

Cover Page



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Women in Conflict Areas: Voicing Victims and Reality

Voice matters precisely because suffering remains, to some degree, inaccessible. Voice is what gets silenced, repressed, pre-empted, denied, [...] Indeed, voice ranks among the most precious human endowment that suffering normally deprives us of, removing far more than a hope that others will understand or assist us. Silence and the loss of voice may eventually constitute or represent for some who suffer a complete shattering of the self (Morris 1996: 29).

Two sisters who are victims of rapes that occurred during a decade-long implementation of a Military Operation Zone (*Daerah Operasi Militer*, DOM) from 1989-1999 in Aceh¹ appear at the beginning of a 33-minute video film released on video compact disc (VCD), entitled *Perempuan di Wilayah Konflik* (Women in Conflict Areas) that was produced by Yayasan Jurnal Perempuan (YJP, 2002). The presenter, a well-known veteran actress and a lecturer at the Institut Kesenian Jakarta (Jakarta Arts Institute, IKJ), opens the film with a short introduction about the situation in Aceh, with an emphasis on the survivors' lives in the refugee camps following the end of the implementation of DOM.

Following the closing remarks of the introduction, which raise a question regarding the future of Acehnese women, the film shows the two sisters sitting on a veranda, facing the unseen interviewer and cameraperson. Below them appears the caption, "*korban perkosaan Lhokseumawe*" (victims of the

¹ There are at least four variations of the spelling of the name of this province. I use the one popularly used in contemporary Indonesian texts, that is, Aceh. The other three names are Acheh (used by the Free Acheh Movement, GAM), Ache, and Atjeh. See Amir 2002. Aceh was renamed Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam (NAD), which means "Aceh as a welfare nation", on 17 August 2001 by the then President Megawati Sukarnoputri. In May 2009, the governor of Aceh, Irwandi Yusuf, declared a return to the name of Aceh. In the thesis, I will refer to NAD and Aceh interchangeably.

Lhokseumawe rapes).² Neither of the sisters says much, they do not even mention the word ‘rape’. One of the sisters, Halimah, explains that the rapist just came into the room and without saying anything, laid his weapon at her side. Her sister, Sawiyah, recalls a similar silence, as she hardly heard the man who raped her say anything, except for his questioning whether she was a member of *Gerakan Aceh Merdeka* (GAM, Free Aceh Movement): “*Kamu GAM ya?*” (You’re a member of GAM, aren’t you?), to which she responded, “No, I’m not GAM, I’m a woman”. While she reflects on this ‘silly’ question with a bashful smile, she turns her head away from the camera and falls silent. The moments of silence when they seem to be at a loss of how to express their unspeakable pain are as important as visualisations as are the acts of speaking or crying as presented in this film. Next, the father of the two women recounts, “*Anak itu diperkosa, dua-dua. [...] Ndak berani kami lapor*” (They were raped, both of them. [...] We didn’t dare to report it). These scenes in the film highlight at least three associations of the victimisation of women during the military conflict in Aceh that may be applicable to other regions as well. First, they involve silence; secondly, weapons are present or there is military presence; and thirdly, due to their sex and gender categories, women are positioned as victims.

Another documentary film that presents female victims of violence in conflict areas, also in Aceh, is *Bade Tan Reuda* (Aceh’s Never-ending Tragedy). Made in 2003, it is a 26-minute documentary film produced by Offstream, a production house based in Jakarta. In comparison to the previously discussed video, *Bade Tan Reuda* depicts and emphasises women’s anger and strength. The film opens with a caption, “*Suatu hari di tahun 2001*” (One day in 2001), with the sound of the striking of typewriter keys superimposed over the mellow tones of a violin in the background. Then a black-and-white close-up of a woman’s mouth fills the screen.³ Sobbing, the woman begs for information about the government’s involvement in her husband’s death. She speaks in Acehnese and an English translation is presented at the bottom of the screen.⁴

² In the radio programme (RJP), edition 144 on *Perempuan Aceh di Wilayah Konflik* (broadcast in May 2002), it was mentioned that, in fact, there were three sisters raped, but the youngest, Lelawati, died during childbirth. The story about these rapes was placed almost at the end of the radio programme.

³ Per Perrson argues that close-ups should be analysed more for their functional uses, rather than their objective definitions. The objective definition, which includes “size enlargement of objects depicted, close distance between camera and objects and a specific type of framing”, not only excludes the spectators, but is difficult to define. Meanwhile, the functional definition of close-ups “works within the text and in interaction with the spectators”. In addition to the general argument that close-ups function to direct attention, Perrson finds that it also has two other functions, i.e., “threat and intimacy”. See Perrson 1998.

⁴ The English translations of the texts that appear on the screen and most of the utterances by the people in this film appear at the bottom of the screen. Throughout the chapter I will note whether the English translations of the quotes are taken from the video or are mine.

Then there is a pause. A line appears on the screen: “*Kamera merekam ungkapan seorang perempuan Aceh*” (Camera records the statement of an Acehese woman).⁵ The sound of a typewriter suggests that this is a documentary. The picture returns to the close-up of the woman’s mouth again. However, this time, her voice has changed. She has stopped crying; she resolutely controls her voice. Furiously, she curses her husband’s murderer and swears: “If I knew who killed my husband, I’d drink their blood”. The picture of the woman’s face is blurred and is shown constantly moving from her mouth to her eyes and back to her mouth again. Despite the deliberately unclear moving images, the audience can see that she is young, veiled and has a child on her lap. Then the scene switches to a middle-aged woman who has survived the conflict and is working on a rubber plantation tapping sap from rubber trees. When speaking about her daily activities her expression is flat and lacks any strong emotion. The story in this film is presented chronologically in relation to the implementation of the Military Emergency Operation in May 2003.⁶ Scenes of the Indonesian armed troops ready to board a ship at Tanjung Priok port in Jakarta, the government press release by then Coordinating Minister for Political and Security Affairs Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, who is now the President of Indonesia, and troops landing in Aceh alternate with the images of village women crying over their dead husbands.⁷ The film ends with the depiction of one of these women covering her face with her shawl and lamenting, “Don’t ask anymore. I’m not strong enough to tell you anymore.”⁸

⁵ The translation provided in the VCD is, “The camera bears witness to the women of Aceh”.

⁶ The Military Emergency Operation was declared in Presidential Decree No 28 (2003) and was initially planned to last for six consecutive months.

⁷ In Pidie, North Aceh, there are several *kampung janda*, villages of widows, where the men of the village were killed by the army or fled to Malaysia. The army’s exorbitant violence has been captured in stories of intimidation and sexual assault against these women in “*Resistensi Perempuan Aceh*”, the cover story of *D&R* news magazine 1998(a).

⁸ The film *Bade tan Reuda* won the award for Best Short Documentary in the Jakarta International Film Festival (JIFFEST) 2003. The first JIFFEST was held in 1999, immediately after the fall of the New Order. Since then it has been celebrated as a new, more prestigious film festival than its predecessor, *Festival Film Indonesia* (FFI, Indonesian Film Festival), a state-sponsored film festival (1955-1992). In 1992, when the Indonesian film industry collapsed, FFI was discontinued. In 1999, with the opening of the public sphere and media deregulation, two female film devotees, Shanty Harmayn and Natacha Devillers, inspired by other international film festivals in other Asian countries, such as the Singapore International Film Festival, Korea’s Pusan International Film Festival, the Bangkok International Film Festival, and the Philippines’ Cinemanila, created the first JIFFEST (culled from the website of JIFFEST <http://www.jiffest.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=jiffest.about&ID=15&ver=indonesia>, accessed 26 January 2006). Together with the booming of new film production in Indonesia at the turn of the 21st century, JIFFEST’s supremacy as the barometer of Indonesian film quality has also been boosted. When discussing the film *Perempuan di Wilayah Konflik*, Gadis Arivia revealed that it is an acknowledgement and achievement for a film, especially one that was locally produced, to be screened in this festival. Arivia proudly told me that *Perempuan di Wilayah Konflik* was screened at the JIFFEST 2002. In 2004, when the Indonesian film industry had regained its full capacity, the FFI was held again after a 12-year hiatus. The resurgence of the Indonesia’s film industry in the late

This chapter focuses on the representations of women in conflict areas by looking closely at these two films—*Perempuan di Wilayah Konflik* and *Bade Tan Reuda*. This chapter discusses further the aspects of ‘voicing’ women’s experiences in violent conflicts that are deemed significant by the films’ producers.⁹ Both films draw attention to the violent conflict in Aceh via images of women as the main victims.

The following sections read the two films in more detail not only by analysing their contents, but also by taking into consideration the contexts in which they were produced and situated. As a reminder, in Chapter Two, I discussed the situation following the resignation of then President Suharto in May 1998, when many cases of state violence against women were simultaneously disclosed and highlighted in respect to general issues of torture and repression. The discussion also calls attention to the public discourse around the issue of alleged sexual violence by members of the armed forces against local women in some areas. In such a broad context, women are generally positioned as the main victims—whether they are the direct or indirect targets of the violent acts—and in need of a venue to voice their suffering. Along with the proliferation of media production, an escalation of a spirit of freedom and public denunciation against the New Order regime, and a nascent global network among human rights groups (see also Chapter Three), the prominence of women as victims of state repression, both figuratively and literally, gains authorisation. Within this frame of contextual analysis, the discussion of the political economy of the films’ producers becomes relevant. The question of the effects these films have on the viewers is beyond the scope of this chapter.

Perempuan di Wilayah Konflik: a Woman’s Film

The documentary is part of YJP’s project, *Perempuan di Wilayah Konflik*, which resulted in four media productions: one issue of the journal, *Jurnal Perempuan*, three radio programmes, a video film released on VCD, and a national seminar. The variety of product formats in this project fits with the organisation’s marketing strategy in which each of the media presentations has a different

1990s has attracted many scholars, including Katinka van Heeren, a Dutch media scholar who focuses on films produced in the reformasi era, see van Heeren 2009.

⁹ As revealed in my interviews with Gadis Arivia, the director of YJP, and others, such as the foundation’s journalists, as well as managers involved in the making of the film, *Perempuan di Wilayah Konflik*, during the period of September–November 2002. I also interviewed Lexy Junior Rambadetta, the art director of the film *Bade Tan Reuda* and Hening Tyas Sutji (Uci), representative of TIFA, the funding organisation that produced the film during the period between October 2003–January 2004.

target audience and thus requires different appropriation of images, language, and narratives (see Chapter Three). This project was supported by various funding institutions, such as, the Ford Foundation, USAID/OTI (United States Agency for International Development/Office of Transition Initiatives), UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund), and PJTV (Centre for Television Journalists Training – Faculty of Social and Political Science, University of Indonesia). A number of newspapers and magazines also assisted the organisation with the national seminar.

Video recording as a medium of presentation that combines both visual and audio aspects is 'new' to YJP.¹⁰ The print journal, *Jurnal Perempuan* (JP) was their first focus and, with the radio programmes that were added later, remains the main media production of YJP.¹¹

Although images of men and children are occasionally shown, this video focuses conspicuously on images of women as victims. This is understandable, since this film was made by a women's organisation whose leaning is clearly towards women's interests. This film signifies the efforts to represent and 'voice' women's concerns, using women's reasoning, language and perspective. Hence, this focus on the victims characterises the organisation's presentation. In response to the question of why this film did not present in-depth interviews with, for example, military personnel, as it did with the victims, and thus may be deemed biased, Gadis Arivia, the founder and then executive director of YJP, replied that indeed for YJP, the stories of the victims were more compelling.¹² However, bear in mind that YJP consists of, and is established by, people who are profoundly aware of the political dimensions of the conflict, yet are situated at a distance from it. Hence, one might question how the background of YJP as a rather highbrow, highly political women's organisation based at a distance from the conflict areas shapes the stories about violence against women in the concerned areas.

I learned about YJP's *Perempuan di Wilayah Konflik* project and video film during my first period of fieldwork in Jakarta in September 2002-January 2003.¹³ The film had just been launched, so everybody in the organisation was eager to discuss it. The young journalists enthusiastically shared their 'adventures' during the shooting period with me. They talked about the

¹⁰ Gadis Arivia's presentation during the discussion, *Perempuan Indonesia Membuat Film*, 19 October 2003.

¹¹ Interview with Adriana Venny, 20 September 2003.

¹² "Perempuan Indonesia Membuat Film", 19 October 2003.

¹³ As with other organisations, my observations at YJP began with a formal request stating the aims and background of my research and a specified schedule. It was accompanied with a formal recommendation letter from my supervisor. However, in practise, the schedule was flexible and most of the observations and interviews were conducted in an informal manner.

experiences of going to places they had never been to before, meeting with the 'real' people in the 'real' places, and also feeling the anxiety of being in places that were in a state of conflict.¹⁴ Their term 'real' people meant all the people appearing in the film, including the two sisters who were rape victims and their father, the refugees in the camps, the widow of the assassinated Papuan leader Theys Eluay, the newly-appointed governor Abdullah Puteh, the spokesperson of GAM, Teguh Kamaruzzaman, and Lieutenant Colonel Firdaus Komarno, the head of the Military Zone Command Iskandar Muda. They seemed surprised that they had actually met with those high-profile figures that hold key roles in the conflict areas. Also, coming from a place which is quite safe and peaceful, and going to places where conflicts had just, or were not yet, resolved, these assignments were meaningful, adventurous experiences for these young journalists. It occurred to me that the experience of being involved in the making of the film was more important for them than the film as the end product itself.¹⁵

The role of experienced media practitioners, such as the cameraperson Angela Nicoara, in this VCD production cannot be overlooked.¹⁶ The YJP journalists admitted that Nicoara's experience as a hard-news journalist helped to shape the final presentation of the video.¹⁷

The film, if borrowing Bill Nichols' phases of documentaries, uses the latest method in documentary filmmaking that combines "observational passages with interviews, the voice-over of the film maker with intertitles" (2005: 18). This method, adds Nichols, says it all, that "documentaries always were forms

¹⁴ When I contacted one of the YJP journalists who participated in the making of this film, he assured me that all people portrayed in the film were 'real people' (*pelaku sebenarnya*). E-mail correspondence with Ung Wijaksana (5 September 2002).

¹⁵ Photographic documentation taken during the process of the filming is included in the special issue of *Jurnal Perempuan* themed "*Perempuan di Wilayah Konflik*". These include, for example, two pages of photos taken when the journalist Budie Santi interviewed Yanneke Theys Eluay; Adriana Venny recorded the testimony of a mother whose son witnessed the killing of his father; Ung Wijksono being filmed by the camerawoman Angela Nicoara in front of a mass grave in Poso; and Andith Wisnu and the camerawoman, wearing *kerudung*, interviewed and recorded a schoolgirl in a class in Banda Aceh. Borrowing Jay Ruby's account, sharing with the readers their precious experiences parallels reflexivity. See Ruby 2005.

¹⁶ Angela Nicoara is known as a reporter, camerawoman, editor, director, and trainer in conflict and post-conflict areas. By the time this film was made she had joined Internews Indonesia. Since 2003, she has served as Country Director for Internews in Rwanda and Tanzania. She has produced numerous films about justice and reconciliation that have been screened in local communities, prisons, and at the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR). Raised in Romania, Nicoara was trained as an engineer and helped set up one of Romania's first 'free radio' newsrooms. Visit http://www.internews.org/news/2003/20030429_congo.html (Viewing date 30-01-2006).

¹⁷ Although to some extent this represents a disagreement with YJP's position as a women's organisation that has a clear leaning towards women's interests, which is sometimes perceived as less objective when viewed from hard-news journalistic account. Discussion with YJP journalists M.B. (Ung) Wijaksana, Budi Santi, and Andith Wisnu, 5 September 2002 at YJP's office.

of re-presentation, never clear windows onto ‘reality’; the filmmaker was always participant-witness and an active fabricator of meaning, a producer of cinematic discourse rather than a neutral or all-knowing reporter of the way things truly are” (ibid.).¹⁸ However, in practise, reporters may find that their experiences in getting to locations, meeting with the ‘real people’, and seeing the ‘real situations’, enable them to get closer to reality and may help them to understand not only the reality of the situation, but how to present it. Gadis Arivia considered herself and the team lucky to be able to approach, interview, and present those profiles on screen. Arivia situates the conflict and its representations into a clear gender-based stand, in which it would be more appropriate for a story about women to be documented by women, using a woman’s perspective. She explains:

Our story is specifically about women, right? And [in] *Perempuan di Wilayah Konflik*, there were four women involved in Aceh and Papua. Uung, a male journalist, was in Poso, so it was easier to take the *angle* [original], and it was easier for the victims to be open with us, talking about violence, harassments.¹⁹

Arivia found the gender bias of the military personnel who granted the permission for the interview to be fortunate, because they thought that “the interview was only about the kitchen”, meaning that it would be harmless.²⁰ For Arivia, their success in encouraging the women to speak—not only the two rape victims, but also the others who appeared in this film, as well as their women sources in general—hinged on their approach as women. She also revealed that to some extent the language, techniques, and even technology, should be associated with specifically gendered ‘female’ characteristic traits. With regards to the appropriation of cameras and other devices to women, Arivia explained that they had to first introduce and assure the women that they too could use these high-tech gadgets. She found that small cameras served better than the big, complicated ones so they were less intimidating to the interviewed women as they spoke about the violence that they had endured.²¹

During the interviews with female victims, Arivia found that often men answered for the women. Here, the issue of voice reflects the inequality of power; who has the authority to speak? Arivia’s assertion that women have so

¹⁸ The earlier three phases of documentaries are: commentary, *cinéma vérité* (footage-like recording), and interview (Nichol 2005).

¹⁹ Interview with Gadis Arivia, 6 November 2002.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

far been 'muted', as the husband or father always speaks up to represent her voice and thus the women need a space and language of their own, is in line with the radical feminist linguistic theorists' argument that relies on the 'dominant and muted' dichotomy theory. This theory is based on the premise proposed by Edwin and Shirley Ardener, two British social anthropologists, who find that,

While every group in a society will generate its own ideas about reality, not every group has equal access to the 'mode of specification' – crudely, the linguistic system through which realities are publicly articulated. This is controlled by the dominant group. Relatively less powerful groups are 'muted': their reality does not get represented (Cameron 1992: 140-141).

In this view, women are positioned as the 'muted group', while men are the 'dominant' group. As such, women, though having different experiences than men, are forced to 'encode' their experiences in men's language/reality, or as in the example above, men do it for them.

Arivia's effort to create an alternative space for women to voice their experiences adopted approaches and means considered most appropriate for the women themselves. As such, the question as to whether or not she and her project achieved their aim perhaps matters less than an acknowledgement that such an effort was undertaken.

Short Sketch of the Film

The video film (VCD) features not only the story about the rapes of the two sisters in Aceh, as presented in the beginning of this chapter, but also shows images of many other women, as well as men and children, who are presented as victims in two other conflict areas, i.e., the province of Papua and the region of Poso in Central Sulawesi. As such, this VCD is filled not only with the faces of rape victims and mothers who mourn for members of their families, but also with images of an old Papuan woman whose fingers were cut-off as an expression of mourning, a woman with a plastered cheek who is a victim of domestic violence, and a traumatised woman who, while crying and constantly rubbing her eyes, tells about how she had to survive without food on the sea for two days and nights near Poso.



Figure 5.1: The jacket of the VCD, *Perempuan di Wilayah Konflik*

The jacket of the VCD (Figure 5.1), as well as the cover of *JP*, issue 24, and the folder distributed during the seminar, shows a portrait of an elderly Acehnese woman, wearing a batik head-cover, standing behind barbed wires, and looking into the distance with her watery eyes. Above her right shoulder, there is an image, more a shadow, of a bird in flight.²² The film opens with the image of the YJP's logo. Then there is a series of images of women in various locations engaged in different activities. The title, *Perempuan di Wilayah Konflik*, appears with an image of a veiled woman with a child in the background. Then the presenter, Ninik L. Karim, appears wearing a black blouse with a matching batik scarf. The traditional batik scarf confirms the unofficial dress code of feminist activists.²³ The journalistic nature of the video, as well as its sense of professionalism, is accentuated by the background setting of an editing room with a number of television screens and other audio-visual devices. Her introduction focuses on the conditions of survivors in refugee camps and the continuing violent conflict.

²² These symbols—the barbed wire and flying bird—are adaptations of Amnesty International's symbols of conflict and war. The journalist explained that the barbed wire signifies a state of conflict and the flying bird, freedom. Discussion with Uung Wijaksana (5 September 2002).

²³ Some find that this dress code is unfashionable and may discourage prospective feminist sympathisers, especially young people. *The Jakarta Post* newspaper, for example has published "tips for women activists", that questions, among other things, "What is it with the batik scarves, purple scarves and ethnic accessories? While there is nothing harmful about these (except they are a bit passé), this 'activist style' makes some women reluctant to don such accessories, for fear that they will look like ... well, a hardened activist. Plus, they are unappealing to teenagers." (*Jakarta Post* 2005: 3).

The section on Aceh appears in the beginning of the film and is also the longest of the three segments. It covers many aspects of the impact of the armed conflict between the secessionist (GAM) movement and the Indonesian army (TNI). It is said that tens of thousands of lives, “*umumnya penduduk sipil laki-laki*”, generally male civilians, have been lost due to this conflict. Other consequences of the long conflict include rapes of local women by military officers, problems in refugee camps, and the high numbers of students dropping out of school. Images of rape victims and women, young and old, grieving for their parents, husbands, or children are abundant. It is sometimes not clear whether a woman who is crying over the death of her children has also lost her husband. Laments are saturated with loss—of family members, property, or even cattle—and helplessness. Loss and helplessness are generic determinants of the notion of victimhood.

This first section ends with a conclusion by journalist Andith Wisnu, who reports from the front of the National Monument (*Monumen Nasional*, Monas), in Jakarta. She proposes that the fate of the Acehnese people depends on the political and military leaders, not only in Aceh, but also in Sweden where the negotiations were held, Geneva where the Indonesian government and GAM finally signed a peace agreement in December 2002, and, of course, Jakarta. This closure offers an analogy, which is quite imperative precisely because of the choice of the setting, to the fact that the situation of the conflict in Aceh is contingent upon the roles of those who remain outside the province, and that the producer of this film is based in Jakarta, also outside the province.

The lack of a narrative about the rapes in the Aceh story is overshadowed by the horrific description by a mother in a refugee camp in Aceh who tells of the beheading of her child. The constant interplay between laments of losing one’s child or husband on the one hand, and stark narration of the murders on the other, may resemble other similar phenomena of media productions in conflict areas where “sentiment and violence, far from separate, collapse melodramatically into each other” (Spyer 2004(b): 22). The scenes that follow also focus on the images of women and, to some degree children, as the main victims of the violent conflicts, not only in Aceh, but also in two other areas featured in the VCD, i.e., Papua and Poso. Men remain in the background.

In the section about Papua, the issue of the military occupation is overshadowed by other issues, such as those related to traditional practices, maternal health, and the alarming spread of HIV/AIDS. It is only in the last section, which is about Yaneke Theys Eluay, the widow of the slain Papuan leader, Theys Eluay, that a connection that links the local problems with the larger political conflict allegedly provoked by the state becomes clearer. The death of Eluay is mentioned at the beginning of Karim’s introduction to this

section, which also focuses on the government's mishandling of the overall situation by sending too many troops to the province, but investing too little financially.

However, a different tone marks the presentation following this introduction. Arivia follows with a discussion about women in Papua that emphasises the traditional preference of Papuan women to enjoy dancing and how men control the women. The video then shows a group of women wearing a combination of modern and traditional Papuan attire, dancing the welcoming dance. Another scene shows Arivia, wearing a shirt, pants and sport shoes, and holding a microphone amongst bare-chested women and children carrying baskets strapped to their heads.

These scenes emphasise the nostalgic-romantic images that highlight the distance between 'traditional' Papua and 'modern' Jakarta. They are followed by depictions of women as victims of polygamy, domestic violence, child marriage, prostitution, poor maternal health, and traditional mourning practices, which require widows to chop off their fingers. All of these conditions are products of the dominant *budaya laki-laki* (men's culture). These problems are mentioned in the narration in relation to the state's negligence that has failed to improve the conditions of the Papuan people. The penultimate scene presents Yaneke Theys Eluay, who strongly condemns the killing of her husband, Theys Eluay, a local political leader. She calls the killing a 'political assassination' and pleads for Megawati Sukarnoputri, the Indonesian president at the time, to investigate and solve the case. If it cannot be solved in Indonesia, the case will be taken to an international forum. Yaneke does not position herself as a victim, but as a fighter. Arivia then closes this section by suggesting that the government pay more attention to the people of Papua and she encourages the Papuan people to free themselves from the shackles of detrimental cultural traditions.

The last section of the film is about Poso, the provincial capital of Central Sulawesi. This section focuses more on the situation in the refugee camps that house thousands of 'internally displaced persons' (IDP), following the ethnic and religious conflicts that began to hit the region in 1998.²⁴ Most of the filming shows the situation in the refugee camps. Karim's introduction emphasises the devastating impact of these conflicts, which are subsequently discussed by the

²⁴ The conflict was triggered by an attack on a Muslim man by a drunken Christian man on 24 December 1998. It soon developed into mass conflict that divided Poso into two warring parties based on religions, i.e., Islam and Christianity. Considering the scale of the conflict and its long duration, it is apparent that there were more complex reasons, namely, economic and political competition, behind the friction that was increasingly polarized by religion. For further discussion, see among others: Aragon 2002 and Ussem 2008.

journalist, Ung Wijaksana, who reports that these refugees depended on aid from the government, international donors and local volunteers, all of which were decreasing at the time.

There follows a series of interviews with people living in the refugee camps, who are identified as *pengungsi* (refugee), *koordinator pengungsi* (refugee coordinator), *pengungsi yang telah kembali* (returning refugee), etc. This underscores that the theme of this section is about life in the refugee camps in Poso, which is a relatively new kind of reality for most Indonesians.²⁵ Under the New Order, 'refugees' referred only to those who sought refuge after natural disasters, not political conflicts. By proposing that alcoholism was the main reason for the conflict, the Regent of Poso revealed an inability or unwillingness to understand the conflict in depth. This section ends with Wijaksana proposing that a better future for Poso depends on the new generation born from women who are free from rape and torture, an important point that was not explicitly touched upon in the presentation.

In general, the video presents the conflicts in Aceh, Papua, and Poso as having caused various forms of catastrophes for most of the local women and men. Faces of victims are the focus of this VCD.²⁶ However, women, together with children, represent the main victims. The position of women as the primary victims in the concerned conflict areas reveals the important element of the video and the highly saturated political significance of women's victimisation. Since this video is produced by a women's organisation with a specific interest in mind, that is, to create a media campaign protesting violence against women, it is understandable that women and their problems are emphasised. Meanwhile, as mentioned previously, in response to the revelation of many cases of state violence against women in conflict areas, bringing forward the female victims has indisputable political bearing and consequence. In this light, presenting the Acehese widows whose husbands were killed during the conflict, for example, can be seen as an indirect condemnation of the state's heavy-handed treatment of the separatist group in the province. This might also be true with the rendering of Yaneke Theys Eluay as a manifest symbol of state repression in Papua, and the women refugees in

²⁵ For a study of refugees and IDPs in the conflicts that occurred across Indonesia in the post-Suharto era, see Hedman (ed.) 2008.

²⁶ Referring to the circulation of the VCD that presents the perspectives of the 'victims' during the conflict in Ambon, Patricia Spyer finds that the media often "provide little perspective on events and often make no pretension to having a narrative, besides, that is, the insistent, repetitive narrative of victimization resurrected on and out of body parts". See Spyer 2002(a). While the circulating videos, pamphlets, and other media in Ambon during the conflict fatally erased narration and reason of the conflict, and instead presented hackneyed graphics of dismantled bodies, the *Perempuan di Wilayah Konflik* VCD focuses more on the faces of victims and presents more narration.

Poso as victims of the state's harsh responses towards the ethno-religious conflict in the region. While other parts of this VCD are worth analysing, I will focus here on the Aceh section, and specifically on the depiction of the rape victims.

Violence against Women in Aceh

The conflict in Aceh has a long history. Resentment against the central government was driven by the reaction to the New Order state's repressive practices in forcing its aspirations onto the region through development projects.²⁷ To accomplish its development targets for the nation, the central government usurped large portions of Aceh's natural reserves and left little for the province. This unjust treatment sparked an 'anti-Jakarta' sentiment amongst the Acehnese. In this light, the emergence of a secessionist movement can be seen as a reaction against the central government's attempts to impose its power on the province. The conflict between the Free Atjeh Movement (GAM) and the Indonesian government began in the 1970s. The initial GAM uprising was easily repressed by the Indonesian army (TNI). Following the second wave of GAM movements in the late 1980s, the Indonesian army responded with a heavy-handed reaction by sending troops to implement the Military Operation Zone (DOM) to repress the secessionist group. During the 10-year implementation of DOM (1989-1998), thousands of lives were lost, tens of thousands of people were displaced, and hundreds of women were raped or sexually assaulted. With the collapse of the New Order government in 1998, the military operation was suspended. In 2003, a peace agreement between the Indonesian government and GAM was signed. However, this peace agreement was tainted by recurring GAM insurgencies to which the Indonesian government under then President Megawati Sukarnoputri reacted harshly. Troops were sent back to Aceh in mid-2003 as a 'security operation' with a harsh agenda to 'crush GAM'. After a devastating earthquake and tsunami hit Aceh in December 2004 and took the lives of over 100,000 people, a new phase of peace negotiations commenced under the Helsinki Memorandum of Understanding. GAM agreed to surrender their weapons and participate in a local election.

Thousands of women and men were killed, tortured or detained by security forces during the 28-year armed conflict. Women survivors were stranded by their male relatives—fathers, husbands, or brothers—because of death or escape, and the women were forced to bear heavy economic burdens. It was

²⁷ Thorough analysis of how the armed conflict in Aceh began, continued, and eventually ended is beyond the scope of this chapter. For more description and analysis, see, for example (to mention only two), Aspinall and Crouch 2003, and Aspinall 2009.

reported that there had been “a long-established pattern of rape and other crimes of sexual violence against women by the security forces in the villages of the region”.²⁸ Many women were detained and imprisoned based on accusations that they were members of GAM or had provided the insurgents with logistical support (Amnesty International 2004).

The issues of rapes of Acehnese women by the TNI soldiers during the implementation of DOM became important in the political struggle for human rights activists in Aceh, as well as in Jakarta and other cities where such heavy-handed military operations were conducted. Cases of violence against women still persist even after the ending of DOM. During the implementation of the security operation commencing in May 2003, various media presentations reported numerous allegations of sexual violence against women by the security forces.²⁹ There have been different reactions to the cases of rapes during those two periods of military control. While the allegations of sexual crimes during DOM were rarely brought to trial, a number of cases that occurred during the later security operation have been brought to military tribunals.³⁰ Few of these allegations of sexual violence have been investigated. Amnesty International notes that “following prosecutions before military tribunals, the longest sentence handed down so far has been three and a half years for rape”.³¹

There is no doubt that a clear political agenda lies behind the designation of women as the main protagonists in these films. Since the resignation of former president Suharto and, thus, the end of the New Order regime, many cases of state violence against women in the military-controlled regions have begun to be revealed. The uncovering of these cases of violence against women in the conflict areas, together with those of the May 1998 rapes (see Chapters Two and Four) canonised the victimisation of women in Indonesia under the decades of the New Order regime. The role of numerous newly-established NGOs and media productions in post-Suharto Indonesia in the development of

²⁸ Amnesty International, campaign media for Stop Violence against Women (AI Index: ASA 21/047/2004).

²⁹ See, for example, the media campaign by Amnesty International on “Stop Violence against Women” (2004). The allegation of violence against women by the security forces is strongly and visually suggested in the two-page pamphlet. One of the two photos shows three women squatting in the background, looking at the legs of a military person who is standing in the foreground, with his automatic gun pointing down, as if it is aimed at the three women.

³⁰ Amnesty International indicates that only one case of violence against women by the security forces during DOM has been investigated. The issue of impunity among the perpetrators of the sexual crimes is also another concern. Rapes in Aceh in June 2003 that involved members of TNI were brought to trial (*Kompas* 2003(c), 2003(d) and 2003(e)). *Kompas* (2003h)) reported that there were 100 rapes in Aceh during the implementation of the Military Emergency Operation.

³¹ Amnesty International, campaign media for Stop Violence against Women (AI Index: ASA 21/047/2004).

this canonisation cannot be ignored. With the opening of the public sphere and the deregulation of the media, the disclosure of appalling state violence became imminent. It virtually became the rule of the day that the media in the reform period revealed the New Order state's violence, which became the mediatised object of public anathema. The depictions in these two films of women crying, condemning, speaking unemotionally, or even being silent about the violence they had endured also partly demonstrates the intensity and persistence of the media producers to break the silence and stress "the emergence of voice in the moment of transgression" (Das 2000: 207). The violence against women propelled the struggle to break the silence through images.

Faces of Victims Revealed

The video *Perempuan di Wilayah Konflik* aptly represents the contemporary media culture in Indonesia in which, in response to the upsurge of violence and the discussion of it in media presentations, the use of the word '*korban*' (victim) escalates. In tandem with the opening of public space—with its zeal toward *transparansi*, transparency or openness (Siegel 1998; Spyer 2002(a); Strassler 2005)—and further facilitated by the deregulation of the media, there is also an increasing interest in the production of self-reflexive media presentations, such as documentary film.³² There is an impulse to "represent everything" (Spyer 2002(a)). Another characteristic of the media during the *reformasi* era is its proclivity with the idealistic nature of 'just journalism', in which the leaning toward the victims becomes part of the essential imagining. As such, being a 'reformed' media is sometimes equated with being able to present and give voice to the 'real victims'. This development has to some extent influenced the strategy in representing documentaries.

It is always difficult to address cases of sexual violence because usually the female victims are reluctant to report the cases due to social stigmatisation and lack of legal assurance. Thus, encouraging the victims to come forward and give testimony is not simple, especially without any credible guarantees for their protection. In political rapes, or sexual assaults in politically charged situations, it becomes even more difficult because the allegations of crimes of sexual violence are often used by the opposing parties to attack each other and mobilise public sentiment against each other (see Chapters Two, Three, and Four).

³² Another film genre focusing on reflexivity that has also become a trend in the *reformasi* era is the independent film. Stories related to the chaotic or rather hopeful situation during the early days of *reformasi* became the themes of these independent films. For further discussion, see van Heeren 2002. On self-reflexive films during *reformasi*, see Clark 2004.



Figure 5.2: Halimah and Sawiyah, victims of rapes in Lhokseumawe, Aceh (VCD, *Perempuan di Wilayah Konflik*, blur added)

I am drawn to the depiction of the faces of rape victims in Aceh in the film, *Perempuan di Wilayah Konflik*. It is in stark contrast to how the victims of the May 1998 rapes have been represented (see Chapter Four). Aside from the differences of the media format used in these two presentations—video film versus printed illustrated story, or documentary of a past event versus cartoon of imagined future, or the underlining ethnic perspectives of Chinese vis-à-vis Acehnese—it is the visual rendering of two real victims in this film that marks the most difference with the representation of the May 1998 rapes. While the victims in the latter case are hidden or depicted by ethnic traits, with the portrayals of Sawiyah and Halimah, the film *Perempuan di Wilayah Konflik* shows the real faces of rape victims. The difference is substantial, as without the presence of the victims, the truth about the cases is difficult to imagine, let alone prosecute in court, although even then it does not necessarily mean that the revelation guarantees fair trials (Strassler 2005).³³

The Speaking Victims

That the images of the rape victims are placed at the beginning of the film indicates their importance, as it is true that crimes of sexual violence in Aceh

³³ There has been a split of opinion about the rapes in Aceh. It is either perceived as personal rape, i.e. personal crimes committed by members of the security forces and/or and as a military strategy for repression (See *Kompas* 2003(f) and 2003(g)). However, many human right activists find that as far as TNI is concerned, the alleged rapes by TNI members is perceived only as a violation of the image of the military body, and not a crime against humanity.

have been significant issues to address, not only as violence against women, but as part of the dispute between the separatist group and the national government. Talking about one's experience as a victim of rape is never easy, especially in front of a camera. Aside from the ethical question of why this film reveals the faces of the rape victims, which can be quite vexing to some and unethical for others, one might wonder how the production team was able to get them to speak. In answer to this question, as mentioned earlier, Arivia feels that YJP has an advantage as a women's organisation that enables them to approach the female victims as fellow females.

In fact, the two rape victims here do not speak much. Halimah, one of the two victims, starts her story by describing one rainy day when a group of military personnel came to their house:

Where is your husband?" one of them asked. I said I had no husband, I'm handicapped. Nobody wants to be my husband. He put his gun beside me.

Then Sawiyah, the other victim, who appears to be pregnant, continued:

He didn't say much but kept asking, "Are you GAM?" I said, "No, I am a woman".³⁴

Her immediate reaction to reject the accusation of being a member of GAM because she is a woman confirms the general perception that women are not involved in political action and are incapable of committing crimes.³⁵ She just laughed at the soldier's 'ignorance'.

In the film, these two victims never mention the word 'rape'. Instead, Halimah uses the words 'it' (*itu*) and 'hit' (*nubruk*). As mentioned previously, the corresponding words for 'rape' in Indonesian come in various, sometimes vague, terms (see Chapter Three). It is their father who more blatantly said, "*anak itu diperkosa, dua-dua*" (those girls were raped, both of them). The fact that the rape victims actually speak, but are unable to utter the word 'rape' may well confirm Ardeners' argument that "muting is not to be confused with actual

³⁴ Excerpt from the VCD, *Perempuan di Wilayah Konflik*, by YJP.

³⁵ The general understanding of conflict or war has a strong gender dimension in the sense that the surviving victims are predominantly women and the perpetrators are primarily men. Scepticism as to whether GAM has female members is not uncommon since women are often cast aside by the disputing parties. However, some reports have indicated women's involvement in the Aceh separatist movement. *Media Indonesia* (2003) reported that three female members of this separatist group were arrested by TNI during a raid in the region of Aceh Besar. Meanwhile, *Tempo* magazine (2004(b)) reports that a woman was arrested and sentenced to an 18-year imprisonment on the allegation that she was the commander of Inong Bale. She rejected all of the accusations and revealed that she was threatened of being undressed and feared of being raped during the investigation.

silence" (Cameron 1992: 141). "They [the muted group]", comments Shirley Ardener, "may speak a great deal. The important issue is whether they are able to say all they would wish to say, where and when they wish to say it" (ibid.). Rape generates two different realities for women and men, based on their respective roles as, in most rape cases, perpetrator (male) and victim (female). For rape victims, to communicate their experiences of male aggression that has been forced on to their bodies and sexuality by using male reality and language is simply 'unspeakable'. As such, muting these rape victims means forcing them to deny their right to convey their feelings about these experiences.

The politicisation of the violence against women in Aceh and, at the same time, the impunity for persons responsible for the crimes not only reinforces the general assumption that rape has been a part of the military strategy to repress the local people, but also buttresses the commonality of the violence. In this film this assumption is substantiated by the way one of the high-ranking TNI officers referred to the rapes as merely 'incidents'. Lt. Colonel Firdaus Komarno's response suggests that in his perception the allegations of rape, if proven, would only constitute a military institutional offence that would be punishable only with a sanction such as 'removal' or 'troop swap'. A similar downplaying of the rapes in Aceh is seen in the response from the governor of Aceh. He ascribes the inoperative status of the trials for the rape cases to the lack of adequate judiciary officials in the region due to the conflict. Meanwhile, without legal accounting, the rape cases are barely acknowledged and may even be regarded as fraudulent. The acknowledgement sought from official army sources who normalise rapes as merely incidental effects of conflict is ironic in light of this film's attempt to give voice to the rape victims.

The rapes as represented in this film have been eclipsed by issues that are regarded to be more important, as the battle between the state military and secessionist armed forces has produced numerous social problems, including refugees, disrupted education, and economic collapse. While the presence of the rape victims may add to the realism of the film and present an appeal for the 'victim', it focuses all of the suffering into a single picture of rape. Moreover, in its attempt to reconstruct 'how things really are', this film presents 'real' victims; however, the impact of the representation of the victims themselves is questionable. In addition to this, the inconclusive interviews with the authorities, i.e., the governor and TNI lieutenant, are not supportive of any effort to seek justice for the victims, except to subtly express criticism against those in power. Is it worth risking the lives of the rape victims—from further stigmatisation and possible threat—if the exposé only serves the film producers' desire to present the 'real' victims? It is in regards to the question of representing the 'real' that I now turn to the film *Bade Tan Reuda*.

Bade Tan Reuda: Voicing the Real

In contrast to the film *Perempuan di Wilayah Konflik*, *Bade Tan Reuda* presents not only fragmented pictures of female victims in Aceh, but also a biographical narration of one woman who survived the conflict. The image of this woman embodies how women in Aceh make meaning of the past in their present lives. The inherent women's agency is adequately represented through her image and gives the impression of being unmediated. The focus on the beginning of the implementation of the military emergency provides appropriate attention to the pictures of, and narration about, the women's lives. The opening of the film that shows a close-up of a woman cursing the murder of her husband and family that was taken from a recorded interview two years earlier also shows quite a marked difference in tone in the way the film is presented. While in the YJP film the prevailing mode of representing female victims is through the depiction of subservient and vulnerable women, in *Bade tan Reuda* the portrayal of the female victims is stirred by the representations of an incensed widow and strong, independent survivor.

The film is also organised differently than *Perempuan di Wilayah Konflik*. *Bade Tan Reuda* does not use a voice-over. It relies on interviews with a number of women victims, activists, government and military profiles, and makes use of stock footage. Unlike *Perempuan di Wilayah Konflik* that presents the faces of the rape victims starkly uncovered, this film blurs the faces of two figures and conceals their names and places of residence as per the filmmaker's self-censorship and the sources' wishes.³⁶ The two women are the women that appear in the beginning of the film—a victim of the conflict and a woman activist. Unveiling the real identities of these two women puts their lives in danger, not only because of what they say, but perhaps more because of who they represent: a victim, or survivor, as the film producer prefers to call her, and an activist.³⁷

³⁶ Rambadetta says that in the interviews he always asks for his sources' permission as to whether or not their faces and personal information can be disclosed. Interview with Lexy Junior Rambadetta, 24 October 2003.

³⁷ Amnesty International reported on cases of human rights violations against human rights activists. See Amnesty International 2003.



Figure 5.3: An Acehese woman activist (VCD, *Bade tan Reuda*, blur in the original)

I first heard of and watched this film during the JIFFEST 2003 in Jakarta. A few days later, I heard that the film won the award for short documentary in this film contest. I contacted Lexy Junior Rambadetta, the filmmaker, for an interview. He began his description of the film by emphasising the issue of ‘perspective’, as “no film can cover all aspects completely”. He continued by saying that *Bade tan Reuda*:

[...] raised the aspect of armed conflict in Aceh from the viewpoint of the victims, that is, the women. *Bade tan Reuda*, the title, is Acehese, meaning ‘never-ending tragedy’. And it was true. The armed conflict in Aceh is between TNI and GAM. They are both military units—one is the Indonesian military force and the other is the local Acehese military. But both are wearing *baju loreng* (combat attire). They have been in conflict for many years and the ones who have suffered the most are the women.³⁸

There are two points that can be highlighted from his description, that is, first, *Bade Tan Reuda* is meant to “expose armed conflict in Aceh from the viewpoint of the victims, that is, the women”; and secondly, “what happens is real”. Let me discuss the latter point first and then I will return to his point about women’s victimisation by examining the film more closely.

³⁸ Interview with Lexy Junior Rambadetta, 24 October 2003.

What is Real?

Bade Tan Reuda is a collaborative project by Offstream and Yayasan TIFA. Offstream was established at the end of 2001 by their three executive members, including Rambadetta. Other members soon joined and they formed a professional community combining the fields of journalism, photography, video, and computer graphic technology. Rambadetta refers to Offstream as a “documentary filmmaker group”. The members all believe that “audio and visual products are an effective means for conveying messages”.³⁹ For example, he thinks that Indonesians prefer to watch films rather than read books.

With experience as a television journalist affiliated with a range of news television services, such as the Associated Press, Worldwide Television News, Reuters, and SBS Television, Rambadetta finds that working with documentary films and for Offstream is a different kind of challenge, because the documentary film industry is still in its infant stage in Indonesia. This is especially true when the documentary concerns politics, which many consider to be ‘hard’ as it is an ‘attack on the government’. He also found that most television stations in Indonesia prefer to buy imported documentaries because they are less expensive than the home-produced films. Currently, Offstream owns advanced digital recording equipment that facilitates their activities. Rambadetta explains, “*Enaknya sekarang itu bikin film gampang hanya ruangan segini aja kita sudah bisa bikin film*” (Making films is easy now; it requires only a minimal space).⁴⁰

Distinctive of the new generation of filmmakers in post-Suharto Indonesia, the members of Offstream also adopt a spirit of openness, freedom, and justice. This is clearly apparent in their stated mission statement, in which two out of three of their objectives are clearly connected to the issues of victims’ voices and silencing. Offstream’s three missions are:

1. To give a voice to “survivors of horror”
2. To tear down walls of “silence”
3. To denounce “injustice” and “barbarism”⁴¹

These objectives are clearly represented in Rambadetta’s activities that he claims to record and give voice to ‘reality’ that so far has been silenced, as the victims have been rendered ‘voiceless’. This silencing, he argues, is unjust and barbaric. Through recording their stories he wants to unveil the realities that

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ <http://www.offstream.net/profile.asp> (accessed 27 January 2006).

remind us about the issue of transparency and its relevance with the new mode of journalism in Indonesia's reformasi (see Chapter Three).

Recording Reality: Harsh versus Soft Journalism

Realities are plural; what one person considers real may not be perceived as real by another person. For Rambadetta, the realities he records can appear differently in their final presentations depending on whether the presentations are 'harsh' or 'soft'. The process of transforming the recorded realities into a graphic presentation influences its 'harshness' or 'softness'. People involved in the production of the film, such as the sponsor, can play a role in this stage of the process. Rambadetta said that during the course of recording 'realities', he finds that 'state crimes' did indeed occur in many aspects of life in Indonesia. However, people often find his recorded realities too 'harsh' and, as such, the presentations need refining or editing, which in turn softens them in his perspective.⁴²

Reality, according to Rambadetta, is "*yang apa adanya*" (the way things are). However, something must be done when this reality is visually presented to an audience. The graphic depiction of a dead body, for example, does not have to be presented, as it can instead distract from or disturb the narration or story. He also tries to avoid depicting stories about rape as, he argues, the repetition of the story will repeat the abuse of the female victims (*pelecehan dua kali*). Thus, to represent the 'real' in rape cases, he feels that it is not necessary to reveal the victims' faces. He also avoids voice-overs, as they distract from the 'realness' of the story.

Documentary about Women

Documentary films about women are sometimes exclusively related to women filmmakers, as women's organisations are said to be concerned only with women's problems. I asked Rambadetta about women's films and women's issues. *Bade Tan Reuda* was not his first film about women. His first film was about *Jugun Ianfu* (pribumi comfort women during the Japanese occupation in Indonesia in 1942-1945) and entitled, *Introduction: the Indonesian Comfort Women*. Women activists, Rambadetta said, found it effective as a campaign media. The next movie that he made concerned female migrant workers. This movie is no less political than his latest one about Aceh. He wanted to show the public that although these workers have brought great amounts of foreign capital into the country, the government has never given them proper attention

⁴² Interview with Lexy Junior Rambadetta on 24 October 2003.

or support. His third movie was about domestic violence. In this movie he focused on the strength of the female victim to survive and fight back. He argues strongly that domestic violence is not a domestic issue, but it is a social issue that needs to be brought out into the public. He described his initial steps in the filmmaking process when he asked whether the victim was willing to expose her case:

She agreed to be exposed, no problem if we have to blur [her face] and ... [then I asked if she would] fight. Fight! [...] this film will be a kind of inspiration for [...] many other Indonesian women who consider violence to be a domestic problem. It is a social problem. I want to say that in this film.⁴³

Most recently, he made *Bade tan Reuda*, which he claims represents 'reality':

Then *Bade tan Reuda*, [which is about] Acehese women. [...] In my opinion, that's reality. In reality, there are many systems, values, etc., in Indonesia that put everybody at a disadvantage, both women and men. There are many systems that position women as incapable, and that puts everybody at a disadvantage.⁴⁴

Rambadetta has different ways of positioning women as victims. Indeed, in reality he sees that women have been victims of many social injustices, but they do survive and some even fight back. So, in representing violence against women, he is more likely to position and present these victims as survivors. He is also averse to representing violence with depictions of violence.

In my films, I position the women as survivors. Starting from our first film, we presented them not as victims, but as survivors, because, first, the fact is that although they are victims, they are not dead, not down. They still fight. That's a survivor. So, the films that I made about foreign workers and Jugun Ianfu and *Bade tan Reuda* are to show how women survive, and encourage audiences to see them as survivors, so in the end they will, for instance, build solidarity or discuss with their friends or do something else. But, we don't position them as victims.⁴⁵

When I asked if he, as a male filmmaker, had ever encountered discrimination or difficulties when making a film about women because of his gender, he admitted that indeed there had been difficulties for him, as often the female sources were more comfortable being interviewed by women. Another

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

disadvantage that he encountered as a male documentary filmmaker working on women's issues was when he was rejected by a women's filmmaking organisation, Women Make Movies, because this organisation only distributes documentaries made by women. Although he felt the policy to be disadvantageous for the encouragement of women's empowerment, he could understand that their intent was to support women's works.

Ideas, Editing and Distribution

The idea to make the film, *Bade Tan Reuda*, arose in early 2002. It was planned to be an hour-long documentary. Initially, said Rambadetta, the film was intended to cover the conflict in Aceh from a wide variety of confrontational angles. Offstream prepared a complete storyline that involved many aspects and high profiles. However, when they sought funding for the production, Tifa, a funding organisation, rejected their proposal. A few months later, Tifa contacted them again and agreed to produce the documentary, but with some major changes to the original script. The 'harsh' story had to be transformed into a 'soft' one.

We worked on the idea for a long time. [...] We made a long story, longer than an hour. But this story was harsh because we wanted to reveal, to attack many aspects of the political economy. We got all the contacts and the story, and the only thing we needed to do was to get a sponsor to fund the production. We sent the story to Tifa Foundation in early 2002, [...] but it was turned down. [...] A few months later, Tifa contacted us because they planned to make video (about Aceh) that is 'soft', not too complicated, not too dangerous like the one we had planned. [...] Tifa Foundation is careful, so we spent months in discussion and did a lot of editing. [...] But, it is worthwhile as stimulation for people to discuss Aceh. [...] And we made a series of approaches to the people, including mothers in Aceh. It was done over quite a long period of time [...] and we had to be careful, because they are victims and they don't trust Javanese, whereas all of the members of our team are Javanese with very thick Javanese accents. [...] And it turned out that this 'soft' production, as we consider it, won the first prize in JIFFEST.⁴⁶

When I contacted Tifa and talked to its representative, Hening Tyas Sutji, usually called Uci, she mentioned that the funding organisation had their own concerns about the films that focus on sensitive issues. As a campaign media, she said, it would be ineffective if the films produced heated reactions from the state regarding the controversies that arose among the members of society:

⁴⁶ Ibid.

[...] in the production process, [the film] was sent to Tifa to be reviewed and then returned to Offstream for editing, then sent back again. The process was very long [...] about eight months [...] then it was done. Tifa's role was to critique the film and try to improve (it). Not only the executives, but also the board [of directors] were intensively involved [...] as the film concerned problems, content, on a sensitive issue. That is why the role of the board was important and also why the process (of editing) was drawn out. It was not easy to gather together all the bosses who were very busy.⁴⁷

It is obvious that editing works differently for Rambadetta and Uci. For Rambadetta, the editing changed the final presentation of the film into a 'softer' representation of reality. Meanwhile, considering that the issue presented in the film was of a 'sensitive' nature, Uci found that the editing was important in making the film more presentable (and acceptable). She adds that if the government considered the film to be too daring, its distribution would be jeopardized, and as such, their effort to 'socialise' (i.e., make known) the issue about conflict and violence in Aceh would be rendered ineffective.

The film, as with other campaign media produced by NGOs, is distributed via the networks of both Offstream and Tifa. The initial plan was to produce 1,000 – 2,000 copies and distribute them to university students, activists, network foundations, and perhaps, bookstores, such as in the Gramedia network, then screen the film for discussion groups, other filmmakers or at international film festivals.⁴⁸

Women Surviving the Conflict

As I described in the opening of this chapter, the film *Bade Tan Reuda* opens with a close-up of a woman's mouth, initially crying inconsolably about the loss of her husband, then cursing angrily at her husband's killer (figure 5.2).

Did the government do this deliberately? We don't know why our husbands and parents were killed. They just came without warning... What is to become of us? Who can we appeal to? Did the government deliberately kill our husbands? We still don't know... why they killed our husbands, our parents and our relatives. We want to know what they did wrong. We didn't even have a chance to see our dead husbands ... [crying miserably, stroking a child's head] ... and our parents, brothers and sisters. Now I'm left with three children. I'm so sad. [translation provided]

[Typing sound, text, black background: The camera bears witness to the women of Aceh ...]

⁴⁷ Interview with Hening Tyas Sutji (Uci) on 14 January 2004.

⁴⁸ Interview with Lexy Junior Rambadetta, 24 October 2003, and Hening Tyas Sutji, 14 January 2004.

[Back to close up of the woman's mouth again, this time with no crying, but with an angry voice]

We won't take money bribes. Even if they gave us a building we'd reject it. If there's a chance, we will take revenge for our murdered husbands. If I had the chance I'd drink the blood of his killers. If I knew who killed my husband I'd drink their blood. [Close ups of the eyes] Oh ... my heart hurts in my breast. [Back to the close up of the mouth again] There's no place to go. And even if there was, there's none who can help. [Translation provided]



Figure 5.4: Close up of a woman's mouth, VCD, *Bade Tan Reuda* (2003)

It is quite striking that the woman expressed such a very harsh condemnation. Yet what makes it sound less harsh is, in my opinion, and Rambadetta's too, the fact that she speaks in Acehnese, while the film is screened in Jakarta where few, perhaps even none, of the audience speak that language. The fact that the background music was superimposed over her voice also diminishes the intensity of her words and sentiment. Still, for those who understand, even the English translation reads very harshly. When I asked Rambadetta about this particular scene, he explained that the English subtitles were less provocative than the Indonesian version. Presenting only the English translation prevented TNI soldiers from understanding her words as, according to Rambadetta, few of them understand English. It was a kind of self-censorship. Another reason why this particular scene did not have a powerful impact was the fact that the audio equipment in Oktagon, a photography and cinematography gallery in Jakarta where the film was screened during the JIFFEST 2003 was not working properly. The poor audio quality became another agent of censorship that

softened the effect of the scene. However, the primary means of self-censorship was the blurring of the woman's face.⁴⁹

The scene discussed above was taken from a stock shot that Rambadetta had taken back in 2001. After this scene there is a switch to a scene in the year 2003, when a woman is shown extracting sap from a tree in a rubber plantation. Most of the rest of the film is dedicated to her story. The film depicts her daily activities from dawn until dusk. She reveals that when her husband was killed, their children were still very young. In order to support herself and her children she looked for a job. She was alone, trying to feed them and send them to school. Even now, the situation is not improving, as she often cannot go to work when "we hear gunfire". She speaks of the two big tragedies in her life—first, in 1990 when her husband was taken away and their house was destroyed, and then in 1998 when her house was burned down to ground and she was left with her three children and almost none of their belongings. However, she survived and lives on in her new life.

This woman's story is central to this film. In the background, we see texts on the screen with quantitative data of the numbers of TNI, GAM, and members of the society that have become victims of the conflict. Two women activists present their opinions about Acehese women during and after the violent conflict; TNI members from Java (mostly men) ready to leave for Aceh; the national political scene in Jakarta when the Coordinating Chief Officer of TNI announced the implementation of the Military Emergency; numbers of widows interviewed and crying over the tragedy; and a scene in which the filmmaker and the cameraperson were caught in an outburst of armed combat—an instance of embedded journalism. All of this busy activity in the background contrasts with the slow-paced life of the woman. The contrast also highlights to some extent the alienation of women in conflict areas. As the time in this film is set only a few days prior to the implementation of the Military Emergency in May 2003, the depiction of this woman scratching for a living from the crumbs of this desolate region and the many widows crying for their dead husbands, and the bleakness of their future substantiates Rambadetta's personal condemnation of the conflict. The film becomes a venue for him to convey his opposition to the conflict by juxtaposing the scenes between the military preparations and the housewives who suffer the most from the strife.⁵⁰

In a documentary such as *Bade Tan Reuda*, the form of the presentation cannot be identified as a pure representation of reality, because, first and foremost, realities appear to, and are interpreted by, each individual differently, whereas there are so many different actors and interests involved in a project

⁴⁹ Interview with Lexy Junior Rambadetta, 24 October 2003.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

such as this. In this regards, Rambadetta's perception of reality is decisive. It influences the process of selecting the fragments of the lives that he presents as bits of reality. The process does not stop here, as many other aspects are involved in the transformation of the 'raw' materials into the final production. The funding organisation has an important role as well, as does the context in which the production is produced and distributed. The context here refers not only to the determinants of the production, but also to the anticipated reception of the production and its distribution, as reflected in the concerns expressed by Hening Tyas Sutji of Tifa. Thus, it is apparent that the realities as presented in a media production like *Bade tan Reuda* are selected, negotiated, and anticipated.

Conclusion

In both of the films discussed here, violence in conflict areas is marked with the silencing of the victims, who are primarily women. In light of this, a considerable effort is required to provide female victims with a space to express their voices regarding the violence from which they suffer. This is in accordance with the general discourse of victimhood in which the loss of the victim's agency is often considered to be the effect of the unavailability of a space to speak (Morris 1996). In other words, subjectivity of a victim is first and primarily engendered by the absence of the victim's voice. These films provide a space for the victims to voice their experiences of violence, an important objective for both YJP and Offstream.

However, to quote Jacques Derrida, "there is no genreless text" (Morris 1996: 33). 'Speech genre', a term proposed by Mikhail Bakhtin, refers to codes that help us produce and comprehend 'utterances', which depend on "the existence of specific discourse communities" (ibid.). Morris further argues that speech genre even fashions:

[...] facts and events to fits its contours, and a narrative of suffering will undergo subtle changes depending on whether it takes the form of documentary film, a television miniseries, or a comic book [...] indeed 'survivor testimony' is now a distinctive modern subgenre, with informal conventions governing content, setting, camera angle, gesture, and display of emotion (Morris 1996: 34).

As 'speech genre' facilitates the shaping of "the substance of what is said" in "specific discourse communities", when we look at these two films, we can see that they also follow contours and bounds of "how we talk about suffering" (Morris 1996: 33). The voices presented by the two films are the voices shaped by 'codes' of how activists or filmmakers alike convey what suffering means for the female victims and how they should look to the audience.

Both films use specific genre when they talk about the violence from which the female victims are suffering. In the first film, the laments and silence of the female victims set a tone to the presentation. This approach to representing women's suffering may well be in line with the feminist characteristic that the filmmaker wants to underline: represent and 'voice' women's concerns, using women's logic, language and perspective.⁵¹ The depiction of the rape victims' inability to uttering the word 'rape' is one way this film shows that women are silenced, muted, and only men, the dominant actors, represented here by the father, can define what happens to them. The film's incorporation of the 'moment of silence', i.e., when eventually one of the rape victims turns her head away and does not say anything, becomes a genteel metaphor of its attempts to give voice to victims of an 'unspeakable' violence.

In the second film, the filmmaker reveals his personal opinion about the capability of documentaries in representing harsh reality, which he found in the victim's strong condemnation of her husband's murderer. However, his confrontational approach is toned down by the cautious attitude of the funding organisation. Thus, the blurred close-up of the angry woman's mouth becomes a venue to deliver a strong message through a subtler presentation. The filmmaker's appreciation of women's survival aptitude is expressed in the depiction of the widow surviving in post-conflict life. This is in line with what Das, referring to the conflict during the Partition of India, states, that while it is true that a widow is vulnerable, "to be vulnerable is not the same as to be a victim" (2000: 209).

⁵¹ Interview with Gadis Arivia, 6 November 2002.