BEYOND PIOUS CRITICAL AGENCY WOMEN INTERFAITH MARRIAGE AND RELIGIOUS CONVERSION IN ACEH

by Muhammad Ansor

BEYOND PIOUS CRITICAL AGENCY: WOMEN, INTERFAITH MARRIAGE AND RELIGIOUS CONVERSION IN ACEH

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ABSTRACT

Most studies discussing about interfaith marriage and religious conversion are ignoring woman's autonomy in selecting spouse as well as choosing religion. This paper examines the agency of women who converted due to marriage based on the experiences of four women in two areas in Aceh, the South East Aceh, and Aceh Singkil. Data was collected through observation and semi-structured interviews of four converted women, her husband, and her relatives. The phenomenon of religious conversion on the reason of marriage is placed in the feminist poststructuralist discourse, especially the concept of pious agency and critical piety agency. This paper challenges the view that says religious conversion on the reason of marriage will give the result to those who converted that religion to them is merely administrative matters and they lose their focus in building personal piety. Instead, this article argued the possibility of people who convert to other religion represent their religiosity after conversion as well as before conversion.

Keywords: Pious Critical Agency; Interfaith Marriage; Religious Conversion; Acehnese Women.

INTRODUCTION

Most studies discussing about interfaith marriage and religious conversion are ignoring woman's autonomy in selecting spouse as well as choosing religion. This article examines the experiences of four Acehnese women who converted their religion due to marriage. They are Catholic and Protestant women who converted to Islam or vice versa. This article also will investigate the experiences of Acehnese women who engage in interfaith marriage, that is, 'a marriage undertaken between two persons of different religious affiliations' (Lukito, 2008: 176). Both religious conversion and interfaith marriage will be seen as an expression of one's freedom to choose her religion and spouse. Employing Saba Mahmood's concept of Pious Agency (2001: 2005) and Rachel Rinaldo's Pious Critical Agency (2013: 2014), the article shows the religiosity of the participants before or after conversion. This article also criticizes Seo (2012: 1045; 2013a; 2013b) who revealed that religious conversion on the reason of marriage in Indonesia reduces the religion to merely administrative matter and resulting in losing the focus to build self-religiosity.

Interfaith marriage and religious conversion is always interesting to be discussed (Lazerwitz, 1981). The most renowned works on this theme written by Bagus, Al-Yousuf, Dwisaptani and Setiawan, Seo, and Liderberg. Bagus (2008: 346-362) discussed the marriage of Hindu and non-Hindu in Jimbarana, Bali; while al-Yousuf (2006: 317-329) discussed marriage and religious conversion among Muslims and Christians in Britain. Dwisaptani and Setiawan (2008: 327-339) explained that there are at least three things regarding the phenomenon of religious conversion among the Javanese community, i.e. (1) the failure

to find God in his/her previous religion, (2) the weakness of religious value in the family life, and (3) conflict or crisis experienced by him/her; a condition where one feels that his/her religion is unable to give a solution to his/her crisis, problems, and conflicts. Both Dwisaptani and Setiawan found that sometimes religious conversions for a marriage were conducted on merely administrative consideration, though in some cases it is more substantial.

Seo's research (2013a; 2013b) focused on the meaning of religious conversion viewed from the perspective of religious life management in Indonesia. Seo explained that religious conversion in Indonesia had social impact as well as political and juridical impact in accordance with socio-political reality surrounding them. By investigating the phenomenon of religious conversion in Java from Islam to Christianity or vice versa, Seo concluded that religious conversion on the reason of marriage was a reflection of state intervention on the religious life of the society. According to Seo, regulation of marriage in Indonesia that prohibits the interfaith marriage caused the religion itself lost its focus to build one's piety, instead of that it focuses more on merely administrative matters.

Lindenberg (2009: 243-246) discussed the conversion of Chinese ethnic in Kota Bharu, Malaysia, to Islam. According to him, the merging of two different ethnic groups in marriage is not only related to two individuals, but involves two families, two groups of friends, and the two ethnic groups, which has – in the case in Malaysia – a different legal treatment. The couples who have converted for marriage tried to negotiate the diversity of their own ethnic background in order to be accepted in a new social environment, family, as well as their mate. However, according to Lindenberg, amid the effort of bridging the differences, at the same time each group turned out to reinforce the boundaries of differences and tried to keep away from outsiders.

Lindenberg concluded that even though the religious conversion and cross-ethnic marriage in Malaysia is able to resolve the differences between different ethnic groups (between Malay and Chinese) but at the same time often lead to break the family ties of the convert.

One of the articles which connected the religious conversion to female agency discourse was written by Margot Badran (in Nieuwkerk, 2006: 192-232). Badran shows that the attraction to the concept of Islamic feminisms is the core of the main motive that becomes the background of religious conversion among the females in the western countries. Badran (2006: 194) said that religious conversion is influenced by the consciousness of the convert and the attraction to what they considered as the peculiarity of Islamic feminisms concept. Therefore, women convert in the West often involve in some activities that promote the concept of Islamic feminisms. Regrettably, Badran focused only on women conversion to Islam; he didn't relate the phenomenon of marriage as background of religious conversion discourse that he presented. However, his contribution is significant in describing the process of forming woman agency in the West who converted to Islam.

The previous studies on this theme do not place the woman agency as a locus of analysis. Consequently, studies about woman and religious conversion less contribute to any understanding on autonomous of woman who converted to other religion for the reason of getting husband. For this reason, we will discuss the experience of four women who converted to other religion for the reason of marriage by utilizing the concept of agency as an analysis perspective. Conversion is often considered as a deviation of faith, therefore it is socially condemned (particularly by convert's previous religion). Interestingly, amid this situation, women that will be discussed here have a distinction in expressing their agency and subjectivity. Hopefully, discussing their experience will

give theoretical contribution and enrichment to the debate and discourse on woman and agency, in post-feminisms perspective.

The article is organized as follows. The first section provides the protocol of research that is used. The second section describes the discourse on agency in the perspective of post-structural feminisms theory and relates it to the phenomenon of conversion and marriage. This will be theoretical design to the next part of the discussion. After that, we describe the topography of religious conversion in Aceh, especially Aceh Tenggara (Southeast Aceh) and Aceh Singkil. To initiate the debate on woman agency, we present the biographical narration of four women who converted from Islam, Catholic, and Protestant. The next sub-chapter analyzes the reproduction of women agency of the convert, either before or after conversion. This article ends with conclusion and academic recommendation.

RESEARCH METHOD

The empirical data for this article derived from our ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Aceh Singkil and South East Aceh since November 2014 up to January 2015. Data were collected through observation, semi-structured interviews and informal conversations. We observed the daily activities of four research participants in Aceh Singkil and South East Aceh i.e. Lina, Nila, Fitri, and Alta. We also interviewed their families, including husbands, children, and close relatives such as parents, brothers, sisters, neighbors, and friends. The in-depth interviews flowed steadily but focused on the theme of the research. We had a discussion with imam of the mosque, priest and pastor to deepen the comprehension on the investigated phenomenon.

Interviews with the key informants (the women who have converted) focused on digging all information regarding the conversion including backgrounds, experiences, responses of their family, the challenges that they had to face, the strategies of adaptation to the new milieu, the perception over their previous religions, and experiences in marital life in relation with differences of religious backgrounds. As for the relatives of the convert, similar queries were questioned from the perspective of each respective informant.

Based on the narrative analysis method proposed by Polkinghorne (1995: 5-23), the data were analyzed by assembling plot of narration that shows the relationship between data elements as part of an effort to make a conclusion. As it is shown by Polkinghorne precisely, narrative analysis is described as a synthesis method in which events and occurrences (data) coherently constructed to explain certain phenomenon or how certain situations occured. Our intention in this article is not to make claims about Acehnese women who converted their religions due to marriage in general, but to use the experiences of four women to problematize the ways in which convert women's agency is commonly taken for granted in the existing research literature and to provide a conceptual rethinking of the notion agency (Näre, 2014: 226).

WOMEN AND PIOUS AGENCY

Religious conversion is an expression of agency (Connolly, 2003: 353). Our paper argued that the convert may form self-religiosity either before or after the conversion. This phenomenon is discussed by using the concept of agency in the discourse of post-structural feminism theory. Determining the borders of the term 'agency' is important, because as Kachra (2006: 1) stated that the concept of agency which emerges in the discourse of contemporary social science has differences among each other, at least as it is seen in the study of feminism, gender, queer theory, post-

colonial theory or theory of race and ethnicity as well.

Agency is a social concept which nowadays becomes the concern of anthropology of Southeast Asia (Slama, 2012: 313; Keane, 1997: 674). The term agency refers to people's ability to make their own choices and act on them, even if they encounter opposition (Abu-Rabia-Quader and Weiner-Levy, 2013: 90; Dwyer and Minnegal, 2007). The issue of whether the social structure or personal agency that determines human action have long been the talk of the social sciences and ignited the interest of feminist intellectuals.

Many feminists believe that what women want is freedom; therefore, women collective act is an effort to resist any oppression (Rinaldo, 2014). In Western feminist discourse, agency and choice with respect to religious women are associated with to liberal concept of emancipation (Zimmerman, 2014: 4). However, the studies of the latter feminist challenge that assumption by showing women acts that reproduced gender inequality and questioned the stability of gender identity (Butler: 1990; Collins, 2000). Nowadays some scholars argued that woman could be an agency in a way that do not meet the feminist expectation, like deciding not to question social injustice; locating family, nation or other social structure as oppression location; or sometimes giving contribution in submitting to others (Rinaldo, 2014; Mahmood, 2005).

Agency is the main issue for the thinkers of gender and religion. Many of them intended to fade the stereotype that women religiosity is the effect of patriarchal violence (Rinaldo, 2014). Women religiosity may become an agency, and not merely obedience to religious doctrines. Women can reinterpret religious doctrines to offer a solution to their problems and establish a life that suited the modernity (Rinaldo, 2014). Women agency sometimes is political in

nature. As what the women in Turkey did, they wore headscarf as denial to secularism (Saggie, 2011).

Later, the debate about the agency was enriched by Mahmood (2001; 2005) with the idea of religious adherence. Mahmood's *Politics of Piety* (2005) contends that although Butler's theory of agency is preferable to those accounts of agency that take the subject as foundational, Butler's theory cannot be taken as universal. Mahmood wrote ethnography of the piety movement in Cairo, a movement that encouraged women from various socio-economic classes to meet in public to learn about Islam and to foster a pious life (Mahmood as cited in Clare, 2009: 52).

Mahmood (2005) argued that subjectivity is produced in its relation with normative doctrines. According to him, the practice of wearing headscarf, establishing religious learning groups, and other religious articulations that carried out by women activists of mosque-based movement in Egypt; an example of how women become the subject of themselves. Mahmood realized that liberal feminists hardly admit that this strict and rigid religious adherence is an agency, because they assume that agency works in the frame of resistance against oppression of either religion or culture (Mahmood, 2005: 13). Mahmood offered a concept of agency that totally different from the framework of liberal feminists. According to Mahmood, agency must be understood as a capacity to act in accordance with the space, time, and the structure of authority links that surrounds (2005: 34). Mahmood's study concludes that these Islamist women are active agents, practicing through 'self-techniques' an 'ethical formation' that engages their entire way of life (Vintges, 2012: 284).

The work of Mahmood then inspired many feminist scholars and sociologists that analyzing the viability of individual is a subject in practicing religious teachings as

well as an agency. Avishai (2008) elaborated Mahmood's idea to construct an argument that orthodox Jewish women are an active object to become religious. Yet, Avishai took this idea in different direction. While Mahmood focused on docile conduct as a self-authoring project, Avishai concerned with the construction of religiousity (Avishai, 2008: 413). Ali (2011) discussed the formulation of piety among the women member of Tablighi Jamaat in Australia. Accordingly, instead of conceptualizing agency as a struggle against social-norms, Ali concerned with how action is formed and acted out (Ali, 2011: 245). Likewise, Winchester (2008) discussed about how the Muslims who have converted produce new morality through religious practices. Essentially, the work of Mahmood prompted social scientists to see that the agency may involve the various capacities to act, even includes the action that is not intended to realize freedom. Agency, according to Dwyer and Minnegal (2007: 547) is often ambiguous in nature. But the concept of pious agency that was introduced by Mahmood has limitations. For instance, this concept obviously does not accommodate the critical attitude towards interpretation and religious practices. Therefore, the idea of pious agency shows incompatibility between analytical framework (where religion used for various purposes) and practical framework (where women subjectivity fully set by religion). It is strongly predicted that the mismatch between feminism and piety is the manifestation of this division.

Rinaldo (2014: 6-8) on his research about women and piety movement in Indonesia offered a correction to the concept of Mahmood's pious agency. Rinaldo introduced the concept of pious critical agency (PCA), a social concept which he defined as women capacity to critically interpret religious texts and driving it become public debate. PCA is a model of piety which is developed based on religious

subjectivity. PCA did not compel those women to involve directly with the new interpretation of religious texts but more to encouraging the existence of mentioned debate. The notion of PCA aimed at the capture of new women involvement in public spaces, managing a discussion – which is political in nature – about the meaning of religious texts that often contested with conventional interpretation. In this case, PCA did not involve women reflection over religious texts but also offered critical interpretation that used for their political activities.

In this context, PCA is indeed similar with the concept of pious agency introduced by Mahmood. The only difference is that PCA simplified the process that described by Mahmood – a process where women try to form the subject of piety through critical approach in understanding the religion. Mahmood discussed the women interest in interpreting Koran (either in private or in general religious learning), and showed that they interpret the Koran not according to the common way. They argued that it is the way how they formulate life guidance based on normative piety, and it was not for the purpose of reforming religious interpretation. Such this concept failed to dig political consciousness of the related subject, things that often underlying critical interpretation as Rinaldo said (2013; 2014: 7-8) it was found in the pious movement of women activist in Indonesia. "While actually", argued Rinaldo, "that is the true agency".

Rinaldo put the debate of sociological agency into the deep discourse about the scholarship of contemporary Islamic feminists. The Muslim feminists from various countries such as Morocco, Iran, Malaysia, and Indonesia were presented to show their effort to build the synthesis between Islam and feminism (Badran, 2009; Gonzales, 2013; Mir-Hosseini, 2006; Moghadam 2012; Salime, 2011; Mulia, 2005). The said movement emphasizes on

reinterpretation of religious texts to enforce women emancipation and their rights. They are personalities who are influenced by earlier Muslim feminist such as Fatime Mernisi, Asma Barlas, Zainah Anwar, Leila Ahmed and others who interpreted religious texts in egalitarian way and argued the importance of using historical context to understand Islam. Such movements differ with earlier feminist movement in Middle East and Asia which generally did not try to reinterpret religious texts from the perspective of gender (Badran, 2009; Roded, 2012).

Woman agency makes available a space for understanding the women subjectivity in forming their action. But both concepts of agency do not capture women's religiosities who have converted – either while they were in their old religion or new one. Badran (2006: 204-205) argued that the convert women with their agency have capacity to construct religiosity based on value and norms of the new religion. However, Badran did not discuss the religiosity of the convert women before their conversion. As for Indonesia conversions occur more because of the marriage considered valid if the couple have the same religion. Our premise is that a person when converted to other religion is able to represent his religiosity either in his previous religion or the new one.

The concept of religiosity in this article is employed through the notion of religiosity's Stark and Glock. Stark and Glock (in Wald and Smidt, 2006) measured one's religiosity based on five dimensions as follow: ritual, ideological, intellectual, experiences and consequences or practices of religious doctrines. Therefore, to measure the religiosity of women convert, we explored their obedience of their old and new religious practices. We also explored their understanding of their old and new religion as well as how those religious understanding affects their daily social berhavior.

Through the ethnographic data that presented in the following discussion, this article shows how women agency constructs religious identity as well as religiosity both before and after conversion. We place the discourse of religious conversion for the reason of marriage as negotiation between structure and agency. In this case, agency is not in the passive position in relation with the choice they have taken, but rather the result of objectification of social structure that surround. They are not only free to choose their religion, but they also reproduce the culture either within their family or in social environment, after the conversion.

RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Interfaith Marriage and Religious Conversion in Aceh

This part explains the topography of religious conversion on the reason of marriage in Aceh. Before that, we need to present concise illustration of Aceh, especially South East Aceh and Aceh Singkil as the research location. Both districts are situated in the frontier of Aceh province. The east line of South East Aceh is the border of Tanah Karo district, while Aceh Singkil is the neighbor of Sibolga district. Sibolga and Tanah Karo are two districts in North Sumatera province that populated by majority Christian. It is unsophisticated if these both Aceh districts have significant Christian population, that is about 35.000 lives or about 22% of total population in South East Aceh (Statistics centre of Aceh Tenggara 2011), and about 14.000 lives or about 10% in Aceh Singkil (Statistic center of Aceh Singkil 2011). The Christian population of both districts contributed to 92% of total Christian population in Aceh (53000 lives).

Unlike other places in Aceh, Christian people in South East Aceh have quite significant social role. Since the establishment of South East Aceh in the early reformation era, the regent or at least his vice originated from sub district of Lawe

Sigala-gala and Babul Makmur, the basis of Christian majority. Both Lawe Sigala-gala and Babul Makmur are economically two important cities in South East Aceh after its capital, Kuta Cane. The similar condition is apparent in Aceh Singkil. Since the beginning, the regent of Aceh Singkil is often having relation with Christian figures. For at least in the last two periods of local election, the supports of Christians become decisive for the victory. The existence of Christians in the two areas has become political consideration for local people since the vote had been concentrated on the figure or particular candidates who are trusted to facilitate their political aspiration (Ansor and Meutia, 2016).

Daily social interaction between Muslims and Christians in Aceh Singkil takes place intensively in diverse form. Conflict and harmony in Muslims and Christians relation came one after another. In the mid-2012, Aceh Singkil became the topic in the media after the local government banned approximately 21 churches due to the absence of permit building worship place. Five years prior to that, a church was set on fire by unknown executor. The conflict between the two communities appeared regularly since the riots which resulted in casualties and displacement of Christians in the local area in 1979 (See Baqir 2013). The social construction of Muslim-Christian tense relation was different from the condition when the research is conducted, which was harmonious (see Ansor, 2013). The Christian citizens attended the wedding party of their Muslim relatives and vice versa. Social interaction of the citizens was beyond religious barriers, including relation of marriage.

The best portrait of harmonious relation among different Acehnese religious adherrents is in South East Aceh. Amid the image of Aceh intolerance since the implementation of Islamic *sharia* (see Makin 2016: 1-35; Milallos, 2007; Ansor, 2016),

South East Aceh presented total contradiction. When the celebration or merely a simple Christmas greeting was banned all over the districts and cities, a giant billboard size about four by eight meters containing the greeting of Christmas with the photograph of local regent as a background was set up in the city center of South East Aceh. According to the research participants, the government of South East Aceh gave some gifts not only to the Muslims on their feast day, but he did the same to the Christians on the Christmas – that never happened in any other places in Aceh. When other districts in Aceh banned the construction of the churches, a regent in Aceh Tenggara attended an inauguration of a new church; moreover, he contributed financial assistance to the renovation of the church. This condition is parallel with the real harmonious relation between Muslims and Christians in their social life. Shortly, South East Aceh represents 'other Aceh'.

In line with the socio-demographic context as explained, the intermarriages where the couple comes from different religious backgrounds used to occur in South East Aceh and Aceh Singkil. However, there is no accurate data regarding the exact number of religious conversion in the two districts because no census has ever been done for that cause. Therefore, this paper just describes the phenomenon of religious conversion sporadically, either from Islam to other religion or vice versa. In a lane of a village in suburban of South East Aceh where the research participant resides, we found that almost every house has a family member who converted to other religion, either from other religion to Islam or vice versa. This consists the conversion that occurred based on the reason of marriage as well as other reasons during the last three generations. Generally speaking, the conversions that occur are generally the conversion to Islam, but it doesn't mean that the conversion from Islam to other religion is not found. We were

informed that in a certain sub district there are at least 8 women who have been converted from Islam to other religion; two of them are our research participants.

The data of the converts in Aceh Singkil is hard to find too. We only succeeded in collecting 300 documents regarding the conversion to Islam. Those data were kept in the Office of Religious Affairs (KUA, Kantor Urusan Agama) in two sub districts, Simpang Kanan and Danau Paris. This is the data of the conversion to Islam from the year 2000 up to 2014. Before they converted they were Protestant, Catholic and Parmalim adherents. We held some interviews with religious figures and former functionary in the local KUA to explore the backgrounds of the conversion. The reasons of conversion varied including factors of occupation, family, marriage, healing, education, God's guidance, ect. The conversion from Islam to Christianity in Aceh Singkil is not found. In a village where we conducted this research we were informed that at least there were two women who converted from Islam to Christianity on the reason of marriage. One was converted to Christian sometimes before the marriage and another one married on the way of Islamic marriage but a year later converted to Christian because her husband reconverted to Christian. We failed to see those women because the case is quite sensitive among the society of Aceh Singkil. The local pastor and Christian leader suggested us not to see those women to avoid any undesirable incident.

The description above will not satisfy the readers who hope to get the exact number of religious converts in Aceh Singkil and South East Aceh. However, the exposure gave an illustration of religious conversion on the reason of marriage in the research area. Religious conversion has possibly occured since the interfaith mariage is not permitted by the law (Lukito, 2009: 34-35). Therefore, the couple of two different religions will choose one of the two alternatives, either conversion or to marry in overseas (Seo, 2013a). Most people of Aceh Singkil and South East Aceh chose the first model, though the second model was also found in the field.

Non-Muslim women in these areas, who want to marry Muslim men, are often required to adjust their religion to their husbands'. From various considerations, converting to Islam is the most sensible and possible way to be taken. Under the pressure of patriarchal tradition and culture, women from minority religious group feel more comfortable when they make some adjustment to the religion of the majority group. We didn't find any male Muslim in Aceh who converted his religion from Islam to other religion on the reason of marriage. Unlike the non-Muslim males who easily converted to Islam simply because they wanted to make some adjustment to the religion of their wives. Such phenomenon indicates that gender is not the only factor that determines the attitude of religious conversion due to marriage.

The women who convert in Aceh, either from Islam or to Islam, have to face a lot of barriers. Women who convert from Islam to other religion certainly have to face various obstacles that are different from those who convert to Islam. Whoever converts from Islam to other religion has to face the *qanun* of Islamic *sharia* (Islamic law) which regulates the sanction for the apostate. To the Acehnese, apostasy is regarded as a higher religious crime. Amid the enactment of the law of religious freedom in Indonesia, Aceh becomes the only province that has regulation regarding the imposition of the sanction over the apostate. In fact, the regulation on sanction against the apostate was re-enforced along with the ratification of *Qanun Jinayat* [Islamic Criminal Code By law] in the early 2014. On the other hand, Protestant women who converted to Islam also had to face the church regulation on the sanction against the relatives of the convert. The social sanction

over religious conversion usually imposed not only limited merely against the perpetrators but also against their relatives (an interview with Citra, 2015). The higher his position in the church, the higher the social sanction imposed on him due to religious conversion. Similarly, Catholic women convert have to face the same consequences. It should be mentioned here that Catholic churches–during our investigation in the field – do not impose any sanction against its followers if they convert (an interview with Pastor Charles, 2015). However, the conflict among the family members caused by conversion cannot be avoided. It can be understood from the facts that in Catholic community, the consequences and social sanction caused by religious conversion is less than two other religious communities.

To give a deeper comprehension about the experience of women convert in Aceh, we shall write the followings to explore the biographical narration of the research participants. This study centers on the prototypical narratives in conversational everyday domains, which is storytelling.

Research Participant's Biography

We shall present the biographical narration of four women who act as research participants: Lina, Fitri, Nila and Alta. These four women are selected because they represent the varied religious adherents. Lina is a Muslim woman who converted from Catholic. Fitri and Nila were initially Muslims but then converted to Catholicism. The difference between them is that Fitri converted at the time of marriage, while Nila converted eight years after her marriage. Alta is a Muslim woman who married a Protestant and enjoys the life of interfaith family. The status of all women is married, having children and feeling happy with their marriage.

The four women have different jobs and educational backgrounds. Lina completed her bachelorship in economy from a private higher studies institution in South East Aceh; Nila got diploma in primary education from a Catholic school in Lampung, while Fitri is the alumni of an obstetrics school in Langsa. Alta completed her studies from high school in South East Aceh Tenggara. Alta and Lina both are house-wives, while Nila and Fitri are career women. Nila is a teacher in a private school and Fitri is a government civil servant as a nurse. Lina, Fitri and Nila economically can be categorized as upper class, while Alta is economically lower class.

Lina, Fitri and Alta were born and raised in Aceh. Nila was born in Lampung and live in Aceh after her marriage about twenty five years ago. These four research participants also represent different ethnics in Aceh. Lina is Batak, Fitri is Gayo, Alta is Alas, and Nila is a Sundanesse. Gayo, Alas and Sunda are the ethnics that identical with Islam. Each of them married a man of Batak-Aceh ethnic (ethnically Batak origin but was born and raised in Aceh). Nila, Fitri and Alta reside in South East Aceh, in a sub district where the majority are Christians. While Lina, though originated from South East Aceh, but after her marriage she lives in Aceh Singkil, a sub district that inhabited by majority Christians. The differences of demographic backgrounds hopefully give an initial picture about the diversity of the research participants. For more details, we shall explain their experiences by correlating their backgrounds of conversion and the process of conversion that caused by marriage.

Lina: 'The cross is still in my heart'

Lina, 42 years, married and has 3 children. Lina converted from Catholic to Islam in 1991 because she married Pak Daryanto. Our first acquaintanceship with

Lina and Pak Daryanto occurred in the early 2013, when we worked for another research about Muslim-Christian relation in Aceh Singkil (See Ansor 2013; Ansor, Arrauf and Amri, 2016). Pak Daryanto is a headman in a village where we conducted our research. When we interviewed Pak Daryanto, Lina and another converted Muslim woman were there. They shared their religious experiences as a *muallaf*: a discussion that later inspired us to do the current research. In the end of 2014, we met again Lina and Pak Daryanto to interview them more intense and to observe their day to day life. We also met Opung Intan (Lina's mother), her brother and her cousin to deepen her biographical narration.

Lina was born to a Catholic family in South East Aceh (it takes 14 hours to travel from Aceh Singkil). Lawe Sigala-gala, the sub district where Lina was raised is populated by Christian majority, though in the capital village of the sub district the population of Christians and Muslims is balance. Her parents are devout Catholic adherents: her father was a sexton, while her mother at the time of the interview is registered as an activist in women Catholic community in bishopric of Aceh Tenggara. Lina is the third of five children in her family and she is the only family member who converted to Islam. After the completion of her studies from a non-government university in South East Aceh, she worked in Aceh Singkil and married a local young man.

Lina's family is relatively more inclusive in practicing their religion. Though she was raised in a Catholic family, but she always interacts with her Muslim friends. Lina claimed to have many Muslim friends in her youth and hardly ever dating a Christian boy. Her parents had disappointed knowing that she was going to marry a young Muslim and convert to Islam. However, the tensions between Lina and her parents did not last very long. Responding to her desire, her parents finally advised her to be 'a good wife for her husband and be a good Muslim'. Her

parents did not attend her wedding, but within a couple of weeks they visited Lina's family in law. A couple months later, Lina organized a simple wedding party at her parents' house. In general, there is no significant conflict between Lina and her parents regarding her decision to marry as well as to convert.

Lina believes that religions are various ways leading towards the same God. She believes in Islam as her new religion and practices it in her daily life. For her, the God that she worships now as a Muslim is the God that she had worshipped when she was a Catholic. After her conversion to Islam, Lina still keeps in touch with her relatives, brothers, sisters and her Catholic friend. She also uses to attend wedding receptions that is held in churches nearby her residence. As a wife of Geuchik (Village chief), Lina actively involves in socio-religious activities in her village. At the same time she is intensively active in ensuring the Muslim preachers, who are invited to preach in her village, to have inclusive perspective about religion. She often protests against the preachers who disfigure other religions including her old religion. When interviewed, Lina said: "Though I am a Muslim, the cross is still in my heart. I just worship the same God through a different way with the way I worshipped when I was Catholic".

Fitri: 'Only the way of worship is different'

Fitri, 41 years, married and has 3 children. She was a Muslim and then converted into Catholicism. When I met Fitri, I got the impression that she feels comfort with her new religion. We met Fitri at her home as recommended by the local chief. Like commonly Catholic home, the living room was full with ornaments of Catholic nuance: a painting of crucified Jesus, a statue of mother Mary, a painting of Holy Communion, and a Christmas tree. In the same room a photograph of Fitri and her

family, in which her mother and sisters are wearing hijab, was hung. We found that she was open to share her experience though some of them are quite personal in feature. Her awkwardness lasted only a quarter hours of interview, the rest of more than three hours the conversation was extroverted and dialogic.

Fitri was born to a devout middle class family, raised in Takengon, a city which is known for the religiosity of its society (About Takengon, see Bowen, 1993). After completion of Muhammadiyah senior high school in her city, Takengon, she shifted to Langsa studying in a midwifery school. On the completion of her studies she was assigned for a job in South East Aceh, in a sub district where the population of Christian is significant. She happened to have date with several Muslim boys, but broke before marriage. She became acquainted with a district staff, a Christian youth, and agreed to get married after a courtship of about six years. However, her plan to marry was strongly rejected by her family since the boyfriend wishes her to convert to Catholicism.

After a long time facing an impasse, in 2004, Fitri and her boyfriend were married in a Christian tradition without the consent of her parents. In other words, they did 'eloping', a marriage without parental consent. They were married in a church in South East Aceh, where she was baptized as Catholic at her age of 30 years old. She tried to hide her marriage and masked her religious status to her family.

However, the rumors had spread quickly and the boss where she worked clarified her decision to convert to Catholicism. Her parents finally knew about her conversion when they were phoned by the regent of South East Aceh, clarifying the truth of the rumor regarding her conversion. Fitri could not hide the truth from her parents any longer, thus the conflict was

inevitable. The society where she served questioned her conversion to Catholicism and expelled her from the village. For a year she didn't go to work until she found a new job in another place. In the new job environment she was also socially isolated when her new co-workers knew that she converted to Catholicism. Her husband, a staff of sub district office was excommunicated by his colleagues so that they decided to move to South East Aceh.

Fitri's decision to convert socially cost her much. She lost communication with her family, social environment, and her old culture. Her parents were resent over her decision to convert. For a year she could not restore a good communication with them. But social threats against Fitri had not diminished for a long time. Now, their relation is getting better. Her mother and other family members sometimes visit her at her home. Moreover, Fitri's religious conversion happened after the implementation of Islamic *sharia* in Aceh which rules the penalties for aposty (See Qanun 11/2002 on the Incorporation of same Aspect of Theology *(akidah)*, Rituals *(ibadah)* and Activities that Glorify Islam *(syiar Islam)*; Qanun 6/2014 on *Jinayat*). Although the rule was not really applied to her; Fitri felt the impact of the application of Islamic law in Aceh significantly shaped her religious life experience.

Nila: 'Go with me, may the lightpath be with you'

Nila converted from Islam to Catholicism eight years after her marriage. She was raised in a middle class family in Lampung. Her father was an employee in a private company engaged in mining, oil and gas. In addition, her father was having a business of boarding houses and public transportation. The boarding houses are only for male tenant; some of them were university students and were Christians.

227

Nila got six sisters, each of them having a maid assigned to serve them. Her parents took her to a Catholic school, from kindergarten up to high school. The school was categorized as an elite school and the most expensive school in Lampung. During her education in that school she then got acquainted with the value system in Catholic tradition. Therefore, she accepted the proposal of a tenant of her father's boarding house, a student of Lampung University, a Catholic. Nila married in the end of 1980s, a year after the completion of her high school; while her husband was a student of final year who failed to complete his education.

The wedding took place in Lampung according to Islamic tradition. After two years of her marriage, Nila and her husband moved to South East Aceh, her husband's hometown. There she lived with her parents-in-law who is Catholic. Her parents in-law did not agree if their son converts to Islam. However, at the same time, they could not prevent the wish of their son to marry this Muslim girl. Therefore, when their son came home with his Muslim wife and stayed with them for a period of time, Nila's parents-in-law awfully encouraged her to convert to Catholicism. Nila recalled that she always wanted to be a good daughter-in-law. Though she doesn't consume pork, she didn't object when her mother-in-law asked her to clean the pork as a meal to this family.

For eight years, Nila still practiced Islamic tradition. Her conversion to Christianity took place in the month of Ramadan, after three consecutive nights dreamed of meeting Jesus and Mary. In her dream, Nila said, Jesus repeatedly said 'Follow me, may the light path be with you'. This dream was interpreted by Nila as a 'guidance' to make her convert to Catholicism. Sunday or third day after the dream, Nila decided to join worship at the church and expressed the desire to be baptized as Catholics. Nila who had been twelve years educated in Catholic school did not feel awkward with the new environment.

From her point of view, the moment of her conversion to Catholicism is the turning point of her economic transformation in her family life. A month later, the pastor offered her a job as a teacher in a school managed by Catholic foundation, a profession that she runs untill now.

Nila's conversion surprised her family. Her parents knew she had converted to Christianity a year later and obviously did not agree on the verdict. When she went back to her hometown in Lampung, she was not accepted by her parents. Likewise, when she visited her forefather in Banten, she was expelled. Her forefather lived in Banten and runs an Islamic boarding school. At last, she has never seen her parents untill the death of her mother. She learned to become a new Catholic adherent and active in social activities in her church. When we interviewed Fitri, she described Nila as a 'woman who was Muslim previously, but has become a teacher of Catholicism in a Catholic school'.

Alta: 'Two religions in one house'
Alta's story is quite interesting because she lived a life of interfaith marriage. Out of Aceh, interfaith marriage is a bit understandable, but when it happened to Acehnese girl from Alas ethnic, it becomes incredible. Alta is 38 years old and having three children. Her marriage with a Protestant leader was held fifteen years ago. Her husband is a sexton and called himself as evangelist. Alta and her husband married in civil marriage. It is unknown whether the marriage was held according to Christian tradition or Muslim tradition. Altas' husband said that they had requested to marry in local KUA (office of religious affairs), but was rejected due to difference of religion. The local church also denied arranging their marriage since the bride is a Muslim. Many people presumed that Alta converted to Christianity, but she confirmed that she is still a Muslim and never left Islam. Alta, as

we saw her, performs Salat, and claimed that she never gone to the church for life.

Our meeting with Alta and her husband was under the recommendation of Opung Intan, Lina's mother. A month after the interview with Lina in Aceh Singkil, we visited Lina's parents in South East Aceh. Right after the interview with her, Opung Intan introduced Alta to us who lived about 30 meters from Opung Intan's residence. Altas' husband is a nephew of Opung Intan. Therefore, she was quite receptive to our presence to share her married life experience, though she used to be cautious to strangers. By reason of her confession, she is afraid of strangers because she realized that her marriage was not recognized by Islamic religious authority in Aceh. However, soon we managed to convince her of our status as a researcher, and committed to ensure her comfort as our research participant.

Alta said that her parents initially opposed the marriage very strongly. Many Muslims denounced her marital life. Alta told us that her neighbors warned her that she will be in hell if she lives a life of interfaith marriage. Alta often thinks over the life she lives, whether it is approved by God or conversely, disliked by Him. By the course of time, she surrendered to her destiny as she had told us in her confession. She does not want to force her husband to convert to Islam; at the same time, she was also not willing to conform to the religion of her husband. She does not want to end her marriage, because she loves her husband and their children, she wants their children grow under the upbringing of their parents. She felt confident and strong to live such this life because she was supported by her siblings to go through the current path she had chosen.

It is not easy to live in Aceh while your mate is non-Muslim, especially for woman. Interfaith marriage is not recognized here. Alta told us that she is always worried about being interrogated by the *sharia* police (WH,

Wilayatul Hisbah) who could someday come to her house and question the status of her marriage. When we visited her at home, she could not hide her fear. It was clearly seen when we informed her that we came to interview her related with her marital life. "Perhaps they are officers who come to stone me to death, because I married a non-Muslim. That is the reason why I am afraid when strangers come", said Alta amid the interview of three hours duration.

Pious Agency of the Convert Women

Based on his research in Central Java, Seo (2013a: 92-93; 2013.b) concluded that gender is not determinant factor for someone to convert his/her religion on the reason of marriage. There was a negative correlation between marriage and the compulsory of following husband's religion. Gooren (2010: 65) said that couples who have stronger religious commitment (regardless of male or female) tend to invite the partner to convert, while Seo (2013b: 137) believed that economic factors and domicile determine who should convert in interfaith marriage. If the married couple live in environment of Muslim family, the mate tends to convert to Islam. On the contrary, if they live in an environment of non-Muslim family, the Muslim will tend to convert to the partner's religion. Seo concluded that economic is determining factor for someone to convert in interfaith marriage.

Unlike Seo, Jansen argued that women often become the parties that conform to the religion of their partners. In his research about Muslim women and Christian minority in Jordan, Jansen showed the intersection between gender and religious conversion (Jansen, 2006: x-xi). In line with Jansen, Hacker (2009: 178) pointed out that non Jewish female spouse's strongly pressure to convert than do non-Jewish male spouses. Women, sociologically often loose agency power in several aspects of life, including the

determination of religion to be embraced. Women often become the parties that are requested to conform to their husband's religion. This custom implies that women's autonomy in accepting religious beliefs is less recognized than that of men (Jansen, 2006: x). Conversion of religion put women in a complicated position. If a Christian female, for example, marries a Muslim male, the female will almost certainly convert to Islam. On the contrary, when the marriage comes from a couple of Muslim female and Christian male, polemic will appear. Islam clearly forbids someone to convert to other religion. Therefore, in Jordan Christian males often convert into Islam. In summary, the gender dimension effect determines the behavior of religious conversion, but on different instances these aspects sometimes ignored altogether.

The two perspectives showed the differences and similarities. Seo holds that gender variable is not determining in the behavior of the conversion, while Jensen said that gender factors were influenced by a number of specific requirements according to space, time and doctrinal aspects revolving around it. The similarity is at least proven by the fact that the two perspectives above ignore the agency of women in determining the behavior of religious conversion. Unlike Soe and Jansen, Badran (2006, 202) concluded that the converted women were actually expressing agency and power in representing themselves. To understand the performance of women agency, one may explore the condition before conversion, the process, as well as the condition after the conversion. It means that looking upon the motive of conversion alone is not sufficient, because it also needs to understand the manipulation process of conversion impact (Jansesn, 2006: xii; compare to Shanneik, 2011).

We will show the role of agency in the phenomenon of religious conversion by placing it in the discourse of post-structuralist feminism. One of the characteristics of post-structuralist feminism thought is to believe that women have the capacity to represent themselves. Not to talk about being represented women empowerment in the perspective of post-structuralist feminism more emphasize to give the discursive space for women to represent themselves. Lila Abu Lughod (2002: 783-790; 2013) in one of her articles (then published as a book with same title) that quite provocative, questioned: 'Do Women Really Need Saving?'. To her, academic perspective that have placed the women in the position of 'the group that have to be saved' need to be discussed further. "Because", Abu Lughod argued, "this perspective departed from the assumption of male's superiority to become the savior of female. Women don't need any savior from outside themselves. To Lughod, the need is the capability of outsider to understand women and their own cultural sphere.

Before presenting ethnographic data regarding the agency of the converted women, we will show some theoretical concepts about agency according to experts. According to Rinaldo (2014) agency is basically one's capacity to determine his/her will and to act accordingly, while Aisyah and Parker (2014: 207) said that agency is the freedom to express one's will. Agency may be understood as the capacity in the context of system relation to determine the movement of the world and not merely being dissolved in the world movement (Dwyer and Minnegal, 2007: 546). Therefore, agency is one's capacity to influence the social movement and not to be drifted in the flow of the movement. Agency makes the subject do something that might be different from the current of the thought or the action of the mainstream.

The converted women have the capacity to define their will and actualize that will as well. They express the agency and power to actualize their will (Pritchard, 2006). There are some forms of performance of women agency when they convert to other

religion: (1) removing the obstacles that hinder their desire to convert, (2) rationalizing the reason of conversion through reinterpretation of religious doctrines as well as other reasons of non-religious one, (3) giving a new meaning to important events that occur in their life and relating it to the decision to convert, (4) adaptation to new environment as well as old environment to defend the taken decisions.

The narratives of the research participants showed how they get rid of obstacles that prevented them. Their decision to marry and to convert was challaneged by their parents, but they strive to actualize their will by getting ride of all obstacles preventing them and accept the consequences as the result of their choice. Fitri had to pay high social cost due to her decision to convert to Catholicism. She had her job shifted, isolated by social environment, and moreover, she had to bear sustainable social criticism. Nila had to deal with similar experience. Until the time we conducted the interview she failed to restore good communication with her family members due to her conversion. Gross (2012) said that changing faith often inflicts social cost that is too expensive, like breaking with family, breaking with customer, work environment and alike. According to Gross (2012: 145), converts' attempt to make a complete break with the *past* is most directly manifested in the transformation of the *present* (compare to Fazzino, 2014: 255-256). Women capacity to understand and to face the consequences according to our opinion is an expression of agency.

The research participants also expressed the agency through rationalization of religious conversion. Lina said that religion is a matter between her and God. All religions are directing towards God. It's just that each religion has different ordinances in worship. Fitri believes that all religions teach the truth and lead its adherents to spread goodness. Therefore, she was not too awkward with her decision to convert to Catholicism despite fierce opposition from the people around her. For Lina no one can ensure that a religion is more correct than the other religions. Heaven can be achieved by running and wholeheartedly following the teachings of the religion. All religions, for Lina, allow its adherents to enter paradise as far as they practice their religion well.

> "Though I embrace Islam, and Islam is a true religion, but in my opinion, if I do not practice Islam, I won't go to heaven. Likewise, Christianity is good religion that teaches love. If the Christians do not practice the teachings of Christianity, they won't go to heaven either. It is not merely religion that takes us to heaven, but the faith will do. That's all I know.... I left Christianity not for its badness, but it is my destiny, the path that is given by God to me. I am broadminded in regard to religion. It doesn't matter for me to convert to Islam."

Research participants attempted to seek conformity between their old religion and new religion in order to minimize differences. Fitri said that religions have different rituals among each other, but all religions have the common goal, that is towards God. Fitri believes the differences between Islam and Christianity lies only in the number of the prophet. Christian prophets ended in Isa, while Islam ended on Prophet Muhammad. As Fitri said:

> "I see [...] there are a lot of conformities. Only prophet Muhammad is not there. [...] In Islam prophet Isa was lifted, while in Christianity he was crucified. [...] Muslims believe that before the doomsday the prophet will come, likewise, the Christians believe the same. Regarding the tradition of the Prophet's birth anniversary, both Jesus and Muhammad are equally celebrated. In Catholicism, the living can pray for the deceased. In Islam, a goodly child could also pray for the parents who have passed away."

231

Previous quotes from interview showed the effort to seek conformity between old religion and new religion. Fitri always rationalizes the decision to convert. Fitri believes that her conversion is God's destiny she should live. To her, if God did not allow her marriage to happen then she will never marry her current partner. What Lina said during the interview was also similar. To Lina, no one can ensure that her old religion (Christianity) is more true than her current religion (Islam), or vice versa. Religious conversion is God's path which is assigned to her by God. Her duty is to run her life well. According to her, everyone may attain heaven either through Islam, Christianity, or any other religion as far as the adherents practice the teachings of their religions well.

Fitri also mobilized the meaning of important events that happened to her as an acceptance to her decision. Just to mention an example, she financed the *umrah* of her parents. The reason why she financed this religious journey is to become a devoted daughter to her parents though she believes in different religion. Interestingly, Fitri (and also her mother) connected the phenomenon of *umrah* with her personal experience as a Muslim who had converted to Catholicism. This can be seen in how Fitri and her mother seek an explanation about legal status of the *umrah* financed by a person of different faith.

"Last time I *arranged* umrah for my mother. Somebody said that the finance I provided for the *umrah* is *haram*, because I am a Christian. The *umrah* is considered illegal according Islam. [...] My mother prayed there (Mecca) to God, 'O God, if the money is not *halal*, please let me know! Make me lost here (in Mecca)'. That is the prayer of my mother. Thank God, my mother said that the *umrah* run smoothly there. Moreover, when she wanted to kiss the black stone, God paved the way for her. She was surprised; it seemed that God had facilitated her. [...] My mother prayed: 'O God, I don't like my daughter converted to Christianity. But how is else? Step, fortune, meeting, and death are in your

hand. It is you who creates. I don't know whether this money is *halal* or not to perform *umrah*. I keep going on. If the money is not *halal* please let me know. Make me lost!'. Thank God she was not lost. Everything ran smoothly. She went to Ka'bah alone, like no one was there. The way was wide and straight. I was surprised too. I thank God. It meant that my prayer was granted by God. I prayed to God: 'O God, please give health to my mother. O God, now I believe in different religion from that of my mom, but please answer my prayer for her'. I thought my prayer was answered by God. I told my mother: 'God answered my prayer, Mom. [...] Some say: If a Muslim prays for a Christian, God will not answer. [...] However, my experience proved contra wise. My Christian prayer for my Muslim mother was answered by my God".

Our research participants often have special way to express agency related religious conversion. Among the participants, Alta is the most distinctive in articulating her agency. As delivered, Alta is the only women who did not to convert her religion though getting married with a mate of different religions. Alta also did not question her husband for remaining in different religions with her. Alta did not question the doubt of the people around her against her religious status and her commitment to practicing Islam. She also cannot turn away from Islam, neither because she lives in Aceh which implements the Islamic *sharia*, nor because she is a part of the largest ethnic in Aceh Tenggara (Alas ethnic) which is synonymous with Islam. Alta and her husband claimed that they are happy on her marital life today. Alta said:

"We have married. We remain in our respective beliefs. I remain Muslim, my husband remains Christian. My faith could not be changed by man, likewise my husband. Pastor, ustadz or anyone who wants to change our belief will certainly fail. Only God, who has authority to change my belief. Though I have three children already, the oldest one is at junior high school, in terms of religion, I remain to choose Islam. I

believe that there is no God except Allah. I have got married for 15 years, I have tried to change my belief, but I cannot turn about Islam. Neither because of parents nor because I live in Aceh, where Islamic *sharia* is implemented. It is from the deepest of my heart, I cannot turn from Islam".

Alta practices Islam, although she reduced the frequency of gathering in activity of *wirid Yasin* in the neighborhood. She did not question her children educated according to the religion of their father. But Alta had agreed with her husband that when their children have grown, the children have the freedom to choose the religion desired by them.

This description hopefully can help to explain the performance of agency of converted women. They articulated agency based on religiosity: a social concept introduced by Mahmood (2001, 205) as pious agency. Mahmood (2005) argued that agency is a capacity or skill of conduct according to religious mores and ethics. But it seemed that Mahmood's conception is insufficient to explain the phenomenon of converted women which are discussed in this research. Mahmood presupposed the pious agency done in the context of implementation of religious mores and ethics, while the women of the research participant represented themselves as religious either in their old religion or in their new religion after the conversion.

The concept of pious critical agency introduced by Rinaldo (2007; 2014) in some particular aspects can explain the phenomenon of women agency of the research participants. Unlike Mahmood, Rinaldo (2014) said that religious agency can be generated by being critical to established religious doctrines. Rinaldo showed that pious movement which was done by female activists of socio-religious movements like Muslimat NU (Women organization under the umbrella of Nahdlatul Ulama), Rahima

(women Non Governmental Organization/NGO), or Rifka Annisa (women NGO). The three institutions which became the case study in Rinaldo's research are women activists who promoted critical interpretation over the doctrines of the mainstream in Islam. This must be different with the agency of converted women. While the critical attitude of those activists is within the frame of one religion, the converted women showed their religiosity when they were in their old religion as well as in their new religion.

Nila, Fitri, dan Lina are not only religious in the current religion, but they also obeyed and practiced the teachings of their old religion before they get converted. This phenomen on is similar to the study of Bangstad (2004: 355-358) when he discussed the experience of Bashar's conversion, a pious Catholic, who became a religious person after converting to Islam for marriage. It is also indicated by Shanneik (2011: 503-517) in his writings about Irish women who converted to Islam. Shanneik showed the experience of Irish woman who was raised in a devout Catholic tradition later became a religious Muslim after converting to Islam. Shanneik (2011: 511) revealed that the converts 'wanted their lives to be monitored and controlled by Allah's command'. The converts felt that they have gained emotional and spiritual rewards, have access to rights and able to develop themselves as stable and strong personalities with a (religious) space of their own (Nieuwkerk, 2008: 445). Nevertheless, it must be admitted that the religiosity of research participants showed ranks of levels that varied from one individual to individual. This indicates, as stated by Nisa (2012: 374), the performance of the agency always takes different forms according to the surrounding social structures.

CONCLUSION

This article analyzes the experiences of Acehnese women converts for marriage which is connected to the agency discourse in post-structuralist feminism perspective. The article shows that women who converted to other religion had the capacity to choose a spouse, also transformed into religious subjects with critical awareness. Conversion is not merely based on the pragmatic needs but critical awareness of the goodness of religions. They believe all religions teach goodness and their religion is not the only way to God. They believe in the 'road of safety' outside the religion they profess. Thus, when the state only recognizes marriages of couples who co-religionists, women of research participants did not object when they are faced with the option to convert so that their marriage would be recognized by the state. Interestingly, in their new religion they became religious and wholeheartedly practicing life according to new religious value system. This finding corrects the view of Seo (2012; 2013.a, 2013.b) who said religious conversion on the reason of marriage in Indonesia only causes followers to lose the focus to become religious, because placing religion as merely administration affair.

More detail, the study showed that women who convert their religion have a capacity to represent themselves as religious subjects both before converting and after. These findings theoretically criticized the concept of godliness agency (pious agency) as told Mahmood. Mahmood (2005) argued the agency is the capacity or skills to do something ethically in line with religious morals. Mahmood's conception of pious agency presumes that piety is formed with obedient to religious moral ethics. While the women research participants leaved the old religion with religious adherence to pursue the devotion that appropriate with new religion. The conception of pious critical agency stated by Rinaldo (2007: 2014) would in some ways explain this phenomenon. Rinaldo (2014) said religious agency can be formed by being critical of the establishment of religious doctrines. But the women convert surpassed beyond the critical attitude in religion. While the critical attitudes of the activists remain in the circle which embraced religion, the women convert shows religiosity when they embraced the old and the new religion. Hence, this study enriches the conversation concepts of pious agency which debated by Mahmood and Rinaldo.

Furthermore, to end the exposure, let us humbly express the limitations of this paper. As seen, this paper uses biographical narrative approach to the four women who convert their religion, Catholics, Christians, and Muslims. The findings of this approach are only to describe the experience of the subjects studied. Posts should not be generalized to explain the dynamics of religious women who convert due to marriage in Aceh, especially in Indonesia. Biographical narrative technique was chosen with the intention to produce the depth of meaning of reality without ambition to generalize the phenomenon discussed. Thus, to get a more comprehensive depiction about the experiences of women who converted, more researches on a similar theme which involve more participants and broader areas of research are needed.

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