per cent for every year of Suharto's regime (King, 2000). In the end only 38 women managed election to the 500 strong parliament and in

regional elections in Aceh, their campaigns made very little difference (Bianpoen, C., *The Indonesian Observer*, 13/2/2003). In her 28/2/2000 article, Bianpoen also observes that harassment and intimidation was used to hinder many of the women delegates wishing to attend the *Duek Pakat Inong Aceh* conference

^{vii} Snouk Hurgronje (1906:Vol. I: 2) observes “The form of this, the true Aceh, the Acehnese delight to compare to that of a winnowing-basket (*jeu’ee*)..... The debouchement of the Aceh river suggests to their fancy, the somewhat sharply pointed mouth of the winnow, whence all unclean particles adhering to the husked rice are shaken out.”

^{viii} The British and the Dutch were both at war with the Portuguese and the Spanish in Europe and later with each other. Thus what happened in archipelagic South-East Asia was also governed – at a distance and with delay - by events in Europe and the Middle East. Concessions, territories and later colonies changed hands accordingly, so making privateering, slippage and a large measure of disorder a feature of life in the region from the eighteenth century onwards.

^{ix} The harbour of Banda Aceh Darussalam was returned to service comparatively rapidly after the 2004 Tsunami, although the same is not true of Daya or Pedir (Pidie). Kreung, the site of Malahayati’s Women’s Fort, the remnants of the prison settlement of Portuguese captives and her grave, was completely destroyed.

^x Moh. Said (1961), Lombard (1986), Ahmad (n.d.) and Sufi (n.d. and 1995) all discuss these incidents at length, drawing their accounts from earlier Dutch and English sources.

^{xi} When John Davis, then captain of a Dutch ship, arrived in Banda Aceh Darussalam in 1599, Sultan Ala al-Din Riyat Syah repeatedly quizzed him about Queen Elizabeth and English governance (Said, M. 1961:119; 122-125). Davis was dazzled by the court, the generosity of the Sultan who plied him with food, the lady Admiral and the weaponry so openly displayed. Later, Said (1961:161-162) records that Iskandar Muda reputedly informed the British King that he would like an English wife, and the search for a suitable bride began among the families of the governors of the British East India Company. There is no record as to the success or otherwise of any mutual tactic of cementing trading ties through marriage, but considerable accounts of the jesting which followed.

^{xii} Davis and the Frenchman Beaulieu both note that the Dutch also used persons from the Levant as interpreters from Arabic.

^{xiii} Zakary Ahmad (n.d.:68-69) notes that by 1636, Aceh was trading Sumatran products with India, Africa, Egypt, Persia, Turkey, China, Thailand and the Philippines, as well as with the Dutch, the English and the French. Bearing goods from these lands and further afield crowded the port of Banda Aceh, waiting their turn to dock and sell these goods in exchange for permission to buy and load pepper. Thus Iskandar Muda maintained control of trade, for his military might in the Acehnese territories across Sumatra prevented direct sales of pepper and tea to foreign traders. Van Leur (1960:179) observes that the price of incoming merchandise was dropped by almost half. Thus the Acehnese gained the upper hand in the Straits of Malacca, squeezing out the Portuguese who were attempting to maintain Malacca as an entrepot.

^{xiv} The proportion of women to men in the Legislative Council of Aceh Besar under Queen Tadj was twenty-two to seventy-five, according to Carla Bianpoen’s sources (Bianpoen, 13/2/2000).

^{xv} Ironically, in the late C19th., the Dutch built a line of forts along the coastline attempting to concentrate the Acehnese within their winnowing basket. Instead, they only succeeded in galvanising permanent Acehnese opposition against their troops. The Acehnese, reflecting on the strategy pioneered by Queen Tadj al Alam, who had stationed free-flowing battalions of her womens’ army in these places, around the harbours and the palaces to resist invasion, simply continued to harass the immovable Dutch targets, engage in acts of piracy, form

alliances with privateers and amass war-chests which enabled them to maintain their attacks indefinitely (Hurgronje, Snouk C., 1906, Vol. I.:xi).

^{xvi} Captain Light's son's claim to fame was the founding of the city of Adelaide in the Colony of South Australia - in a place which he described in 1836 as "nearby to a mosquito-infested swamp"! Young Colonel William Francis Light clearly preferred a neatly cultivated rural English domicile, but was compelled to attempt imposing its orderly patterns on the unkempt scrubland, small watercourses and suspicious native inhabitants of his unwelcome Antipodean assignment. Whatever we might now think about the bias of such perspectives, these comments are worth noting. Pamenan (1959:94) reminds us that when faced with the aggressive style of Queen Inajat Syah Zakiat addin Syah, representatives of the British East India Company decided that Bengkulu might be a more obliging place in which to establish a colony, much to the delight of the Dutch, who then grabbed a large and lucrative chunk of Aceh's pepper trade.

^{xvii} In January 2005, the Japanese helicopters for the post-earthquake and tsunami relief effort arrived by sea wrapped in an external white cladding which unzipped and was re-assembled to form the tents of medical field hospitals – a symbolic but belated sign of the truce preceding Japanese capitulation in the former Netherlands East Indies at the end of WW II (TVRI *Berita Pagi* report). This did not happen ceremonially in Aceh: the formal surrender of the Japanese took place in Bali. The coverings also emphasised the non-military nature of their contribution.

^{xviii} Cut Nyak Din and Cut Meutia both fought with their husbands against the colonial Dutch whose rule they refused to accept. In this respect, they resembled both Srikandi and the women soldiers of the mid sixteenth century who fought against the Portuguese in the army of the Acehnese Sultans. Cut Nyak Din was of noble birth on her mother's side. She was captured in 1905 and eventually removed to a prison in Java, where she died, still refusing to acknowledge the authority of her oppressors. Twice widowed in the fight against the Dutch, Cut Meutia died in a hail of bullets, together with her colleagues and the Ulama Teuku Cik Paya Bakong in 1910 (Teuku Ainal, H. & Aly, M., n.d.:297-305).

^{xix} In relation to Islam and the exercise of their sexuality within marriage, many Indonesian women have complained that submission to their husband's will has been exacted through unreasonable sexual demands. Beyond an enforcement of the husband's "ownership" of their person in marriage, this behaviour has been interpreted as a form of punishment for women's own and often highly justifiable exercise of *nushuz* (Blackburn, 2001).

^{xx} Abdurrahman Wahid and Nurcholis Madjid argued that the disputed *hadits* were based on interpretations of the Prophet's teachings, and were not the law revealed by Allah at the time of the Prophet (Istiadah, 1995). Thus they are interpretatively (culturally) based. To remain culturally relevant, *Syariah* must be constantly examined (Quodir, 2001).

^{xxi} Muhammadiyah was founded in 1912. Aisyah's students were drawn from the petit bourgeoisie rather than those of the upper classes who attended the Kartini schools. Students were required to wear a veil covering their heads and necks. Being unusual in Indonesia, veil wearing was regarded as contrary to the otherwise progressive aims of the movement (Vrede-de Stuers, 1960:66). By 1990 Muhammadiyah had 33 elementary and 22 secondary schools in Yogyakarta alone (Heryanto, A., 1993:41).

^{xxii} Personal communication, Firdaus, Adelaide, 1992. When asked about her views on veil wearing as a schoolgirl, the cosmopolitan academic replied that it confirmed her religious and philosophical identity and gave her confidence. As an adult, she rarely wears a veil publicly.

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I read the Malay Annals many years ago and so I do not cite it as a source, even after a brief refresher in Jakarta. Of the Dutch authors, I have read only Snouk Hurgronje in translation, and of the British, perused Marsden, Danvers and several other histories for background regarding the relationships between the English, the Dutch and the kingdoms of South and South-East Asia across the period of time covered here. My interest lay in finding eyewitness accounts of those seafarers and traders who encountered Malahayati and the Acehnese Queens since I was possessed with the idea of making a film about the gallant lady admiral. As most of these accounts are provided in the books I accessed through the National Library, Jakarta, it is sufficient to list these sources and those from Murdoch University in the bibliography. I also confess that I have since lost some of my background sources.

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