

Abstract title: ‘The Girl Child of Today is The Woman of Tomorrow’ – Fantasizing the Adolescent Girl as the Future Hope in Post-Tsunami Reconstruction Efforts in Aceh, Indonesia¹

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This paper draws from my PhD research on gender mainstreaming advocacy in the post-tsunami context in Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam and focuses on the constructs of adolescent girl in advocacy on gender equality. In this paper I will introduce Ida, a 15 year old Acehnese girl, one of the main characters of the Oxfam International’s mini radio drama ‘Women Can It Too!’ that was broadcast in local radio stations in the tsunami-hit coastal areas in Aceh in 2006 and 2007.

Various feminist queer scholars have illustrated an interface between adolescence and youth, with the wider sexed, gendered and sexualized nation-building narratives of the state. For example, Laurent Berlant (1995; 1997) has analyzed the state fetish on future orientation and illustrated how girl child stands as a “condensation of many citizenship fantasies” (Berlant 1995, 380; 1997, 58). Thus, it is not surprising, that the radio drama through its plot repeats the statement of the Beijing Platform for Action, the final document of the fourth UN World Conference in Women 1995: ‘the girl child of today is the woman of tomorrow’. What kinds of images of tomorrow does the radio drama construct as the idealized picture for Acehnese adolescent girls? How do these images intersect with other intersecting social hierarchies?

Drawing from the works of Judith Butler (1993; 1999 [1990]; 2004), and Samuel A. Chambers and Terrell Carver’s work (2008) and postcolonial feminist and recent queer critiques this paper offers an analytical framework that focuses on ‘intersectional norms’ rather than heteronormativity, constructs of sex, gender and sexuality.

I suggest that normativity could be thought of as a continuous negotiation of intersecting norms that take place in various localities and temporalities. Emily Grabham (2009) refers to intersectionality, experience of social inequalities, as an expression of trauma, physicality of power relations that is intensely embodied on an individual level as emotions, physical encounters and intensifications of feelings (Grabham 2009, 196, 198). Grabham, reading Sara Ahmed’s work on emotions, argues that “paying attention to the impressions that subjects make on one another can

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allow for a political reading of encounters that go beyond the individual subject and beyond the law's construction of individuals through disciplinary identities" (Grabham 2009, 198).

By focusing solely on gender inequalities (promotion of equality between men and women), the radio drama and the posters normalize heteronormativity and other social hierarchies such as socio-economic status, urban and modern lifestyle, idealized images of time and space for adolescent girls, aligning with wider neoliberal developmental discourse of "working hard and reaching progress". I connect this discourse with debates on Islam and modernity, women's rights and political economy, and the question of the 'phenomenology of whiteness' (Ahmed 2007c).

Due to sensitive nature of certain arguments in this paper, the full version is made available upon an emailed request to kmj06@aber.ac.uk.