

## Tueng Bila as a Characteristic and Identity of Acehnese Culture

### Tueng Bila sebagai Karakter dan Identiti Orang Aceh

AGUS BUDI WIBOWO

#### ABSTRACT

*Tueng Bila is one of the characteristics and identities of Acehnese cultural values, usually expressed as a form of violence against another person, either individually or in a group. This research was conducted to understand the meaning and motives behind such actions, as a way of proposing a solution for ending violence undertaken in this way. This research explores the importance of Tueng Bila as an integral part of Acehnese culture, using data obtained through oral interviews with informants in addition to a literature review. Based on the results of this research, Tueng Bila can be interpreted as targeted action, often taking the form of a revenge attack against a family or individual that occasionally results in death. Tueng Bila is culturally justified, but it is often performed without arbitrary reason, and it is strongly associated with the self-esteem of a person, family or kawom; in Acehnese, human. However, in Acehnese culture, there is also a mechanism for conflict resolution that involves enacting local policy. By this method, local policy mechanisms extract a guilty plea and payment of compensation as a way to eliminate ongoing hostility between the warring parties. It can be seen then, that on the one hand there is a culture of violence in Acehnese society, but on the other hand there are indigenous mechanisms available to mediate disputes that have traditionally been practiced by the community.*

*Keywords: Tueng Bila; revenge; character; identity; Acehnese*

#### ABSTRAK

*Tueng Bila merupakan salah satu karakter dan identiti yang menjadi nilai budaya orang Aceh. Tindakan Tueng Bila biasanya berupa kekerasan terhadap orang lain, baik secara individu mahupun kelompok. Untuk itu, penelitian ini dilakukan untuk memahami erti dan motif tindakan, serta cara menghentikan perilaku Tueng Bila. Penelitian ini adalah penelitian deskriptif yang bertujuan menggambarkan secara tepat keadaan dan gejala-gejala tertentu dalam suatu masyarakat. Data diperoleh melalui cara wawancara dengan informan dan studi pustaka. Data yang diperoleh dari para informan tersebut kemudian disemak dan diperiksa secara berulang lalu disilang-semak dengan informasi lainnya sehingga diperoleh data yang sah dan boleh dipercayai. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Tueng Bila dapat diertikan sebagai menjemput atau menuntut balas/ajal terhadap lawan atau keluarganya. Tueng Bila merupakan sebuah tindakan yang dibenarkan secara budaya, tetapi harus melalui motif-motif tertentu yang tidak sembarangan alasannya, yang sangat terkait dengan harga diri seseorang/keluarga/kawom sebagai manusia. Untuk itu, "ureueng Aceh" akan melakukan tindakan apa saja dalam rangka Tueng Bila, sekalipun harus mengorbankan nyawa sebagai taruhannya. Akan tetapi, dalam budaya Aceh, sebenarnya juga telah ada suatu mekanisme penyelesaian konflik dengan menggunakan kearifan masyarakat setempat sebagai jalan penyelesaiannya. Dengan kaedah ini, kebijakan lokal menggunakan mekanisme pengakuan bersalah dan pembayaran konpensasi sebagai jalan untuk meniadakan permusuhan yang berkelanjutan antara para pihak yang bertikai. Terlihat disini, bahwa di satu pihak terdapat budaya kekerasan dalam masyarakat, namun di pihak lain terdapat kearifan lokal yang cuba mengenengahkan pertikaian masyarakat yang secara tradisional telah diterima masyarakat zaman dulu sebagai suatu penyelesaian pertikaian.*

*Kata kunci: Tueng Bila; balas dendam; karakter; identiti; orang Aceh*

## INTRODUCTION

Every community across the globe has distinctive characteristics. These characteristics distinguish one community from another. Aceh is a region entity and an ethnic which differs from other communities in Indonesia. One of the ethnic groups residing in Indonesia is Acehnese. They live in an area that is now called the province of Aceh. In Aceh province, there are 8 ethnic groups including Acehnese, Alas, Aneuk Jamee, Kluet, Tamiang, Gayo, Simeulu, and Singkil. Acehnese often refer to themselves as *ureueng* Aceh (Acehnese).

In everyday life, Acehnese has its own culture of behavior, attitude, manners, cultures, and so on. Acehnese is generally characterized by not willing to give in, not willing to be dictated, not quickly giving up almost in all occasions and steadfast in facing any problems (Muliadi 2005: 29; Muslim 2007: 124). Meanwhile, in the view of Irwan (2007: 2-3), Acehnese customary behavior pattern is identical to the values of Islamic culture. In another part, Rusdi (1997: 4) says that one of the characteristics of the Acehnese cultures is *Tueng Bila*, which literally means "revenge". This stereotype, whether right or wrong, often gives the impression that is scary to outsiders, especially when misinterpreted. For instance, there is an opinion that interprets *Tueng Bila* as revenge in negative sense, which makes the people of Aceh to be considered as a vengeful society. Therefore, the meaning of a community character should be viewed from the point of view of the character's owner. Thus, it will not pose a narrow ethnocentrism attitude.

In several previous studies, *Tueng Bila* can be compared with *Carok* culture in Maduranese society (Mohamad Fauzi 2004: 91-110; A. Latief Wiyata 2002: 15), *Siri* culture in the Bugis and Makassar society (South Sulawesi) (Muhammad et al. 1995; Pelras 2006), *Kemalun ni Edet* in Gayonese culture in Central Aceh (Seherdi 2008: 3), and *Seppuku* culture in Japanese society (Douglas & Waksler 2002: 36; Mohd Rasyid 2011: 106-107). However, the geographical condition of each culture is different. For example, Maduranese are not Acehnese, and vice versa. Therefore, this paper attempts to provide an overview of a culture that has a different geographical condition.

In connection with this, this paper discusses *Tueng Bila* among Acehnese. The paper does not aim to discuss it from a moral point of view, or the merits of a behavior, but it discusses *Tueng Bila* as a phenomenon from the point of the experience and culture of Aceh. Therefore, the discussion will elaborate *Tueng Bila* as an aspect of history, meaning, motives, and efforts to resolve *Tueng Bila*.

This research is a descriptive study. The data was obtained through interviews. Before conducting the interview, the researcher surveyed a selection of informants. They were chosen as informants due to their

knowledge about *Tueng Bila*. The data obtained from the informants were then checked and cross-checked with other information in order to obtain reliable data.

In addition, the researcher also conducted a literature study, searched a number of archives, books and articles that were stored in several libraries in Banda Aceh, such as Preservation Hall Cultural Values Banda Aceh (BPNB Banda Aceh), Aceh Documentation and Information Center (PDIA), Aceh State Museum, the National Aceh Provincial Library and Archives, and Research Training Center of Social Sciences Aceh (PPISB) of Syiah Kuala University, Darussalam, Banda Aceh. A number of archives and books as well as articles that were collected included some portion of this paper.

## CONCEPT OF CHARACTER AND IDENTITY

Before understanding the "character" and "identity" of a society, we need to understand/acknowledge the definition of these two terms, in order to clarify the focus and the object to be observed in the context of collective life communalism (ethnic), both personal and communal. In this case, the character and identity that we search for, is very much related to the issue of frame-value which qualifies pattern and mark of the existence of a society in all actual activities and multi-faceted life. This means that, when a person is in the midst of other people, either consciously or unconsciously, all words and actions always take place with all the symbols and substance that collectively characterize the nature and signs of its existence. Thus, the nature and shared characteristics eliminate the process of self-identification, interpretation and interaction with a person as a member of a community, and act in response, which included elements that collectively become binding and unifying.

So the definitions of what we understand and call the character is the properties or dispositions that have historically been owned by the citizens of a society. The nature and character is not initially formed as they are, but is the result that is formed after the considerations and processes no matter how superficial the rationality is, which are influenced by emotional and intrinsic images that are inherent in the desire called "collective ego" of a society. These all then formed a sort of basic personality structure, and is then passed as trans-generational process.

The nature and character which are formed by considerations and rationality processes, again predominantly affect patterns of thinking and patterns of behavior manifestations in individuals in dealing with various situations and problems in daily life. It runs a span of a long history of existence; so it is free from any awareness of what they were when it was first formed. The residents of a community who come later no longer feel the need to be criticized, but just

used both in the context of his own as an individual, as a citizen and in the context of its community (ethnic) (Fuad Mardhatillah UY Tiba 2013: 4).

The concept of identity and ethnicity is a relational concept that is associated with self-identification and social origins. What we think of our identity depends on what we think of as not us; not Javanese Madura, nor the Buginese Batak, and others. Consequently, identity and ethnicity will be better understood as the process of creating and forming boundaries which are enforced in a particular socio-historical condition. Therefore, do not be surprised if Barth's (1998) list says that ethnicity can be said to exist when people claim a certain identity for themselves and define by others with that identity. Ethnicity is a meaningful identification with an ethnic group because of this affiliation (Barth 1998: 10-11; Irfan Noor 2013: 1).

This is where identity and ethnicity is understood as a culturally constructed concept. According to Lavenda & Schultz (2011), identity and ethnicity are created by combining the historical process of social groups that differ in a single political structure under certain social conditions (Irfan Noor 2013: 1). In more detail, identity and ethnicity is the result of construction (process), commonly called social ascription. This social process is marked by any particular group of people. It means that, the origin of the sign can be used to "point" (label) certain groups; the process is certainly a process that lasted for centuries. Ascription process is the interaction of symptoms that occur when people from different backgrounds meet each other in various fields of life, rather than when they are truly "alone". To be specific, in this process it is ethical when someone was not treated as an independent person, but for example, a member, or representative of a group of people with certain ascription. The ascription process functions over time as though such a description informs the group of people. As for the group described, the description of which is a rule of action. Historically, that makes ascription functions as if such description is a political or power factor.

Ethnic groups are usually distinguished from other types of social groups based on attributes that identify the members of the group such as: language, religion, customs, and history. Therefore, all these cultural exchanges would never have happened if the group members do not regularly interact. Ethnic identity is often thought, either by group members or outsiders to be rooted in a common biological origin. In discussing the conceptual understanding of identity and ethnicity, Giddens (2001) asserts that ethnicity is always centered on the individual and group identities. The importance of this identity to an ethnic group, according to Giddens is because "It can provide an important thread of continuity with past and is often kept alive through the practice of cultural traditions" (Irfan Noor 2013: 3). Therefore, almost all cultural identity - the terms of the

bond of fraternity identity, race, or ethnicity - is built in the context of the face-off with the others. Therefore, the boundaries are finally being recognized between different ethnic groups as a product of self definition internally and externally by other definitions. Obviously, in the view of Lavenda & Schultz (2011), ownership groups and the ability to distinguish their own group with other groups, stretch far back in the history of the past (Irfan Noor 2013: 2).

#### AN OVERVIEW OF ACEH

Aceh is a special region - it is a province located in the island of Sumatra and is the western-most province of Indonesia. This area is bordered by the Bay of Bengal in the north, the Indian Ocean in the west, the Straits of Malacca in the east, and North Sumatra in the southeast and south. Geographically, Aceh lies at position 2°-6° north latitude and 95°-98° east longitude from the northwest to the southeast. As for the borders of the province, it is the north by the Straits of Malacca and the Bay of Bengal, to the south west by the Indonesian Ocean, and the east by the Strait of Malacca and North Sumatra Province.

Based on this geographical position, it is clear that the province of Aceh is the entrance gate to the western part of Indonesia. Thus, it is very strategic, in terms of both military and economic terms. All vessels will be heading to the Indian Ocean through the Straits of Malacca. Therefore, it is not surprising if Aceh heads into an open area and haven ships of various nations in trading activity. Besides, Aceh has cooperated with various regional trades in the Malay Peninsula and India (Rusdi Sufi & Agus Budi 2004: 2).

The kinship system is one of the socio-cultural aspects related to *Tueng Bila*. In Aceh, the kinship system is generally the smallest relative nuclear family, consisting of the father, mother, and unmarried children. The father and mother have an important role to take care of a family into adulthood, including meeting the needs i.e. food and clothing, health, and education. Aceh has an interesting lineage society that takes into account the principle of bilateral kinship, either through paternal or maternal line. Relatives from the father's side are called *wali* or *biek*. When a father passes away, his biological brother will replace him as the *wali* (trustee/guardian) of his children. If he has no brother, then the son of his biological brother will presume the responsibility. On the other hand, one's maternal lineage is called *Karong* or *Koy*. This lateral principle makes the kinship term similar between male and female members of the family. The status of a *wali* (trustee) is higher than a *karong*, thus entitling him the responsibility of becoming the *wali* in a marriage and *asabat* (the one entitled to) inheritance. Such is related to the teachings of Islam. However, in daily living and interaction, a family will have closer

relationship with the *karong*, which is related to their uxori-local custom where a married couple will have to reside with or near the wife's parent.

The larger kin group is *kawom*, which traces its lineage through the paternal line, originating at the men who degrade them. Many Acehnese have or keep pedigree of relatives (*sarakata*). *Kawom* group tends to be lost (only a few people in Aceh can trace his line up to more than three generations and over). They still call themselves belonging to one particular *kawom* patrilineal. Other groups are *sukee*, for example *Sukee Lhee Reutoh*, *Cut (Ja or To) Sandang*, *Tok Batee*, *Imeum Peuet*. They refer to the origin of the offspring that come from the outside; the Karo, Hindus, Arabs, Persians and Turks (Rusdi Sufi et al. 1998: 12).

#### THE HISTORY OF CONFLICT AND VIOLENCE IN ACEH

The history of violence and conflict in Aceh has not been resolved. Consequently, it is reasonable if the outsiders view violence and conflict as an inherent part in the lives of the people of Aceh and its collective memories. Such a view cannot be fully justified, nor can it simply be denied as well. In order to understand this, it is necessary to have an overview of the historical explanation describing the condition of the people of Aceh. James Price as quoted by Hurgronje (1985: XXI) said that the situation in Aceh is filled with conflict and chaos that makes outsiders (foreign nationalities) unable to live in Aceh.

Conflicts in Aceh have occurred since immemorial time. It occurred due to the existence of four *kawom* which stem from different origins. These *kawoms* were often involved in conflicts, both between *Kawoms* and among themselves. *Kawom* is the basic of the people of Aceh, and the solidarity and loyalty to each other and to the leadership is very high. The presence of such conflict shows that the internal conflict does not only occur in the structure of modern societies, but also in the structure of traditional societies.

The longest and the most draining conflict which costs a lot of power, lives and fund in Aceh was when the Dutch tried to occupy it. In the conflict, both Aceh and the Netherlands had lost a lot of their "best young people". The Dutch soldiers' grave, *Peucut Kerkhof* in Banda Aceh is one of the evidences of the lost suffered during its conflict against Aceh. The efforts of militancy<sup>1</sup> of Acehnese in fighting the Portuguese, the Netherlands, and the Japanese colonizers have been recognized by many international and local authors. Zentgraaff (1938:1), for example, argued that Acehnese men and women fight with a resounding "national ideal" (sic!) or religion. Likewise, Jongejans (1939: 347) mentioned that if Deli Land was given the name "Het Dollarland" (dollar state), Aceh received the name of "Balkan van

Sumatra" (Balkans in Sumatra). This explains why after hearing the name of Aceh, the Dutch officials who were sent for duty in Aceh became discouraged. Although Aceh gets a negative name, Resident Jongejans mentioned that the people of Aceh is the same as the Europeans, with some good behaviors in addition to the 'less good' ones (Teuku Ibrahim Alfian 1987: 27).

Apart from running the resistance or struggle against the Dutch colonialists through open warfare communally, the resistance was also performed individually by the term *Atjeh Moorden* (Aceh killings) (Rusdi Sufi 1997: 4). These killings targeted Dutch people (men, women, and children) who were considered infidels. It took place everywhere - on the street, in the market, in the Dutch barracks, and so on. This is of course closely connected with the *sabil* war movement. The perpetrators also expected themselves to die, due to their belief that death against the infidels is martyrdom and will automatically guarantee them heaven. The murder with this anti-pagan motive was named by the Dutch as 'Het is een typische *Atjeh Moord*', a typical murder in Aceh. This individual resistance began to take place since the easing of the Dutch colonial war in Aceh up to the 1930s. For example, on July 10, 1933 a Dutch captain named CE Schmid became the victim of what was called typical murder in Lhoksukon, North Aceh. Two months later, a similar incident recurred. This time, a Dutch sergeant was killed in front of an army bivouac in Bakongan North Aceh. Later, at the end of November 1933, another incident took place against two Dutch children in Kutaraja.

Based on the reports of the Dutch regarding actions conducted by Aceh people, 1910-1920 witnessed 79 series of murders, with 12 deaths and 87 injuries from among the Dutch victims. While from the Aceh side, 49 people were killed. The culmination of the struggle/this daring murder occurred in 1913, 1917 and 1928, i.e. up to 10 more cases each year, whereas in 1933 and 1937, 6 and 5 cases occurred respectively. (See Table 1 and Table 2).

#### TUENG BILA: MEANING AND THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE ACEHNESE

*Tueng Bila* is a part of the prototypes of the Acehnese characteristics which appears on their thoughts, behaviors, actions, attitudes, and speech. Based on the results of a study conducted by Mohd Harun (2008: 16) towards a *hadih maja* which contains philosophical values, it appears that the people of Aceh have prototype characters which are (1) reactive, (2) militant, (3) optimistic, (4) consistent, and (5) loyal. These characteristics color the patterns of thinking and their actions in life, which is also related to the carrying out of *Tueng Bila*. According to Teuku Syamsuddin (2000), *Tueng Bila* is one of the characters of the Acehnese



TABLE1. The Location and Chronology of Events of *Atjeh Moorden* (Aceh Murder) (1910-1921)

Region	No. of cases of attack												Total
	1910	1911	1912	1913	1914	1915	1916	1917	1918	1919	1920	1921	
Koeta Radja					1					1			2
XXII Mukim	1						1	1					3
Pidie	2	4	2	4	3	2	3						20
Meureudoe			2										2
Bireuen	2	1	2	1						1			9
Lho'seumawe							1	5	2				8
Lho'soekon						2		2	1			2	7
Idi		1		1		2							5
Langsa								1					1
Tjalang			1		1								2
Meulaboh			1				1		1				3
Tapa'toewan	2		1	2	1			1					7
Takengon						1							1
Serbodjaji	1												1
Alas Landen	1				1	1		1		1		1	6
Sabang			1										1
Simeuloe											1		1
Total	9	6	8	11	8	8	5	11	6	3	1	3	79

Resume: 79 attack cases: 99 casualties: 12 dead + 87 injuries. Attackers: 40 people were killed (eds.)

Sources: R. A. Kern (De Adviseur Voor Inlandsche Zaken): Secret letter to the Governor-General of the Dutch East Indies, 1921.

TABLE 2. The Number of Cases of *Atjeh Moorden* within the Period of 30 years

Year	Case	Year	Case	Year	Case
1910	9	1920	1	1930	7
1911	6	1921	3	1931	5
1912	8	1922	8	1932	4
1913	11	1923	5	1933	6
1914	8	1924	4	1934	3
1915	8	1925	7	1935	4
1916	5	1926	7	1936	1
1917	11	1927	3	1937	5
1918	6	1928	10		
1919	3	1929	3		
Total	75	Total	52	Total	35

Recap cases: 1910-1937: 75 + 52 + 35 = 162 cases

Sources: Gedenboek v.h. *Marechaussee Corps* (1890-1940) by A. Doup Majoor KNIL. See also Ridwan Azwad & Ramli A. Dally (eds). 2002. *Poh Kaphe Action*. Banda Aceh: PDIA.

people to be vigilant for ‘revenge’ and it is something that can be done at any time depending on the occasion.

Therefore, the term *Tueng Bila* is a word that is familiar to Acehese. As mentioned earlier, in the customs and habits of Acehese, the term *Tueng Bila* is closely related to their personality (Rusdi Sufi 2003; Hasanuddin Yusuf Adan 2006: 86). According to Aboebakar et al. (2001: 104) in *Acehnese-Indonesian Dictionary*, *Tueng Bila* is derived from two syllables, i.e *tueng* and *bila* which mean taking or revenge. However, in the *Acehnese-Indonesian Dictionary* (Aboebakar et al. 2001: 83) there is also a word *bila* which is the noun on *bela* meaning martial vengeance, demanding the

death of opponent or his family while the word *Tueng* can be interpreted as accepting (Bukhari Daud & Durie 2002: 42), or it can also be interpreted as pick. Thus, in short, *Tueng Bila* can be defined as picking or avenging/death to the opponent or one’s family.

Rusdi Sufi (2003: 14) defines *Tueng Bila* as avenge. Surely, an Acehese will sue for the damages he suffered. Avenge should be interpreted in a positive way because in Acehese language, there is also a word of vengeance (revenge) called *dam* and hold grudges (*tróh dam*), which connotes a negative sense of usage. Furthermore, Rusdi (2003) said that:

In some books written by the Dutch in the past, there was a statement which said that the people of Aceh were vindictive. This view is actually a misnomer. In accordance with the teachings of their religion, Acehnese actually only know the word *Tueng Bila*, meaning avenge. An Acehnese would avenge the loss he suffered. According to Islam, retaliation is a must. This is described in the Holy Qur'an, in Surah Al Baqarah verse 178 or Al Maidah verse 45. However, because the principle of life of Acehnese who prefer peace, it is the duty of the *eumbah* or *ma* in a village, as authoritative figures to act, so that all disputable issues can be neutralized in the community life in the village. Indeed, in the Acehnese language, there is a word revenge called *dam*. However, its use is negative. So, if there are deviations in practice than those mentioned above, it means this person does not understand the principles of life as people of Aceh.

Hasanuddin Yusuf (2006: 85) states that *Tueng Bila* as a means of avenging in the Malay language is an old phenomenon which also has slightly negative connotations in the sense of a vengeance. Furthermore, if we explore further, the meaning and essence of *Tueng Bila* cannot be separated from a concrete manifestation of the imagination of someone who feels betrayed to straighten out the real issue. In this case, Hasanuddin (2006) said that:

*Tueng Bila* in many cases happens as a feedback from something that cannot be accepted as legal sense and personality such as fraud, rape, murder unconditionally, theft, and so on. In the dictionary the old Acehnese, *Tueng Bila* is something that must be done to make up for the loss even though any risk that would befall the doer. Such action often happens in the life of society after the ruling party failed or did not know how to find the solution to the conflict that is harmful to one of the parties.

The Islamic teaching also recognizes avenge or defending of honor. However, avenge is only carried out for the damages suffered. At the time of Prophet Muhammad S.A.W, counter-attacks against infidel troops were carried out after a series of warnings was given and a call to choose the right religion was conveyed. In addition, the decision to implement the *hudud* law and *qishas* (the law of equitable retaliation) was conducted by the approval of Prophet Muhammad S.A.W. Equitable retaliation is not done based on one's subjectivity/favor and is instead obligatory for Muslims. The basis of this equitable retaliation was stated in the Holy Qur'an, Surah Al Baqarah verse 178 and Surah Al Maidah verse 45. Therefore, according to Badruzzaman Ismail (2006:3), when *Tueng Bila* is performed by Acehnese, it must meet certain criteria, and cannot be done without any consideration. Furthermore Badruzzaman Ismail (2006) stated as follows:

In Aceh family life, there is no "revenge", because it is very contrary to the Islamic law (*hukom ngon agama, lagei zat ngon sifeut*). *Tueng Bila* is done in order to "defend himself/ *bila droe*", to uphold the honor, religion, family dignity, possessions and lives for any loss caused by the actions of others.

#### MOTIVES OF TUENG BILA

Being humiliated in public in the form of provocation on particular matters to a certain degree definitely insults people's heart and disturbs their emotion. The mentioned condition could be the beginning of *Tueng Bila* behavior of Acehnese. Acehnese would also feel insulted when they perceive mistreatments that lower their dignity.

The feeling of shame and embarrassment (Acehnese: *Malee*) for Acehnese is something that should be covered, swallowed and something that other people should not know. No water gutters beheaded, no gold nugget is geared up; for whatever reason, if the situation becomes an emergency (*noodzaak*) to cover the shame. The loss of self-esteem for the people of Aceh means losing everything because it does not only make them ashamed, but also embarrassed *Kawom*. Rusdi (2000) says that:

In Acehnese life, the relationship or kinship is very high. If one member of the clan is hit by something, then the members of the family will be demanding. They will do *Tueng Bila*.

Acting an embarrassing behavior is not only a type of self-personality destruction, but it also embarrasses and damages *kawom* in its entirety, family, and hometown (*saboh keubeue meukubang, ban saboh weue meuleuhob*). In this case, Islam also orders to maintain the dignity, self-esteem, and embarrassment (Teuku Raja Itam Aswar 2007: 25-27). Besides, the feeling of embarrassment is also a reflection of a conscience that can be in the form of guilt, regret, consciousness or obligation, responsibility, and religious observance (Abidin Hasyim et al. 1997: 30).

Because of the reason stated above, any provocation that can cause embarrassment must be avoided or is considered taboo, even for the sake of dabbling or joking. According to Ramli A. Dally (2006: 1), there are five behaviors that should not be done since it may result in *Tueng Bila* act of Acehnese. First, insulting the religion, God, God's messengers, Prophet Muhammad S.A.W., his Apostle, the Holy Qur'an, and all symbols considered sacred in the religion of Allah. Second, doing or saying something that embarrasses elderly people in public especially in the presence of their children (boys). Parents' institutions are greatly honored, and are very respectful in the eyes of their children and descendants. Third, defeating, flirting or having an affair with somebody's wife. A wife is a symbol of purity and

self-honor to one's family and his descendants. For men, there is no tolerance at all in these cases. Fourth, interfering with someone's daughters. Daughters are considered to be equal to one's wife (a symbol of the sanctity of one's descendants). If a man is interested in the girl, it is suggested that he marry her honorably. Fifth, doing acts that distract land and water at the time of paddy cultivation such as creating a shifting border provocation even on an inch of the land boundaries, or draining water during the cultivation season since these are absolutely serious insults to the Acehese. This phrase is often developed in a form of *narit maja* to show defense of the "homeland". The following is the summary of the *narit maja* concerning the five provocation stated above:

*Mée ta maté bak limong pat maleë  
Keu sa bak agama Allah ji peuhina  
Dua ma ngon ku teuh ji peumaléë  
Lhee aneuk dara teuh ji peukaru  
Peuet inong peurumoh ka gop cuca  
Limong ceue ji peuseuk ie ji peutho jan seumula*

That is:

Should we (defend to) die at five different humiliations  
First, when the religion of Allah is humiliated  
Second, the mother and father are humiliated  
Third, interference with daughters  
Fourth, having affair with somebody's wife  
Fifth, the removal of border, draining water in the paddy field at the cultivation time.

Each behavior or act which is related to the five things stated above can be an insult. Every insult will be perceived as a loss of dignity or self-esteem, not being rewarded and being ignored that might eventually lead to the feeling of worthlessness. As a result, people will try to defend their honor in various ways and forms, both positively and negatively in order to increase their self-esteem including maintaining lives, showing off their ability to destroy the lives of others with his own life at stake. *Nibak putéh mata get putéh tulueng* (It's better to have white bones than to have white eyes) is an expression that supports self-esteem betting of Acehese. So, it's a kind of pride for Acehese' men to die (as a warrior) than to live in humiliation.

To that end, the concept of *Tueng Bila* is one of the principles of life that is hard to break by most Acehese, as it pertains to the dignity of a person as the personal human and social beings. Therefore, if a murder is not solved by peace, especially customized peace, it is almost certain to have reprisal killings in the same way or even worse. In this context, further actions are related to the physical or the concept of the clash of *Tueng Bila* 'avenge'; no longer by words or speech. So, if A slashed B, then B will slash A, or if A slashed B to death, then

the family of B will respond by stabbing A to death as well.

According to Mohd Harun (2008: 16) these conditions cannot be separated from the character of the people of Aceh who are highly reactive in responding to problems that occur in everyday life. The reaction appears, especially when it is associated with his existence as a personal being and as a social being. As a personal being, the Acehese have pride that is preserved in the constellation of socio-cultural life. Therefore, it is necessary to guard the reactive nature of self-esteem and show self-existence as a personal and social being. Acehese is known as one of the ethnic groups that tend to have a strong reactive nature in the context of maintaining self-esteem. The proof, among others, may appear in the following *hadih maja*:

*Meunyo até hana teupèh  
Aneuk krèh jeuèt taraba  
Meunyo até ka teupèh  
Bu leubèh han jipeutaba*

That is

(If his heart is not offended  
Testicle was allowed to be groped  
If his heart was offended  
More rice (the rest) would not be offered)

Mohd Harun (2008) stated that in general, the above *hadih maja* illustrates one nature of *ureueng* Aceh who likes to be friendly and kind to everyone, but sometimes they can also be hot-tempered and vindictive. Both sides of these characters arise because of causal relationship. In the first two lines, for example, it is illustrated that if Acehese is not offended, they would never show hostility to anyone, and would even establish a friendship that would exceed sidekicks. It is characterized by the expression *aneuk krèh jeuèt taraba* (testicles may also be groped).

This adage is certainly not born as itself without the influence of history and cultural elements since it involves the male virility (genitals) that symbolizes a person's self-esteem. In the real world, fingering someone's testis (maybe not only for the case of Acehese) is a brash action and can lead to fights or even the killing of the perpetrator. However, patience, flexibility, softness of mind, and openness are presumably shown by Acehese in daily life, as long as they do not feel offended or hurt. The fact, for example, can be proven by many ethnicities that inhabit Aceh and coexist peacefully therein because they had never offended Acehese.

On the other hand, if Acehese was offended, they will tend to show the apathetic attitude, closed, grumpy, even hate, which really depends on the situation and the quality of their offense. The third and fourth line in the above *hadih maja* shows the medium level of the

offense. In this regard, Acehnese people will place the one who hurts them in the position of 'not being friends, guests, family, or a traveler'. It is shown by the clause *bu leubèh han jipeutaba* which means 'leftover rice would not be offered' to represent their disgust, annoyance, and sadness.

As mentioned above, the odium that happens to a person, for example in a family environment, is the most sensitive to the Acehnese. The act of behaving oneself as a judge to do *Tueng Bila*; particularly concerning the family's prestige, did not only happen in the past but also in these days. Below is an example of the cases encountered by T. Bachtiar Effendi Panglima Polem (1977: 108-109) in Indrapuri, Great Aceh:

One night, when my husband came home from fishing, he found a suspicious situation in his house, where his wife was left alone. The husband was convinced about his surprise when he saw a pair of man's sandals near the stairs. Without thinking for a long time, he pulled out a machete that is always inserted at the top of his home and break down the door of his room. Apparently the man was able to save himself through a side door. The husband then lose his control and felt ashamed so that the husband instantly killed the unfaithful wife who has done the bad thing and she instantly died. Such action was considered as an appropriate act and it was regretted for not killing both the man and the wife.

What was done by the husband (in the example above) is an attempt to defend the honor of himself as a man. Self-esteem for many people is the main thing. As a result, he will do whatever is considered necessary in order not to lose one's self-esteem. In this case, the act of disturbing the wife of others had violated the prohibition in the custom of Aceh. If another man was brave to disobey these rules, it means he had violated her husband's dead body. An advice is often said to a wife as "*tika eh lakoe ta jaga beuget*" (husband's bed should be treated with utmost care) (Teuku Raja Itam Aswar 2008: 10). In line with what Ramli A. Dally (2006: 1) and Mohd Harun (2008: 16-26) say that high morale to establish the truth or dignity, in the view of the people of Aceh, at a given time become something that is "mandatory". This is in accordance to what is stated in *hadih maja* "*Nibak mirah blang bah mirah jurèe, Nibak malèe bahlé maté* (It's better to let the room red than to let the rice; it's better to die rather than to be ashamed)

In a quite limited context, the above *hadih maja* is spoken to describe the obligations of a husband to kill the man who had been caught committing adultery with his wife. In other words, a husband who has self-esteem would better die in his own home in defense of honor rather than to live in the village and always being ridiculed during his lifetime. If it is not done, the people will say that he is as a man who never touched his virility (genitals) '*agam hana raba krèh*' conjecture' or in other words, he is not a man who is associated

with bravery and courage, and he is considered as an irresponsible and a coward.

The 'red' diction in the first line indicates blood which is the excess of the killing or fights. The fights would commonly cause the death of the husband, or the bully, or both. For the bullies, the death is the least of death, while the husband's death is socially uplifted as an honorable death. Therefore, it can be concluded that in order to maintain self and family respect, someone may choose to take decisive action against the bullies without having to wait for the legal process. This action is only applicable or tolerated when it happens in the home environment and yard, while such happening outside the region is considered criminal or manslaughter.

The symbolization of the high dignity for the people of Aceh, according to U.U. Hamidy (1977: 37), can be traced from its roots that consist in the saga ever existed in this area. One question is the saga of *Hikayat Maleem Diwa*. The saga tells about a character - in this case Maleem Diwa - who could marry a woman who comes from heaven. Such a case, according to U.U. Hamidy, has raised the dignity of human society on earth. Maleem Diwa as a community representative can be aligned with heavenly beings. Awards and such a view are not surprising as it eventually evolved into recognition of the Maleem Diwa as sacred or magical creatures.

Atrocities committed by the Dutch had sparked an undying grudge for individuals of Acehnese. According to Imran T. Abdullah (1996: 18), the tradition of *wali* and *karong*; the descendant of paternal and maternal blood derivative as the first and the second party who will avenge (*Tueng Bila*) for the death of his family. The readiness to avenge is the prestige and dignity of the family. If there is no one who rise to avenge the family, or if they are afraid of facing the enemy, then the family is considered worthless in the eyes of the society. Therefore, a young man who does not plunge into a battle to avenge the death of his parents would receive severe sanctions of the society. Even wives who were left by the death of her husband must avenge the death of her husband (e.g. Cut Nyak Dien, Cut Nyak Meutia, etc.). This tradition along with religious fanaticism, encouraged through the reciting of *Hikayat Prang Sabi* renowned the war with complete trigger. Therefore, as already mentioned in the previous section, *Tueng Bila* during the Dutch colonial period was manifested in an all-out fight to see martyrdom and resistance individually, which is called by Acehnese as *poh kaphe* or *Aceh Moorden* by the Dutch. To that end, Kern (1994) who had conducted an investigation into the motivation of war done by the people, expressed that the background of the emergence of Aceh killings were due to the feeling of hatred toward *kaphe/kaphe* possessed through *Tueng Bila*. Furthermore, Kern (1994: 75) said that:

It was actually encouraged by hatred overwhelming to those



who are considered infidels and by their desire for martyrdom. Moreover, it also caused by the feeling of wanting to do *Tueng Bila* (sort of avenge) against those who had killed his family or to those who had embarrassed the family or himself.

The motive of avenge carried out through *Tueng Bila* mode, according to Kern as mentioned above, can stem from various reasons, i.e.

1. Mistreatment
2. Deprivation of liberty
3. Insulting feelings
4. Unrest due to being treated unfairly
5. Unfair treatment by the leaders
6. Heartbreak of romance
7. Not satisfied by the feeling of justice.

Overwhelming hatred for the existence of pagan Dutch in Aceh that have devastated lives and joints resulting in death in the family makes a person want to do *Tueng Bila*. It also happened to the national hero, Cut Nyak Dhien. Rusdi (2008: 10) states that the desires of *Tueng Bila* of Cut Nyak Dien can be seen in the following statement:

Cut Nyak Dhien' desire to do *Tueng Bila* for the death of her husband is one of the reasons why she was willing to marry Teuku Umar who had married twice. It is clear that Cut Nyak Dhien take the benefit of Teuku Umar who is considered to have potential in an effort to *Tueng Bila* for the death of her first husband...

The following quotes show that one of the murders was based on the spirit of the *Tueng Bila* of the dutch officers. It was reported by the Commander of Division 5 Marsose, Anton as cited by Rusdi (2002: v) says that:

One of the Dutch officers who became the victim of the typical murders of Aceh was Captain CE Schmid, the commander of the 5th Division in the Marsose Corps in Lhoksukon on July 11, 1933 conducted by Amat Lepon, while in November 1933 two Dutch children who were playing in Taman Sari Kutaraja (now Banda Aceh) were also victims of typical homicide of Aceh. Amat Lepon witnessed his father "Tengku Beurenuen" while being shot dead by the Dutch soldiers when he was 10-12 years old. This spirit of vengeance avenge (*Tueng Bila*) lasted for more than 20 years.

It is also admitted by Hasanuddin Yusuf Adan (2006: 87) who states that the struggle waged by the fighters of Aceh against the Dutch is a manifestation of the inherent soul of *Tueng Bila* of the great *mujahid*, like Tengku Chik Di Tiro, Cut Nyak Dhien, Fakinah, Pocut Baren, and others. Some cases can be captured as a form of behavior as seen from Hasanuddin's statement about *Tueng Bila*,

Analyzing the process of *Tueng Bila* for the people of Aceh

indeed is very interesting and has a special meaning. The history has recorded that when an Acehese has got *meudarah ate* (insulted very deep), then the solution is *Tueng Bila*. Two prominent examples which were presented by a writer HM Zainuddin is a valid and accurate reference although people do not want to take it as reference. When the war against the Dutch was raging on the land of Aceh, a young villager in the District of Geulumpang Minyeuk (now Geulumpang Baro), Pidie, Abdul Hamid with earthy alone faced the Dutch troops in a *jambo* (hut) in the middle of a rice field to kill as a manifestation of *Tueng Bila* for the killing of the people of the village by the Dutch. In another case, a middle-aged woman in a train from the Langsa to Sigli stabbed a Dutchman who was sitting relaxed on the train seat. When the woman asked by the crowd, she answered: I hate the infidels who have destroyed Islam and Muslims in this world, and that's the rewards of *Tueng Bila* from me, she said firmly.

During the conflict between the Free Aceh Movement (Gerakan Aceh Merdeka/GAM) and the government of the Republic of Indonesia, the term *Tueng Bila* was often used when the Free Aceh Movement (Gerakan Aceh Merdeka/GAM) avenge the deaths due to operations conducted by the military in various areas in Aceh. This can be seen from the news reported by the local media in Aceh. In addition to the attack carried out by a group of combatants against officials in Aceh during the conflict, they also did individually by slashing or stabbing in crowded public places like the markets. The same pattern happened in the Dutch colonial period.

Referring to the above condition, *Tueng Bila* was often stated by the Free Aceh Movement as a form of retaliation against the Indonesian National Army (TNI)/ Indonesian republic police (Polri). In line with this idea, Siegel (2000: 391) states that:

The failure of Indonesia, like its success, is a question of "the people" metamorphose into "the masses" and into criminals while their spokes persons become themselves criminal. The pattern of violence varies accordingly. The violence in Aceh ini 1999 was mainly produced by the army, and so too was the massacre in Aceh in 1965-66 of all suspected communists. The difference comes with public support – or not – of the army. When I was in Aceh in 1999, there had been about thirty murders known as "avenge killings" (*Tueng Bila*). In most these incidents two or three men on a motorbike rode to a village coffe shop, that someone with a rifle, and rode off. Those killed were often identified as informer for the army. People knew that the army had forced certain villagers to identify their neighbors as members of the GAM on pain of the rape of their sisters, the kidnapping of their fathers, and so on. The government was blamed for this practice, but knowledge of it also supported the possibility that the killer.

COMPLETION OF THE EFFORT OF *TUENG BILA*

Conflict or dispute is not expected by anyone who does interaction, as essentially, interaction is a way for human to survive. Man has his own way of resolving conflicts or disputes. In an organized society, any dispute resolved by the norms of living in society are categorized as either positive or non-legal norms. In anthropological terminology, this is often referred to the term “customs”. One of the cultural communities that adopt rules for conflict resolution is the people of Aceh.

In Acehnese family life, there is actually no negative feeling or sense because it is so contrary to the nature of Islamic law (*hukom ngon agama, lage zat ngon sifeuet*). People understand *Tueng Bila* as the need in order to “defend himself/*bila droe*” in upholding his honor, religion, family dignity, property, and lives for the losses caused by insult/hurt. In relation to “dignity/self-esteem”, the mixture of preventive and repressive values is almost equal in the minds of the people of Aceh. Because the equilibrium factor/balancer called peace is so dominant in public life, it usually becomes the ultimate weapon applied by Aceh elite structure when a dispute arises throughout history (the role of tradition institutions).

The values of peace was set by mutual agreement of several parties, led by the “*Ureueng-ureueng patot/ Ureueng Tuha Adat/ Ulama*”, together with the local authorities in the region (first *uleebalang*, ulama, traditional leaders and other intellectuals) in the form of various compensation. Peace in Aceh is strongly influenced by traditional Islamic teaching, as inspired by the Qur’an, which was introduced through readings since childhood, both at home, and in *meunasah rangkang*; a holy place where Moslem usually worship. Peace means connecting *Silaturrahmi* (bond/ties) which has been devastated, with the intention to be peaceful and in harmony (Badruzzaman Ismail 2008). The principles of peace are described in *narit maja*, as follows,

“*Hai aneuk hai, beik lee ta mupakee*”  
 “*Masalah nyang rayeuk ta peu ubit*  
*Nyang ubit ta peu gadoh*”  
 “*Beu lee saba...*”

(O Son, do not make a lot of fuss  
 Big problem we minimize  
 Small we remove  
 That much patience)

“*Aman nanggroe sare, rakyat makmu rata,*  
*Sifat seunukat sabe meusigo ngon ade raja*”

(Be kind to the good of others Let good *nanggroe*  
 prosperous all  
 If we have to go up if you see should look. Do not lose  
 gold heartache)  
*Ta meu jroeh-jroeh sabee keu droe-droe,*

*Mak got nanggroe makmue beurata*  
*Tajak bak troek, ta eu bak deuh,*  
*Beik rugoe meuh sakeit hatee*

(Be kind to others. Let the country or *nanggroe*  
 becomes prosperous  
 Go until you get the destination,  
 Prove what you want to see if you see in order not to  
 lose the precious  
 gold that can insult our heart)

In Aceh, there is a customary regulation called *suloh*, and it serves to reconcile disputes within the community. If a dispute results in bloodshed, the sanction, in accordance to *suloh*, is imposed on those convicted. Sanctions are usually in the form of dams, the feast by slaughtering chickens, goats, cows or buffaloes, whose number and type depend on the size of the impact of an offense. For minor violations, festivity in dispute resolution through the institution of *suloh*, is sufficient with drinks and food accompanied by yellow sticky rice.

*Suloh*, in different regions of Aceh is called with different names. In South Aceh district, it is called *Takanai*; in North Aceh and Pidie, and West Aceh district, it is called *Sayam* while in Great Besar district, it is called *Dhiet/Diyat*. The scope of the disputes is resolved through the *Suloh* institutions, covering all violations of the norms of the society, which in general includes violations that cause harm, illness or violation of the human rights. The traditional sanctions could result in material losses and mental anguish or the decrease of the dignity of the offender. The essence of *Suloh* in Acehnese is summarized in *Hukom peujroh*, that is to set the best for the party and the people; a settlement is to be reached through the stages considered wise and fair to all parties (Teuku Mohd. Djuned 2000: 106-118). There are two mechanisms in the organization of indigenous peace.

These are:

1. The procession of completion of normative values (customary law), which is done through the Indigenous *Musapat* forums, workshops, traditional leaders/institutions and parties concerning relation to the settlement of disputes/violations of Human Rights (HAM), using the principles of *luka tasipat, darah ta sukat* (compensation/loss). *Buet nyan geit peureulee beu bagah, bek jeuet susah watee iblih teuka* (good deeds should be done soon, in order not to get hard if Satan come).
2. The ceremonial procession through traditional formal settlement in public, with core events: *peusujuk*, to forgive each other, *sayam* (submission compensation), counsel and prayer.

The customs and cultural forms of activity which

are inherent to the traditional institutions of *meulangga*, *diyat*, *sayam* and *suloh* are *peusijuek* and *peumat jaroe*. Both of these institutions play an important role in establishing a sense of fraternity (brotherhood) between the crime offender and the victim's heirs. Acehese people consider that the reconciliation of the conflict through *diyat*, *sayam* and *suloh*, is not completed without being accompanied by *pesijuek* and *peumat jaroe* (Muliadi Kurdi 2005: 157). *Peusijuek* is a custom symbol to apologize to others for mistakes and oversight (Muliadi Kurdi 2005:158). *Peumat jaroe* (shaking hands for mutual forgiveness) is a symbol of rapprochement between the parties in problematic events, with the hope to end the conflict between them. Therefore, in the process of *peumat jaroe*, which is facilitated by parties such as *imeum*, *keuchik* and indigenous, stakeholders say special words (Hisyam M. Syafoeddin 1982: 50) as:

Nyoe kaseb oh no dan bek na dendam le. Nyoe beujeuet keujalinan silaturrahmi, karena nyan ajaran agama geutanyoe. (This problem should be ended here and not be extended anymore. Shaking hands is expected to be the (beginning) of the fabric *silaturrahmi* between you because this is in accordance with our religion).

The *peumat jaroe* ceremony is witnessed by many people who are invited to the event and *peusijuek* festivity. The sequence begins with the customary activities *peusijuek*, *peumat jaroe* and having meals together (feast). The third step is a series of long journey activities to the completion of the peace process in order to resolve the violations in Aceh customary frame. The role of ulama and indigenous stakeholders is so dominant in the pre-event receptions, and *peusijuek* and *peumat jaroe*. But after *peusijuek* and *peumat jaroe*, their roles diminished. It is the families of both parties who will continue to bond a relationship or *silaturrahmi* according to the message on the *peumat jaroe* ceremony.

The continuing form of *Silaturrahmi* typically begins with a family visit to both sides on a special day like the day of *Meugang* (the day of slaughtering of cows or other livestock, the day before the Feast of Ramadhan or fasting), Hari Raya, festivity of *Molod*, and others. The efforts of the offender's family who pleaded guilty are usually welcomed in a good manner as a form of the manifestation of *habblumminannas* (ties/relationship with people) by the families of the victims, in accordance to the message in *peumat jaroe*.

## CONCLUSION

It can be concluded that *Tueng Bila* is a part of the efforts of Acehese people in order to uphold the dignity of the human being. It is a part of the character and identity of Acehese people (see concept of character and identity). To that end, the violence (as a result is

*Tueng Bila*) is appreciated and "blessed" by the culture of the community. *Tueng Bila* is an act that should be accepted and is considered "moralist", fair and is not moral turpitude. In some cases, a person who does not do *Tueng Bila*, will even receive public humiliation. Therefore, *Acehnese* people will take any action in order to do *Tueng Bila*, even if they have to put their lives at stake.

*Tueng Bila* is a dignity and character of Acehese people. It starts from a kind of disgrace and humiliation, from which someone rebuilds his self-esteem and dignity. The defense of self-esteem is often performed with actions that often do not make sense, such as reckless murder, which the Dutch colonial era often referred to as *Moorden Aceh* (Acehnese: *poh kaphe*).

Getting the title or sobriquet as the person who defends the honor of religion is a pride for those who do *Tueng Bila* against the blasphemy of religion. In addition, *Tueng Bila* is also done as an act of retaliation against those who abuse one's self-esteem, such as disruption towards his wife and daughters, which causes the feeling of shame (for male Acehese). In this context, *Tueng Bila* is regarded as an institutionalization of violence which reflects a power monopoly and protection of men towards women, as well as the manifestation of the role and duties of men as heads of households. Meanings that exist in the motives of *Tueng Bila* as mentioned above can be considered as a part of a cultural communication systems. For the doers of the *Tueng Bila* action and the community, *Tueng Bila* is considered as a symbol of behavior and attitude towards the abuse of a family, *kawom*, and community where they live. Those who carry out the action of *Tueng Bila* are considered as having done their social responsibility for their family, *kawom*, and the community, and even the country, both for men and women. However, in order to avoid a sustainable resentment, there is also a cultural mechanism provided to be used as an attempt to end the *Tueng Bila* action.

## ENDNOTE

1. The people of Aceh, in the historical record of the archipelago, was known as one militant ethnic in upholding the principles of self-esteem that they believe to be true in terms of religious and cultural values. The militant character, among others, appear in *hadih maja: Tiwah han jeuet Hanco bahlé* (Succumbing do not let it be destroyed). *Hadih maja* is associated to a condition when the troops were heading to battlefields or while dealing with the enemy. Cheers and applause should not be loosened. Heroic songs of the dimensions of jihad should be echoed. Therefore, morale is one of the determinants of victory, in addition to the number of troops, weapons, battle tactics, and combat



management. What does it mean if abundant weapon was held by the coward? The importance of the fighting spirit of Acehese was also realized by the French statesman General Napoleon Bonaparte who once said that "In this world there are only two forces, namely the sword and the soul, but the soul where fleshly will eventually defeat the sword" (Mohd Harun 2008: 19).

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- Agus Budi Wibowo  
Cultural Preservation Hall Banda Aceh  
Tuwanku Hasyim Banta Muda Roads No. 17  
Banda Aceh- Aceh province  
E-mail: agusalif@yahoo.com

Received: 10 July 2013

Accepted: 21 July 2013

