

Contemporary Acehese Cultural Prohibitions and the Practice of Mystical Threats

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Abstract. This article examines the cultural norms and customs of the Acehese by analysing their traditional oral prohibitions, or *haba ureueng tuha*. In Aceh, cultural prohibitions are used to indirectly teach children cultural norms and manners. These prohibitions are typically followed by threats of misfortune or supernatural warnings. Because few studies of Acehese cultural prohibitions exist in the literature, this article reports specifically on the role of mystical threats in some Acehese prohibitions. By conducting interviews with 100 informants, 19 prohibitions containing mystical threats were collected. These threats were further categorised into four groups: black magic, evil spirits, ghouls and sunset-related prohibitions. Mystical threats were traditionally used to draw attention to forbidden behaviour. However, the use of mystical threats is changing; as education levels rise and the use of communication technologies increases, the basis for mystical threats is being challenged. This research found that although most modern Acehese people do not strictly believe the mystical threats attached to the prohibitions, these prohibitions are still used to teach people how to behave virtuously and in accordance with their beliefs and traditions.

Keywords and phrases: Acehese, cultural prohibitions, mystical threats, beliefs, traditional practices

Introduction

Societies have various ways of managing social life, including the provision of warnings (Brown 1963). Such warnings are generally transferred through verbal messages that represent the socio-cultural experiences of the speakers and reflect their way of thinking and acting (Athailah et al. 1984). These warnings are present in nearly all societies and have been observed in the social life of China (see Chu 2009; Wan Seng 1994), Thailand (see Supavimolpum 1995), Malaysia (see A. Aziz and Wan Ramli 1995), India (see Rajantheran and Manimaran 1994) and Zimbabwe (see Chigidi 2009; Masaka and Chemhuru 2011), among others. Similarly, in Aceh, Indonesia, the ancestors of the contemporary Acehese created warnings that produced a sense of community identity. These warnings arose as norms and values were maintained and observed by community

members. They provided a recognised and respected framework for building a unified society (Ishak, Tatiek and Ahmad 1986).

Over time, important norms and values are solidified and maintained through proverbs, songs, poetry, prose and even folklore (Yusuf 2002). Some of these cultural messages are arranged into short sentences that contain an abundance of connotative meaning (Ishak, Tatiek and Ahmad 1986) and are known as traditional sayings. These sayings are transmitted through verbal language and remind Acehnese people to be cautious in their actions. The sayings acknowledge that life's challenges are not always the result people and their beliefs but also arise from nature (Athailah et al. 1984). Among these sayings, *pantang* (prohibitions, bans or taboos) are used to identify forbidden actions. These actions are forbidden to prevent *paloe* (something that can happen to someone without logical reason and cannot be circumvented) (Alamsyah et al. 1990), *bala* (tragedy) or *papa* (poverty). Because few studies of Acehnese cultural prohibitions exist, this article reports on the mystical threats associated with these prohibitions. Coker and Coker (2009) suggest that the oral arts are a resource for socio-cultural empowerment. Gripaldo (2008) also notes that continued existence in a democratic world requires understanding and respect for the multiple religions and forms of spirituality across cultures. Therefore, this study contributes to the understanding of several elements of Acehnese beliefs and traditions.

Religion and Customs in Aceh

Aceh is located at the northern tip of Sumatera in Indonesia. This province is predominantly Muslim (approximately 99%, as reported by Wagener in 2006). Islam arrived in Aceh in the early 800s when the first Islamic sultanate, known as Perlak (840–1292), was established in East Aceh (Ajidar 2004). As Muslims, Acehnese people are monotheistic, believing in only one God, Allah. They believe that Allah also created supernatural creatures that cannot be seen by human beings, such as Jinn, Satan and devils created from fire. The Jinn are classified into two groups: the good and the bad. The good Jinn help and protect human beings from the bad deeds of other spirits, whereas the bad Jinn exist to mislead humans and cause them to commit evil actions.

The implementation of Islamic law, or *shari'ah*, is not new in Aceh. The *Kifayatut Thulab*, written by Syech Abdur Rauf As-Singkili in the Malay language, indicates that the *shari'ah* has been written in the laws of the Acehnese Sultanate of Darussalam since the 16th century (Rajagukguk 2006). At the end of the 19th century, the Sultanate began to collapse as the Dutch began to colonise Indonesia. The Dutch conquered most of Indonesia, which came to be known as the Dutch East Indies. During World War II, the Japanese entered and occupied

Aceh from 1942–1945. Aceh supported and helped Indonesia gain its independence (from the Japanese and the Dutch) on 17 August 1945. In 1950, Aceh became a province of Indonesia (Reid 2005). In 1959, it was given the status of Special Territory (*Daerah Istimewa*) within the Unitary State of Indonesia. Following prolonged conflict and secessionist challenges spanning 30 years, Aceh was given special autonomy by the Indonesian Government in 2001 (see McGibbon 2004). Upon achieving this status, the province began to establish a legal apparatus for implementing *shari'ah* for Muslims (Aspinall 2007). *Shari'ah* had not been fully imposed by the government of Aceh because there was no form of regulation in place at the local level until the province was given special status, *Keistimewaan Aceh* (Aceh's Specialness), in 1999. In Aceh, the field of religious life takes "the form of the implementation of Islamic *Shariah* for its adherents in social life" (Aspinall 2007, 3). *Shari'ah* was further enforced in 2001 by establishing *qanun* (regional regulations) on *peradilan syariat Islam* (*shari'ah* courts), *aqidah dan ibadah* (faith and worship), *khamar* (sale and consumption of alcohol), *maisir* (gambling) and *khalwat* (illicit relations between men and women) (for more details, see Aspinall 2007; Rajagukguk 2006). Currently, the local government and the *ulama* (Muslim scholars trained in Islam and Islamic law) work together because their roles are fundamental for the development of the province (Jalil 2007).

In Aceh, *hukum adat*, or customary law, is applied and should not contradict *shari'ah*. The Acehese Sultan Iskandar Muda, who ruled the kingdom from 1607–1636 (Feener 2011, 7), based his decree on the following principle: *Adat ngon hukôm, h'an jeuet crée lagèe zaat ngon sifeut* (the law and culture cannot be separated, like essence and its manifestation) (Nyakpa and Sufi 2000, 13). Today, the regional government regulations that govern the organisation of customary life also state that "*Adat* law, the customs and traditions that are still applicable, live and develop in the society of Aceh, [and] insofar as they are not contradictory to syariat Islam, must be preserved" (Rajagukguk 2006, 5). This statement indicates that all rules of law, customs and *reusam* (habits or traditions of a certain group/village) that complement *shari'ah* are permissible. Zada (2012) conducted a review of the influence of Acehese customs on the implementation of Islamic law in Aceh from 1514–1903. Zada noted that although the laws were primarily based on Islam, it was inevitable that customs practiced in society also influenced those laws. This was apparent in the laws governing murder, theft, alcohol and adultery charges, the imposed sanctions for which were mixed with customary law. Zada's study concludes that social dynamics played a significant role in the implementation of *shari'ah* during that period.

Acehnese Cultural Prohibitions

Aceh has a rich cultural tradition that is reflected in its language, food, art, dance and customs. Some acts are culturally forbidden in Acehnese society because traditional customs or beliefs deem them immoral or inappropriate. Some of these prohibitions are similar to those found in other ethnic groups in Indonesia. For example, some common Acehnese prohibitions include interdictions against sitting on pillows, cutting nails at night, sewing clothes directly on the body and the speaking of harsh words or viewing of revolting things or scenes by pregnant women. These taboos are also found in Desa Bukit Batu, Bengkalis Regency in the province of Riau (Suri, Eddison and Zahirman 2013), which is approximately 1,176 km from Aceh. During pregnancy, Acehnese women are subject to specific prohibitions. For example it is forbidden for pregnant women to slaughter animals, eat durian and be outside at sunset. These prohibitions are also found in Mojolaban, Sukoharjo Regency in the province of Java (Nugroho 2010). Such similarities may be due to migration, intermarriage and shared cultural and linguistic influences. Ethnic groups have been moving and intermixing since the nation was founded. In addition, some groups may have developed from common origins and may share history, culture, language, experiences and values (Baumann 2004; Ratcliffe 2010).

C. Snouck Hurgronje wrote one of the first books on the Acehnese people (1906a; 1906b). Entitled *Atjehsche taalstudiën* (The Acehnese [in two volumes]), it was translated into English by A. W. S. O'Sullivan. Hurgronje provides a detailed exploration of the lives, belief systems and culture of the Acehnese. He describes the prohibitions that were practised during the time of his research, in particular those related to religion and superstition, but also prohibitions related to pregnancy and childbirth and activities to be avoided during certain days in the Acehnese seasonal calendar. More recently, Hoesin (1970), in his book *Adat Atjeh* (Acehnese Customs), also mentions several Acehnese prohibitions, including those affecting pregnant women, married individuals, circumcision for young boys, funerals and fisheries and specific prohibitions for sunset, which are also found in Hurgronje (1906a; 1906b).

In *Pola Pengasuhan Anak Secara Tradisional Propinsi Daerah Istimewa Aceh* (Traditional Parenting in the Province of Daerah Istimewa Aceh), Alamsyah et al. (1990) noted that Acehnese children are taught manners and ethical values based on customary civilities from as young as 6–7 years old (Alamsyah et al. 1990, 67). Customary prohibitions are also taught to children, including prohibitions against touching another's head, kicking another person, hitting another with a *lidi* (a stick made from the palm leaf rib), pointing to something with one's foot, sitting on the stairs early in the morning with a blanket wrapped around the body, stepping on another person's hat or *kupiah* (a traditional hat worn by men),

stepping over a sleeping person and sweeping the floor at sunset. Alamsyah particularly noted that children were prohibited from playing outside during sunset or *Maghrib* (a prayer made just after sunset and one of five obligatory daily prayers performed by Muslims) because of the belief that a ghost would kidnap the child. Girls are also forbidden to sit in front of a door with their hair loose.

Furthermore, Hurgronje (1906b) observed that Acehnese culture is especially replete in proverbs and other sayings. One of the examples he mentioned was "*a mosque with two lights*" which refers to two scholars of the law, each of whom wishes to be the ruling authority (Hurgronje 1906b, 67). Other wise sayings are found in *hiem* (riddles), prose, *haba* (stories), *hadih maja* (tales), fables, *pantôn* (rhyme), *ratéb* (prayers), *sanja'* (poems) and *hikayat* (sagas) (Hurgronje 1906b). Athailah et al. (1984) compiled a book on Acehnese traditional sayings entitled *Ungkapan Tradisional sebagai Sumber Informasi Kebudayaan Daerah Istimewa Aceh* (Traditional Sayings as a Resource of Information on the Culture of Daerah Istimewa Aceh). These sayings resemble proverbs or axiomatic expressions that state a general truth or give advice, such as "*asèe blang nyang pajôh jagông, asèe gampông nyang keunong geulawa*" (the field dog ate the corn, but the village dog got thrown a stick) (Athailah et al. 1984, 17). This expression means that a guilty person should be punished, but sometimes when the situation is confusing, an innocent person may pay for the crime. Therefore, one must always be careful when assigning blame.

Interestingly, Acehnese cultural prohibitions take a different form than traditional sayings even though both provide advice and warnings to community members. Cultural prohibitions usually begin with the word *h'an jeuet* (don't) and end with a threat, such as "*h'an jeuet duek di ateueh bantai, eunteuk meutumuet punggông*" (don't sit on pillows or you will get a carbuncle on your buttocks). Some sayings begin with the term *bèk* (don't), whose meaning is sharper and harsher than *h'an jeuet*. Whoever defies a prohibition breaks socially accepted norms and the Acehnese believe that those who defy the prohibitions will be punished by God or even by mystical spirits. Brown (1963) confirms that any culture that believes in the supernatural tries to avoid performing any actions that may enrage evil spirits. The Acehnese believe that if evil spirits become angry, they will appear and cause harm.

Cultural prohibitions are a part of the *hadih maja* (Yusuf 2005), which is the collection of tales or traditions maintained and retold by grandmothers or female ancestors. Such tales represent various traditions preserved by the society's elders and supplement popular custom and superstition (Hurgronje 1906b). This tradition is similar to that of the Minang people in Padang, Indonesia. In Minang society, women perform a core role as mediators of culture (Fandri 2012).

Acehnese cultural prohibitions are also known as *haba ureueng tuha* (the old peoples' sayings). These prohibitions influence the ways the Acehnese approach and solve common problems (Yusuf 2002). Prohibitions range from those closely related to spirit beings to those associated with societal approval and include taboos placed on land or other possessions of a particular individual or group. Generally, the community's elders, typically women, transmit these prohibitions to the younger generation through ceremonies or through acts of daily life. Prohibitions may be transmitted by *adat*, the customary tradition established by the ancestors. *Adat* is particularly important for significant occasions such as weddings, a child's first step, circumcision ceremonies and other events. Prohibitions are also conventionally followed by threats.

Threats in Acehnese Cultural Prohibitions

Cultural prohibition is a traditional method used to indirectly teach children life lessons. Prohibitions guide everyday life and provide a framework through which to understand the world. As in Aceh, Shona taboos (in Zimbabwe) also use threats to communicate acceptable behavioural qualities to community members (Chigidi 2009; Masaka and Chemhuru 2011). These threats are strong enough to frighten children into obeying the prohibitions. Acehnese prohibitions directed to children include this same element of fear. For example, children are commonly told, "if you do not listen, the ghost or Jinn will get you".

Threats made to young girls are specifically related to marriage: "if you do not listen, you will not get a husband". As in many societies, married life is important to Acehnese people. It is considered an essential element of a happy life and provides a way for the society to show respect for and to endorse and protect a husband and wife's union. If a woman reaches a certain age and still does not have any suitors, even contemporary Acehnese may still perform *böh malang* (a ritual for removing bad luck) because it is believed that something unlucky is causing her to stay single. In *böh malang*, something that belongs to the woman, such as a dress, is thrown into a river. Flowers, especially the fragrant ones, may also be used. These are placed in the corners of her house with the hope that the scent will attract a man who will propose marriage to the *malang* (unlucky) one. Hurgronje (1906a) described an earlier *böh malang* practice that was more extreme. However, informants educated in Islam consider the *böh malang* ritual to be *syirik*, an act of believing in more than one God and that such practices must be avoided by Muslims because idolatry is the most serious sin. Those who oppose this ritual suggest that a woman without a suitor should pray diligently to Allah for a husband and that this alone can resolve her problem.

Prohibitions for pregnant women are generally followed by threats related to labour: "if you do not listen, you will have trouble delivering your baby". One

participant, RA (75, farmer, Meunasah Meunjee, Pidie Regency)¹, explained that death during labour was previously common because no sophisticated medical tools were available. Therefore, expectant mothers were fearful of increasing their risk during childbirth. Threats made to men are related to the struggle to sustain life, such as "if you do not listen, you will be poor or get misfortune". Men in Acehese society are generally expected to be the primary providers for their families and it is considered shameful if the husband is unable to provide for his family's daily needs.

Tajul Muluk

The elderly informants (60 years and older, see Appendix) said that they learnt Acehese cultural prohibitions as teenagers while studying at the traditional boarding schools in their villages (as reported by FT [71, farmer, Geuleumpang Minyeuk, Pidie Regency], MYI [90, retired military, Amut, Pidie Regency], RA [75, farmer, Meunasah Meunjee, Pidie Regency] and SR [65, tailor, Meunasah Capa, Bireuen Regency]). These informants mentioned 23 prohibitions known as *Pusaka Papa* (actions that can bring someone into poverty or danger). These prohibitions can be found in the great book, *Tajul Muluk*, which means "the Royal Crown of Jewels" in Arabic. This book was written for Malay royals in *Jawi* (an Arabic alphabet for writing the Malay language) by Sheikh Abbas of Aceh (Sia 2008). The texts that comprise the *Tajul Muluk* were compiled in 1266 Hijriah of the Islamic calendar (1849) at the request of the Acehese Sultan Mansur Billah Syah Bin al-Sultan Jauhar al-Alim Syah (Abdul Hayei 2011). Hurgronje (1906a, 124) records that "among the principal court officials in the period of prosperity of the sultanate (of Aceh) there was a royal secretary with the title *Keureukön Katibulmuluk*". He continues, "the importance and extent of such correspondence dwindled with the decay of the court" (Hurgronje 1906a, 124). This indicates that, at the time, the contents of the *Tajul Muluk* were important in Acehese cultural practice because they were kept by the order of the Sultan. Furthermore, Mohd Koharuddin (2003) mentions that the great book contained 500 pages and discussed 147 topics. Among the matters discussed were house-building customs, house-height rules, holistic astrology, herbal and traditional medicines, interpretation of dreams and even how to address black magic (Abdul Hayei 2011; Mohd Koharuddin 2003; Skeat 1965). Nevertheless, the informants had never seen the great book; the *Pusaka Papa* were passed down to them orally by their teachers. One participant, FT, further noted that these prohibitions were not followed by threats, as the prohibitions transmitted orally to the younger generation were. She remarked, "*meunyoe ta peubuet nyan, mandum hana rôh. Soe-soe yang hana patéh keu pantang nyan, eunteuk udép jih papa atau meuteumèe bala*" (If we follow the prohibitions, they are all not good. Whoever does not follow these prohibitions, their wealth will decrease or their life will be in danger).

To collect the rest of the prohibitions, we attempted to locate a copy of the *Tajul Muluk* in the villages in which the informants resided (Meunasah Meunjee and Amut in Pidie Regency and Meunasah Capa in Bireuen Regency). However, none of the elders, including teachers at the traditional boarding schools and the *Teungku Imum* (the male leader in a mosque who leads the recitation of prayers) had ever seen a copy. They claimed, however, that they had heard of it, saying that the name of the book had been mentioned by their previous teachers, who had passed down the content about herbal medicines. Unfortunately, due to their old age, the informants remembered only eight of the 23 prohibitions:

1. *Rhah laju pingan dak pih ka malam* (wash the dishes even though it is getting dark outside).
2. *H'an jeuet sampôh brôh malam-malam* (don't sweep the floor at night).
3. *H'an jeuet sugôt ôk ngon sugôt patah* (don't comb your hair with a broken comb).
4. *H'an jeuet koh ukèè di malam uroe* (don't cut your nails at night).
5. *H'an jeuet sugôt ôk bak babah pintô* (don't comb your hair in front of the doorway).
6. *H'an jeuet cop bajèè bak badan* (don't sew clothes while they are on your body).
7. *H'an jeuet manoe teulhôn* (don't bathe naked).
8. *H'an jeuet duek bak reunyeuen* (don't sit on the stairs).

On 10 October 2009, hundreds of people in Indonesia, including religious leaders from Desa Karang Gayam, in Sampang, Madura, East Java, protested against the contents of the *Tajul Muluk* (Embassy of the United States Jakarta 2010). The protestors claimed that the content of the book blasphemes Islam and contradicts the holy book, Qur'an. No further action was taken after this protest, even after a report was published by the embassy in 2010. MA (65, businesswoman, Meureudu, Pidie Jaya Regency) mentioned that this book is banned in Malaysia. Her statement is substantiated by articles published in various Malaysian newspapers in 2007, including *The Star Online* (2007), which reported that seven books were banned by The Internal Security Ministry, among them the *Tajul Muluk*. The news further stated that "the books could create confusion and anxiety among Muslims and harm public peace if their publications were allowed to continue" (*The Star Online*, 13 November 2007). MA explained that the ban may have been instated because the *Tajul Muluk* discusses black magic, which is forbidden by the teachings of Islam.

The Study and Methodology

This study explored Acehese beliefs and traditions, specifically Acehese cultural prohibitions that include mystical threats and the factors that influence current belief in these threats. The study is anthropological, using in-depth interviews and direct observation to collect data (Howard 1989). The research is designed to answer three research questions (RQs):

1. What are the Acehese cultural prohibitions associated with mystical threats?
2. What are the typical elements of these threats?
3. To what extent do the research participants believe in these threats and why?

To answer the RQs, informal interviews were conducted with 100 participants between the ages of 14 and 90. These informants were approached and chosen based on their willingness to participate and provide information. Because the participants did not give consent to be recorded, extensive note-taking was used to document each interview. The participants were classified as either urban or rural based on government data; 41 informants were from urban areas and 59 informants were from rural areas. Interviews were conducted in various locations (at the interviewers' homes, informants' homes and other locations) in Banda Aceh. Informants from outside of Banda Aceh were also interviewed in the city while visiting friends and family members. A description of participant's education levels is shown in Table 1 (for a more detailed description, see the Appendix).

Table 1. Informants' education levels (N = 100)

Areas	Urban			Rural			Total
	Elementary	Junior high to high school	Undergraduate to doctoral studies	Elementary	Junior high to high school	Undergraduate to doctoral studies	
Male	1	4	11	5	5	16	42
Female	3	10	12	9	12	12	58
Total	4	14	23	14	17	28	100

Participants were asked basic questions related to the RQs: "Do you know any Acehese cultural prohibitions that are associated with mystical threats?", "What are the elements of those threats?" and "Do you still believe in them and why?". More detailed questions were asked to elicit information about the prohibitions

and their associated threats. Each prohibition mentioned by the informants was descriptively analysed to determine the community members' beliefs about these mystical threats.

Findings

A total of 194 cultural prohibitions were collected from the informal interviews. These prohibitions either implicitly or explicitly transmit educational ethics, morals, social norms and behavioural values. Informants between the ages of 50 and 90 (31 informants) knew the most about the prohibitions, suggesting that community members accumulate knowledge about prohibitions over time. Gender also played an important role in the interviews: women were able to provide more information about prohibitions than men. This result accords with Hurgronje's (1906a) observation that *hadih maja* is primarily preserved by women. Based on our observations, women are more involved in household matters and the raising of children and prohibitions are therefore maintained by mothers to teach children and guide their everyday behaviour.

Nineteen cultural prohibitions accompanied by mystical threats were identified. The participants' responses to the second question were categorised into four groups: black magic, evil spirits, ghouls and sunset-related prohibitions. These categories are discussed in the following sections.

Black magic

Two participants – FT (71, farmer, Geuleumpang Minyeuk, Pidie Regency) and MYI (90, retired military, Amut, Pidie Regency) – reported that their children no longer believed in the threats that accompanied the prohibitions. Their children would say, "*panèe na nyan*" (they are not true). However, these two participants stated that cultural prohibitions were once vital to Acehnese society and were abided by every community member. In the past, those who did not abide by the prohibitions were called *hana adat* (one without a tradition) and were not respected by their fellow villagers. FT claimed that she still believed in the threats because when she was younger, she had seen people suffer the consequences of disobeying the prohibitions. She also added that during her youth, people sought help from indigenous medical practitioners. There are three main types of these practitioners in Aceh. The first, *tabib*, treat the sick using medicines made from herbs or other natural materials found in the environment. The second, *rukayah*, treat the sick through *rukayah shari'ah*, the practice of reciting verses from the Qur'an and saying prayers to Allah the Almighty for protection. Both are accepted by Acehnese society. The third, *dukôn*, treat the sick using black magic or witchcraft (spell incantations, charms, etc.). They are not accepted by Acehnese society because their acts are deemed *syirik*.

Occasionally, the threats associated with the prohibitions are related to black magic. Currently, black magic is still practiced by *dukôn* in both urban and rural areas, a fact confirmed by both young and old participants. One such participant was MH (19, student, Deyah Teumanah, Pidie Regency), who was from a small village near a mountain in the province. MH explained that there were still people in her village who used black magic to *peukeunong* or *bôh* (to put black magic inside a person's body) their rivals or others whom they envied. Such people were called *ureueng-ureueng hana iman* (people without faith) by older informants. We were told that *peukeunong* or *bôh* could be done in two ways: by *niat* (intention), which involves saying the name of the intended person as part of a spell and casting the spell on them, or by *di tanom* (plantation), which involves obtaining something (a picture, old clothes, pins, etc.) owned by the intended person, casting a spell on it and planting it in the lawn of the intended person's house or in another village far from their residence. Targets of *niat* can be cured, but targets of *di tanom* are difficult to cure. *Di peukeunong* or *di bôh* victims do not always show symptoms. *Di tanom* victims can display symptoms such as sickness, a sudden loss of speech, vacant expressions, apparent deafness, or violent tremors; medical doctors cannot cure them. These symptoms can affect them for the rest of their lives until the place of the *di tanom* is found and the charm removed and destroyed. MAR (55, teacher, Meunasah Meunjee, Pidie Regency) claimed that she has been a victim of *peukeunong* since the age of 19 and has suffered intermittently for the last 30 years. Those affected can only be cured if they are brought to another *dukôn* and have the spell removed from their body or from the *di tanom* location. Because some believe that only Allah destroys evil, victims may also be brought to a *Teungku* (religious teacher), who cures them by reciting verses from the Qur'an. To prevent evil acts from being committed by *dukôn* and by community members, respect towards others is commended and clashes or arguments among people in Acehnese society are usually settled through the kinship system.

MK (17, student, Meunasah Capa, Bireuen Regency) imparted a prohibition related to black magic. She claimed that she had witnessed a quarrel between her neighbours that was not quickly resolved. One woman, who was pregnant at the time, quarrelled with her neighbour, who was also her friend. The two were shouting so loudly that other neighbours came over to stop them. The pregnant woman shouted "*Bue!*" (monkey) at her friend, but the friend did not reply and slammed the door as she entered her house. An elderly lady reminded the pregnant woman softly: (1) *Ureueng mumèe h'an jeuet kheun keu gop meuhi binatang, eunteuk aneuk nyang lahée meuhi binatang nyan* (a pregnant woman cannot call other people by animal names or the baby that is born will look like that animal).

MK said that when the pregnant woman delivered her baby a few months later, the baby's face resembled that of a monkey. The other neighbours reminded her about her quarrel and that she had called her friend a monkey. MK said the baby's resemblance to a monkey disappeared when he was three months old and he slowly began to resemble his parents. FT (71, farmer, Geuleumpang Minyeuk, Pidie Regency) reported a similar case that she believed was related to black magic. She retold a story from her girlhood in which a pregnant woman in her village also quarrelled with another woman. During the dispute, the pregnant woman told the other woman, "*kah lagèe bui*" (you are like a pig). Villagers said that the woman whose feelings were hurt sought revenge by consulting a *dukôn* to *peukeunong* the pregnant woman. When the woman's baby was born, the baby's face resembled that of a pig. To cure the baby, the grandmother visited another *dukôn*. She was asked by the *dukôn* to *meunajat* (make a vow) that if the baby got better, she would *peuleuh kaoy* (deliver her vow) at a *jeurat keuramat* (tomb of a saint) in nearby village. When the baby got better, she fulfilled her vow immediately by sending a plate of yellow glutinous rice with sweetened grated coconut, a plate of spicy cooked beef meat and duck to thank the 'spirit' of the sacred tomb for curing her grandchild.

While discussing the *peuleuh kaoy* ritual, AM (60, teacher, Meunasah Meunjee, Pidie Regency) stated that some people still participate in such practices to fulfil vows made to pass exams, increase business profits, conceive a child, etc. However, few people *peuleuh kaoy* at the tombs of sacred saints because it is thought to be *syirik*. When needed, many *peuleuh kaoy* in other ways, such as by holding a feast for orphans in their neighbourhood, reciting the whole Qur'an within a promised time, or donating money to build a mosque. However, SF (26, housewife, Meunasah Campli, Pidie Regency) claimed that residents of rural villages continue to practice the traditions of their ancestors by performing *peuleuh kaoy* at the tombs of saints.

It is also possible to unintentionally cast a spell. This is called *meurampöt* (the act of being slightly touched by a devil). *Dukôn* sometimes keep evil Jinns to help them with their black magic. When they are unable to feed their Jinns, some are freed and wander hungrily through the village. While wandering around, they may strike anyone with a weak body or soul. The victim first gets a headache, then a high fever. They begin to shake violently and sometimes career into walls and seriously injure themselves. *Meurampöt* victims can be cured but if left untreated may die. This occurs when a Jinn is extremely strong, wild and hungry; it can break and destroy a person's body from the inside. Informants from rural areas noted that they did not like to go out late at night because this is when *meurampöt* typically happens. Because traditional Acehnese bathrooms are situated outside of the house and have open roofs, the Acehnese do not bathe at night to protect themselves from *meurampöt*.



Figure 1. A *mon* is a traditional well bathroom behind a house; it is surrounded by *palang mon* made from aligned coconut leaves or zinc

MH (19, student, Deyah Teumanah, Pidie Regency) was one of several participants who said that evil Jinns are fond of naked people or those wearing little clothing or exposing the private parts of their body in an open area. People bathing at night in an open-roofed bathroom are therefore believed to be extremely vulnerable to these evil beings. A well-known prohibition about such activities is (2) *H'an jeuet manoe malam-malam, euntreuk di-cok lé Jén* (don't bathe at night or Jinn will get you).

Further discussion and consultation with two lecturers from the Faculty of Law, Syiah Kuala University revealed that, unfortunately, there is no specific *qanun* for *dukôn* practicing black magic. The practice is not acceptable and is considered a sin in Islam; however, cases are typically resolved by the community rather than a court. For example, in 2011, a 70-year-old man from Desa Batee Timoh was accused of being a *dukôn*. This man's house was burnt and destroyed by local villagers and he and his family were exiled from the village. In more extreme cases, those accused of being a *dukôn* have been killed by villagers. In 2009, a 72-year-old man in Desa Juli Keudee Dua and a 50-year-old man in Lheue Barat suffered this fate (Suryadi 2011). These three cases occurred in the Bireuen Regency, but other cases have occurred in other regencies in Aceh.

IH (40, lecturer, Banda Aceh) suggested that it is difficult to prove *dukôn* charges because the acts or objects/spirits of their craft are invisible to others and their work is conducted in discrete or isolated locations. He said that perhaps the only

way to prove that someone is a *dukôn* is if one of their clients confesses to the public that he or she has visited a *dukôn* and provides unassailable evidence by recording their meeting. However, this rarely occurs because black magic is forbidden by Islam and no Muslim in Aceh would publicly proclaim themselves a *kaphé* (unbeliever of Allah) (Nyakpa and Sufi 2000), even if they have consulted black magic. Therefore, as happened in Desa Batee Timoh, the accused was arrested but later released because the police were unable to find evidence that he was a *dukôn*. Two weeks after his release, the villagers burnt his house and his son's house next door because several villagers were apparently affected by black magic after he returned home (Suryadi 2011).

Evil spirits

Because black magic is frequently related to evil spirits, most of the prohibitions collected were also followed by threats that mentioned such beings. These spirits are known to be unethical; therefore, when an individual acts like one, he is believed to have invited the devil to be his "friend". For example, one prohibition admonishes, (3) *H'an jeuet peugah haba meunyoe teungoh pajôh bu, euntreuk di ditamong Jén rot babah* (don't talk while you eat or Jinn will enter your mouth). Evil Jinns are also believed to be fond of filth. Therefore, unhygienic individuals may attract Jinns: (4) *H'an jeuet tamong rumoh ngon gaki nyang kuto, euntreuk di seutöt lé Jén u dalam* (don't enter the house with dirty feet, or Jinn will follow you inside).

MYI (90, retired military, Amut, Pidie Regency) stated that these prohibitions explain why each traditional Acehnese house has a small, low well near the entrance stairs. Anyone desiring to enter the house must first wash and clean their feet.

Weak human beings are more vulnerable to these spirits; therefore, those who are sick and newborns require extra protection. Babies are believed to be frail and unable to protect themselves from devils. This belief is reflected in the following prohibition: (5) *H'an jeuet ta-hôi nan göt-göt keu anuek manyak, euntreuk di jak Jén* (don't call babies by beautiful or good titles or Jinn will come).

Prohibition (5) suggests that, to prevent newborns from being pestered by mischievous elements such as Jinns and ghosts, they should not be called by beautiful or good titles (*manèh*). Such titles include words such as beautiful, handsome, cute, funny, smart and sweet, etc. Instead, the baby should be referred to by adjectives such as ugly, dull, tiresome, thin, horrible, graceless, etc. to repel the devils from the baby. For example, if a mother wants to praise her baby, she should not say, "Oh, Jannah, you are such a pretty baby!". Instead, the mother should say, "Oh, Jannah, you are such an ugly baby". Some Acehnese still place

small, sharp objects under a baby's bed, such as small scissors or a knife, in compliance with the belief that sharp metal objects such as silver implements repel evil spirits.

Jinns are also believed to occupy certain places and things, such as large, old trees, unoccupied old houses, cemeteries and jungles. The following prohibition reflects this belief: (6) *H'an jeuet pula bak kambôja di keu rumoh, eunteuk di duek Jén* (don't plant a frangipani tree in front of the house or it will be haunted by Jinn).

FT (71, farmer, Geuleumpang Minyeuk, Pidie Regency) said that the Acehese once believed that if a frangipani tree was planted in front of a house, it made the house look like a church. Aceh was occupied by Dutch Christians from 1873–1942 (Mitrasing 2011) and the churches built in Aceh during this period were surrounded by frangipani trees. The Acehese, however, usually planted these trees in cemeteries at one end of each headstone and planting frangipani trees on one's front lawn was avoided in most villages. However, this prohibition is no longer observed by those residing in cities such as Banda Aceh, where frangipani trees with colourful flowers of white, yellow and pink can be seen decorating the front lawns of houses, buildings and public parks.

Another popular prohibition associated with the homes of Jinns is (7) *H'an jeuet koh bak kayèe raya beurangkaho, eunteuk beungèh ureueng po jih* (don't cut down big trees carelessly, or the "owner" will get angry). A custom still practiced today when a person wants to cut down a tree or rebuild an old house is that they must first ask permission from its spiritual "owner". These spirits are asked to move to another place before their home is destroyed. This process is called *peusijuek*, which is translated as a customary "cooling" (Hurgronje 1906a, 43). It is performed by sprinkling water on the object thought to house the spirit to repel any evil powers believed to be "hot" by the Acehese (e.g., evil spirits, an angry person, etc.). Several leaves are tied together, such as betel-nut stalks or wheat stalks. Then, water mixed with a few drops of citrus fruit juice and flowers (such as jasmine, orchid, ylang-ylang, etc.) are cut into small pieces and placed in a small bowl with a handful of rice husks. The person planning to cut down the tree or demolish the old house uses the tied leaves to sprinkle the water and throws the rice husks around the object between three and seven times. Sometimes, *beuleukat*, yellow or white gelatinous rice eaten with sweetened, ground and cooked coconut is placed on a different tray to supplement *peusijuek* ceremonies. AS (57, farmer, Tanoh Abee, Aceh Besar Regency) remarked that during the time of her grandparents (approximately the 1950s), the gelatinous rice was presented to the spiritual "owner" of the tree. Because many Acehese are more wary of committing Islamic *syirik*, the food is now typically eaten by those conducting the ceremony and shared with poor orphans in the village. *Peusijuek*

is supposed to cool the anger of the inhabitants of the tree, whether "spirits" or animals and mitigate their anger towards the humans preparing to demolish their homes.

The *peusijuek* blessing accompanies many ceremonies performed by the Acehnese. For example, when a husband and wife quarrel and their disagreement causes the husband to leave the house or to consider divorce, when they decide to reconcile, their parents or guardians usually conduct *peusijuek* for them before they resume their lives together in the same house. This ceremony is also conducted when men quarrel but then reach an agreement or make peace. Acehnese call this *peusijuek darah gob* (cooling the blood of others) (Hurgronje 1906a, 78). *Peusijuek* is also conducted at weddings, during the seven months of pregnancy called *intat bu* for expectant mothers, when babies are born (*akikah*), when someone moves into a new house (Hurgronje 1906a) and at opening ceremonies of new businesses, offices and so on. Hurgronje (1906a, 306) adds, "A boy who has completed the recitation of the Qur'an is 'cooled' in the same way by his guru or teacher. So too, one who has just returned from a long journey, or been saved from shipwreck, or fallen into the water and narrowly escaped drowning, or a child which has fallen from the steps of the house, etc., is 'cooled' by an old woman of the family".



Figure 2. A tray of *peusijuek* offerings, which includes a bowl of water and flowers, a bowl of flowers, a bowl of rice husks and a small bundle of tied leaves. This tray has been prepared for an Acehnese wedding ceremony (photo courtesy of Ferryzal and Naylina Tarmizi).

We were told by the older informants (60 years and older) that *peusijuek* has been practised by the Acehese since before Islam was introduced in the early 800s and is presumably influenced by Hindu traditions. However, with the arrival of Islam, recitation of verses from the Qur'an was added to make the ceremony more Islamic. This custom has been preserved by the Acehese and is currently practiced during special ceremonies performed by high-ranking officials, ministers, governors, heads of regencies and even by highly respected *ulamas*.

Ghouls

A number of feared ghouls are also believed to exist in Aceh. Using the information supplied by the participants, we identified seven well-known ghouls: *Geunt'euet* (also mentioned by Hurgronje 1906b), *Burông* (also mentioned by Hurgronje 1906b and Hoesin 1970), *Burông Tujôh*, *Baluem Bidi*, *Ma'op*, *Hantu Blawu* and *Beuno*. These ghosts are sometimes mentioned in the threats for several prohibitions. They are known to have malicious intent towards humans and to reside in certain places.

Geunt'euet is an extremely strong ghost that can carry or lift objects of any size into the air. Its size is huge and its colour is dark, almost black. It likes to seize humans who wander around after sunset and make them disappear temporarily before returning them to their family. Interestingly, ten of the informants declared that they had once been kidnapped by *Geunt'euet*² or had witnessed others being taken by this ghost³. Several well-known prohibitions related to such incidents include (8) *H'an jeuet manoe malam-malam, euntreuk di cok lé Geunt'euet* (don't bathe at night or *Geunt'euet* will get you) and (9) *H'an jeuet teubiet teungoh Magrêb, euntreuk di cok lé Geunt'euet* (don't go out during Maghrib or *Geunt'euet* will get you).

Informants said that those who were kidnapped by *Geunt'euet* were taken to places they had never been; they were led deep into the woods, stuck in unreachable objects, or taken to the top of a mountain. Sometimes they did not know how they got there. When they returned to their senses, they found themselves in an unknown place and did not know what to do or how to ask for help. They were therefore forced to wait for the ghost to take them back. Kidnapped persons may be lost for hours or even days before being suddenly returned to their homes.

AM (60, teacher, Meunasah Meunjee, Pidie Regency) narrated an event in which she believed her friend was kidnapped by *Geunt'euet* in her village in the 1970s when she was in elementary school. One afternoon, she and her friends were playing hide-and-seek until Maghrib. Her mother came out and called them to stop playing and return home, but no one listened. Suddenly, just as the girls

gathered to start another round of hide-and-peek, they realised that one of their friends, Rubama, was gone. They scoured the field in which they playing, but she was nowhere to be found. Then, AM ran home because her house was nearest to the field and informed her mother. Her mother was suspicious and told the girls to call their missing friend's name inside a large earthen pitcher near a fence at her house. The girls gathered around the large earthen pitcher and called "Rubama... Rubama... Rubama...!" many times. Eventually, they heard a voice inside the earthen pitcher that shouted "*Nyoe pat lôn!*" (Here I am!). The girls looked around and saw their friend squatting behind the house fence next to them. They were extremely surprised because she had not been there seconds before. Rubama told them that she had disappeared suddenly and that *Geunt'euet* had put her on a chair at the top of a coconut tree. The chair was so comfortable that she was not scared at all. Then, the ghost flew her up to a bamboo tree next to the coconut tree. She told the girls that while she was up there, she could see them searching for her, but she could not call out to them because her voice was locked inside her throat. Then, she suddenly found herself on a soft mattress. She was so dizzy that she fell sleep. She was awakened abruptly when she heard her friends calling her from somewhere. Somehow she got her voice back to reply them.

Another participant, MYI (90, retired military, Amut, Pidie Regency) claimed to have been kidnapped in the 1990s while visiting Desa Sukon Paku, Pidie Regency. He was gone for a whole night and nobody in the village could find him. Luckily, late that night, he returned home safely but was tired and sweaty. During Maghrib that evening, he had been traveling home from the market. He suddenly could not see clearly and felt like he was flying to somewhere foggy. He was then astounded by a vision of place so beautiful that he forgot about everything, as if he had been hypnotised. When he returned to his senses, he realised that he was in a graveyard. He wanted to leave right away but his legs felt heavy and he could not move them. Therefore, he stuck his knife into the ground and said, "*tanoh nyoe teutap, meunan keuh Iblis nyan*" (let this ground stay and the Devil also), expressing a wish that the devil would stop bothering him. After that, all of his body parts returned to normal and he quickly returned home.

In addition to the famous *Geunt'eut*, *Baluem Bidi* is another well-known ghost among the Acehnese. This ghost occupies flowing water, typically the sea, rivers and streams. It is also believed to haunt whirlpools that can destroy anything that enters them. It is described as a huge, dark, mysterious entity shaped like a rectangular woven mat. After dragging its victims into the water, it whirls them around and slowly draws them into the deep water below. A notorious prohibition for this ghost is (10) *H'an jeuet meu'èn bak krueng meuputa ie*,

euntreuk di cok lé Baluem Bidi (don't play in rivers with turning waters or *Baluem Bidi* will get you).

OY (65, lecturer, Amut, Pidie Regency) claimed that he once witnessed his friend being sucked into a whirlpool by *Baleum Bidi* in a river near their village during his youth in the early 1960s. It was near sunset and he and his friend were getting out of the water to prepare themselves for Maghrib prayer. Suddenly, his friend called for help and OY saw that he was spinning around in a small whirlpool that had suddenly appeared. OY called a few villagers nearby to help his friend. He said that it took several large men to pull his friend out because the force of the whirlpool was so strong.

Another ghost, *Burông*, is a female vampire. Prohibitions containing threats about this ghost are related to cemeteries, pregnant women and past-partum women: (11) *Aneuk dara h'an jeuet panyang ukèe, euntreuk watèe matèe jeuet keu Burông* (girls cannot have long nails or when they die they will become *Burông*), (12) *H'an jeuet meu'èn bak jeurat, euntreuk di cok lé Burông* (don't play in the cemetery or *Burông* will get you) and (13) *H'an jeuet tamong aju lam rumoh ureueng madeueng, eunteuk di seutöt lee Burông* (don't immediately enter the house of a pregnant woman or a woman who has just delivered a baby or *Burông* will follow you inside).

In Aceh, visitors are prohibited from directly entering the house of a pregnant woman or a woman who has recently delivered a baby as soon as they arrive. They must wait outside or walk around the village before entering the house because it is feared that *Burông* might follow them when they enter and possess the pregnant woman or the new mother and steal the newborn away. This ghost can bring sickness to the woman and the newborn baby. By waiting or walking around the village first, it is expected that *Burông* will drift away from them.

One ghost said to haunt children is called *Burông Tujôh*. If this ghost enters the body of a child, MD (50, farmer, Lambreung, Aceh Besar Regency), who claimed to have witnessed this event in his village, said that the child's eyes widen, turn red and roll back and that his or her body stiffens. To eliminate this ghost, a *Teungku Imum* is called to expel the ghost from the child's body by reciting prayers. EN (50, medical doctor, Banda Aceh) believed that when a child behaved this way, he or she was not being possessed by *Burông Tujôh* but was suffering a seizure caused by fever, illness, head trauma or lack of oxygen. Seizures may include muscle spasms, a loss of consciousness, a vacant stare or other symptoms and should be treated by a doctor immediately.

In rural villages, it is still common for pregnant women and newborn babies to be given *ajeumat* (charmed objects) to protect them from *Burông*. Pregnant women's

ajeumat are made from threads (Hoesin 1970); newborns' are made from a part of their umbilical cord that is wrapped in *èk malô* and a thin cloth. *Èk malô* is made from milk, honey and flour. Once mixed and hardened, it turns dark brown. It is typically approximately 1.5 inches long and has a half-inch diameter. This *ajeumat* is tied around the baby's stomach and placed on top of his or her bellybutton.

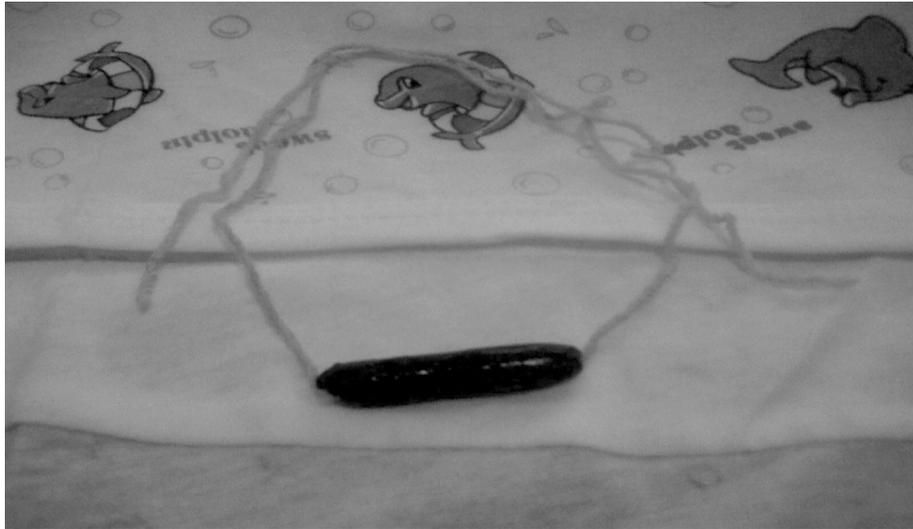


Figure 3. A baby's *ajeumat* is used to repel evil spirits

RA (75, Farmer, Meunasah Meunjee, Pidie Regency) still makes *èk malô* for her newborn grandchildren. She does not consider this an act of *syirik* because the charm is made while reciting certain verses from the Qur'an. However, her daughter, BR (50, housewife, Meunasah Meunjee, Pidie Regency), believes that this is a form of *syirik*, stating that if she wants Allah to protect the baby, she should ask for help directly through prayers without using an object as a mediator because Allah is Almighty. Her eldest son had just entered college and had previously boarded at a modern Islamic high school in Banda Aceh. He told her about other forms of *syirik* based on information he had learned from his teachers and from Internet sources. She said this information made sense to her and that she could accept it. She allowed her mother to make *ajeumat* for her newborn children because she did not want to quarrel or hurt her mother's feelings, but she would remove the charm from her baby when her mother left.

In addition to charms made for post-partum women and newborn babies, other charms for repelling evil spirits are also made for other important occasions, such as the rice planting (Hurgronje 1906a). This agricultural *ajeumat* is a charm

written on paper that defends against mice and insects that can destroy paddies or crops. The *ajeumat* is then kept in a hollow bamboo affixed in the centre of a paddy (Hurgronje 1906a) or hung on the fences that separate one paddy from another. These *ajeumat* are called *tangkay tikoih* (mice prevention) and *tangkay geusong* (rice ear bugs prevention) (Hurgronje 1906a, 266). SH (44, teacher, Meunasah Capa, Bireuen Regency) said that *tangkay tikoih* and *tangkay geusong* are still covertly used by farmers even though many *Teungku Imum* have forbidden them because they are considered *syirik*. SH owned a paddy field that she had hired several workers to plough and harvest. She does not believe in *ajeumat*, but she caught her workers hanging them on the fences of her paddy field. She repeatedly asked her workers to remove them, but they would replace them when she left. The practice had become a habit with the workers because these beliefs were passed down from their ancestors. Because their ancestors were successful in farming, the tradition is still preserved by some farmers today.

While sleeping, a person can also be troubled by a ghost known as *Beuno*. A prohibition thought to protect people from this ghost is (14) *H'an jeuet eh meulinteung, eunteuk di tigom/di ginten lee Beuno* (don't sleep in a position with your chest down or *Beuno* will hold you down). *Beuno* is known to press upon people who are sleeping until they cannot move or even breathe. When a person wakes up and feels stiff and unable to speak (except for forced mumbling), this person is believed to have been held down by this ghost. If the person next to them sees this happening, they should pull the toes of the sleeper until their body becomes flexible again. However, FI (30, teacher, Banda Aceh) said she did not believe in this ghost and that the stiffness is due to sleeping in the wrong position. She had read several studies stating that sleeping in a recumbent position is dangerous and can cause a sleeper's throat to become clogged and can cause the sleeper to choke, have difficulty breathing and even die. She believed the early Acehese knew of these effects and created this threat to motivate the children to obey the elders' warnings. FI said she often reminded her ten-year-old son of this prohibition before going to bed at night but omitted the threat. When he asked why he should obey the prohibition, she provided a more logical explanation instead of threatening him with a visit from *Beuno*.

At sunset

The Acehese believe that black magic is at its most pervasive at sunset, when ghouls come out to stalk human beings. Women, children and infants are especially vulnerable. It is acceptable for men to be outside at sunset if they are travelling to the mosque to perform Maghrib prayers. However, those who have weak souls or evil intentions are vulnerable to black magic at this time of day. The stories told by participants earlier in this paper, such as being kidnapped by

Geunt'eut or being attacked by *Baluem Bidi*, all happened at dusk. The following prohibitions also relate to activities at sunset:

(15) *Aneuk manyak h'an jeuet na di luwa watèe di lóp mata uroe, euntreuk di cok lé Jén* (children are not to be outside (of the house) during sunset or Jinn will get them).

(16) *H'an jeuet seumampôh brôh teungoh Magrêb, euntreuk papa* (don't sweep the floor during Maghrib or you will be in poverty).

(17) *H'an jeuet lakèe sira teungoh Magrêb, euntreuk jeuôh raseuki* (don't ask for salt (from your neighbours) during Maghrib or you will not get any sustenance). This prohibition basically means that it is forbidden to cook during sunset.

(18) *H'an jeuet éh tingoh Magrêb, euntreuk watèe maté h'an di teurimong lée kubu* (don't sleep during Maghrib or when you die your grave will not accept you).

(19) *H'an jeuet meu'èn watèe mata uroe di lóp, euntreuk h'ana beureukat udép* (don't play during sunset or you will not have a blessed life).

RS (50, housewife, Kembang Tanjong, Pidie Regency) claimed to have once witnessed a bride who experienced *meurampôt* at sunset on her wedding day in her village. The wedding party was to be held after sunset or Maghrib prayers. At dusk, the bride had gone down to the open-roofed bathroom to wash herself. Afterwards, as she was being dressed by the village women, her face suddenly turned dark. As everyone panicked, a female elder in the room chanted towards the bride while waving her right hand around the bride's face, "*sa, dua, lhèe, peuet, limong, nam, tujôh! Meunan ka-jak kah, lagèe nyan beu gadôh seudông di muka!*" (One, two, three, four, five, six, seven! How you came about, that is how you should go away, black and gloomy face!). When the chant was finished, she gently blew on the bride's face; a few minutes later, the gloomy face began to disappear and the bride's face returned to its normal colour.

Current Belief in Mystical Threats

This section addresses RQ3: "To what extent do the research participants believe in these threats and why?". The participants' descriptions and stories indicate that prohibitions believed to contain *syirik* aspects, such as the use of *ajeumat*, are generally avoided by modern Acehnese because the Islamic sin of *syirik* is better understood in today's society. *Syirik* does not simply refer to the practice of worshiping more than one God (Allah); it also refers to the worship of or belief in objects deemed sacred and auspicious. However, differences were found between urban and rural participants. Most urban informants (22), such as those from Banda Aceh and Lhokseumawe, had higher education levels (from undergraduate

to doctoral degrees) and no longer believed in the threats accompanying the prohibitions. They consider these threats to be *gura that* (very amusing), *lucu* (funny) or *hana i tamong lam akai* (lacking common sense; illogical and unbelievable). Though they still used the prohibitions to warn their children because they believed them to contain moral values and to be part of their customs and traditions, they did not use the mystical threats. The mystical threats were replaced by more logical explanations. For example, parents explained prohibition (13) to their children by telling them that the pregnant women or women who had just delivered a baby thought to be possessed by *Burông* and the children possessed by *Burông Tujôh* may actually be experiencing seizures. Similarly, they would explain prohibition (14) by telling their children that sleeping in a recumbent position is proven to be bad for their health. Furthermore, if an elder wanted them to follow a cultural prohibition, they would obey as a sign of respect towards the elders. Therefore, despite their scepticism, they continue to follow the prohibitions and deemed it improper to flout them before other community members. This was especially true for those prohibitions with clearly precarious consequences, such as prohibition (10), whose injunction to not play in rivers with turning water is certainly wise. Similarly, as prohibition (11) suggests, keeping one's nails long may be dangerous because one could poke or hurt another person with them.

In contrast, participants from rural areas still believed in the mystical threats. All 31 of the informants with an elementary education and those that had completed junior high and high school believed in the threats. For example, SU (17, student, Cot Baroh, Pidie Regency) said, "*hôm, yô sit meunyoe hana ta patéh, eunteuk ka kejadian, ka paloe teuh*" ([I] don't know, [I am] still afraid if [I] don't believe [in them], [I am afraid that] it will really happen. That would be a problem). Informants with higher education levels (undergraduate to doctorate degrees), had mixed opinions about the threats; some believed in them and some did not. Those who did claimed to have witnessed an event, such as being pestered by evil spirits, ghosts and ghouls, primarily at dusk. Nonetheless, older informants aged 60 to 90 years old (19 informants), regardless of where they resided, were all familiar with the mystical threats and claimed that "*tom kejadian memang barojéh*" (they really did happen in the past). Evidently, they had lived in an earlier period during which these prohibitions were strongly maintained and believed by society.

In modern society, many of the cultural prohibitions discussed in this paper can also be explained as promoting good manners, reducing the risk of illness or encouraging people not to miss evening prayers. With education, children learn that prohibitions against (1) calling people by animal names, (3) talking while eating and (12) playing in graveyards are disrespectful acts. Prohibition (4) is related to cleanliness; it is unhealthy and impolite to enter a house with dirty feet.

Prohibitions (9), (15), (16), (17), (18) and (19) are related to Maghrib prayer. The time in which this prayer can be said is shorter than that of the other four daily obligatory prayers for Muslims: Fajr, Zuhr, Asr and Isha. Therefore, acts that may delay or even cause a person to miss this prayer are prohibited, such as playing, sweeping the floor, cooking and sleeping. Prohibitions (13) and (14) can be directly explained by known illnesses. Prohibition (7) encourages Acehnese people to care for nature and to think carefully before deciding to cut down a tree.

Through exposure to other cultures and lifestyles, people in Aceh are changing how they think and behave and this is changing their attitudes towards their cultural prohibitions. Prohibitions (2), (8) and (9) are now seldom observed. It is now common for people to bathe at night because the bathrooms of modern Acehnese homes are built inside the house. Therefore, the Acehnese claim that they no longer need to worry about experiencing *neurampöt* while bathing at night. Regarding prohibition (5), women are increasingly calling babies by good names. Those who have lived overseas, visited other countries, or become familiar with other cultures through the media do not believe that calling babies by bad names will repel devils. Instead, they believe that babies are gifts from Allah; therefore, they should be called by all of the beautiful names in the language. Again, for prohibition (6), because frangipani trees can now be grown in smaller sizes with the help of agricultural technology, more people, even those that reside in rural areas, are planting them in front of their houses because the colourful flowers are attractive.

It can be concluded that education and communication technologies, such as telephones and the Internet and transportation technologies, such as cars and airplanes, have heavily influenced the knowledge and belief systems of contemporary Acehnese people. As stated by Orman (2012), "a technology-driven society is in constant flux and subject to accelerating change". This means that new information in science and technology may cause Acehnese people to form new habits, ideas, values and behaviours. Though such change is unpredictable, their religion, Islam, controls and guides these changes.

Concluding Remarks

Education and technology play an important role in the belief systems of modern Acehnese people, particularly affecting how and when they use mystical threats to explain cultural prohibitions. These prohibitions have been an important part of Acehnese culture and tradition for hundreds of years. This study only reported on four elements associated with mystical threats: black magic, evil spirits, ghouls and sunset-related prohibitions. These elements were derived from 19 Acehnese cultural prohibitions collected from the participants. In future research, interviewing a greater number of participants, particularly elder participants, may

offer more insights into other aspects of mystical threats. More research is also needed to investigate how religion, particularly Islam, has contributed to the prohibitions. In conclusion, this paper has provided an exploratory study of four key types of mystical threats used in cultural prohibitions in contemporary Aceh. This research opens the way for further studies on the possible relationship between Acehese cultural prohibitions and those used in other parts of Indonesia or Malaysia, especially considering Indonesia and Malaysia's historical connections (see Collins 1998).

Notes

1. Throughout the paper, informants are referred to by their initials. The information in parentheses includes their age at the time of the interview, occupation and area of residence.
2. MYI (83, retired military, Amut, Pidie Regency), RK (48, Farmer, Sukun Paku, Pidie Regency).
3. AM (59, Teacher, Meunasah Meunjee, Pidie Regency), DF (24, Teacher, Lambaro Kafe, Aceh Besar Regency), FT (71, Farmer, Geuleumpang Minyeuk, Pidie Regency) KR (24, Teacher, Lamreung, Aceh Besar Regency), MH (19, Student, Deyah Teumanah, Pidie Regency), MI (36, Lecturer, Meulaboh, Aceh Barat Regency), RA (75, Farmer, Meunasah Meunjee, Pidie Regency), SU (17, Student, Cot Baroh, Pidie Regency).

Appendix

No.	Name	Sex	Age	Education	Occupation	From
1	AM	F	60	Undergraduate	Teacher	Meunasah Meunjee, Pidie Regency
2	AN	M	45	Undergraduate	Civil Servant	Leungputu, Pidie Regency
3	AI	F	67	Elementary	Farmer	Meureudu, Pidie Jaya Regency
4	AR	M	45	Undergraduate	Civil Servant	Lhokseumawe
5	ASR	M	35	Undergraduate	Teacher	Banda Aceh
6	AT	F	60	High school	Housewife	Leungputu, Pidie Regency
7	AS	F	57	Elementary	Farmer	Tanoh Abee, Aceh Besar Regency
8	AA	F	40	Elementary	Farmer	Lambaro, Pidie Regency
9	AI	M	17	High school	Student	Banda Aceh
10	ABA	M	36	Masters	Lecturer	Matang Geuleumpang Dua, Bireuen Regency
11	AZ	F	25	Undergraduate	Secretary	Banda Aceh
12	BR	F	50	Undergraduate	Housewife	Meunasah Meunjee, Pidie Regency
13	BA	M	36	Masters	Lecturer	Sigli, Pidie Regency
14	BH	M	35	Elementary	Farmer	Cot, Pidie Regency
15	BK	M	36	High school	Civil Servant	Cot, Pidie Regency
16	BO	M	34	Undergraduate	Businessman	Meunasah Meunjee, Pidie Regency
17	CAN	F	33	Undergraduate	Housewife	Langsa
18	CD	F	57	High school	Housewife	Banda Aceh
19	CLS	F	23	Undergraduate	Student	Banda Aceh
20	CN	F	57	High school	Housewife	Lhokseumawe

No.	Name	Sex	Age	Education	Occupation	From
21	CU	F	57	High school	Housewife	Lhokseumawe
22	CR	F	45	High school	Housewife	Tungkop, Aceh Besar Regency
23	CA	F	40	High school	Housewife	Banda Aceh
24	CK	F	62	High school	Housewife	Lampakuk, Aceh Besar Regency
25	DF	F	24	Undergraduate	Teacher	Lambaro Kafe, Aceh Besar Regency
26	DFS	F	23	Undergraduate	Student	Banda Aceh
27	EN	F	50	Masters	Medical Doctor	Banda Aceh
28	ER	F	33	Undergraduate	Businesswoman	Banda Aceh
29	FD	F	15	Junior high school	Student	Meunasah Capa, Birueun Regency
30	FT	F	71	Elementary	Farmer	Geuleumpang Minyeuk, Pidie Regency
31	FZ	F	52	High school	Civil Servant	Banda Aceh
32	FI	F	30	Undergraduate	Teacher	Banda Aceh
33	FQ	M	14	Junior high school	Student	Banda Aceh
34	HL	F	60	Elementary	Housewife	Banda Aceh
35	HYA	M	39	Masters	Lecturer	Meunasah Jumphoih, Pidie Regency
36	HB	M	17	High school	Student	Banda Aceh
37	HS	M	37	Masters	Businessman	Banda Aceh
38	HU	M	45	Doctoral	Lecturer	Geulumpang Minyeuk, Pidie Regency
39	IA	M	27	High school	Businessman	Lamno, Aceh Jaya Regency
40	IF	F	34	Masters	Doctor	Banda Aceh

No.	Name	Sex	Age	Education	Occupation	From
41	IM	F	34	High school	Housewife	Leungputu, Pidie Regency
42	IN	F	42	Undergraduate	Civil Servant	Limpok, Aceh Besar Regency
43	IT	F	40	Undergraduate	Civil Servant	Kampung Baru, Bireuen Regency
44	IR	F	28	Masters	Medical Doctor	Banda Aceh
45	IH	M	40	Doctorate	Lecturer	Banda Aceh
46	JA	F	80	Elementary	Housewife	Cot Meurah, Bireuen Regency
47	KM	M	27	High school	Businessman	Amut, Pidie Regency
48	KY	M	29	Masters	Lecturer	Meunasah Capa, Bireuen Regency
49	KR	M	24	Undergraduate	Teacher	Lamreung, Aceh Besar Regency
50	KS	M	21	Undergraduate	Student	Amut, Pidie Regency
51	MAH	F	65	Elementary	Housewife	Leungputu, Pidie Regency
52	MA	F	65	High school	Businesswoman	Meureudu, Pidie Jaya Regency
53	MR	F	45	Undergraduate	Teacher	Matang Geulumpang Dua, Bireuen Regency
54	MAR	F	55	Undergraduate	Teacher	Meunasah Meunjee, Pidie Regency
55	MW	M	40	Masters	Lecturer	Sigli, Pidie Regency
56	MAW	M	44	Masters	Lecturer	Sigli, Pidie Regency
57	MD	M	50	High school	Farmer	Lambreung, Aceh Besar Regency
58	MM	M	48	Masters	Medical Doctor	Meunasah Capa, Bireuen Regency

No.	Name	Sex	Age	Education	Occupation	From
59	MI	M	36	Masters	Lecturer	Meulaboh, Aceh Barat Regency
60	MY	M	71	Elementary	Retired	Limpok, Aceh Besar Regency
61	MYI	M	90	Elementary	Retired military	Amut, Pidie Regency
62	MK	F	17	High school	Student	Meunasah Capa, Bireuen Regency
63	MZ	F	24	Undergraduate	Secretary	Lambaro Angan, Aceh Besar Regency
64	MH	F	19	High school	Student	Deyah Teumanah, Pidie Regency
65	ML	M	42	Undergraduate	Civil Servant	Leungputu, Pidie Regency
66	ND	F	25	Undergraduate	Housewife	Lhokseumawe
67	NH	F	15	Junior high school	Student	Banda Aceh
68	NU	F	48	High school	Civil Servant	Bireuen
69	NR	F	25	Elementary	Housewife	Cot, Pidie Regency
70	NJ	F	33	Elementary	Housewife	Cot, Pidie Regency
71	NL	F	32	Undergraduate	Secretary	Banda Aceh
72	OY	M	65	Doctorate	Lecturer	Amut, Pidie Regency
73	RM	F	25	Undergraduate	Student	Amut, Pidie Regency
74	RH	F	27	High school	Housewife	Lhoksukon, Aceh Utara Regency
75	RV	F	15	Junior high school	Student	Banda Aceh
76	RA	F	75	Elementary	Farmer	Meunasah Meunjee, Pidie Regency
77	RS	F	50	Undergraduate	Housewife	Kembang Tanjong, Pidie Regency

No.	Name	Sex	Age	Education	Occupation	From
78	RG	F	30	High school	Housewife	Leungputu, Pidie Regency
79	RK	F	48	Junior high school	Farmer	Sukun Paku, Pidie Regency
80	SY	M	32	Doctorate	Lecturer	Meunasah Capa, Bireuen Regency
81	SA	M	60	Undergraduate	Retired	Jeuram, Aceh Barat Regency
82	SF	F	26	Junior high	Housewife	Meunasah Campli, Pidie Regency
83	SR	F	65	Elementary	Tailor	Meunasah Capa, Bireuen Regency
84	SH	F	44	Undergraduate	Teacher	Meunasah Capa, Bireuen Regency
85	SV	M	35	Undergraduate	Civil Servant	Banda Aceh
86	SY	M	65	High school	Civil Servant	Banda Aceh
87	SU	F	17	Junior high	Student	Cot Baroh, Pidie Regency
88	SM	M	58	Elementary	Retired	Tungkop, Aceh Besar Regency
89	SI	F	55	Undergraduate	Teacher	Montasik, Aceh Besar Regency
90	TY	M	31	Undergraduate	Businessman	Meunasah Capa, Bireuen Regency
91	TRT	M	71	Elementary	Retired	Pagar Air, Aceh Besar Regency
92	US	F	61	Elementary	Farmer	Mesjid Trieng Duroe, Pidie Regency
93	WR	M	68	Elementary	Businessman	Banda Aceh
94	WA	M	60	Masters	Lecturer	Cunda, Aceh Utara Regency
95	WT	F	18	High school	Student	Sigli, Pidie Regency
96	YN	F	22	Undergraduate	Student	Banda Aceh

No.	Name	Sex	Age	Education	Occupation	From
97	ZY	M	47	High school	Tailor	Meunasah Capa, Bireuen Regency
98	ZD	M	26	Undergraduate	Civil Servant	Banda Aceh
99	ZM	M	43	Undergraduate	Medical Doctor	Banda Aceh
100	ZL	M	22	Undergraduate	Student	Limpok, Aceh Besar Regency

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