

# The Sultanate of Aceh Darussalam As A Constructive Power

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## Abstract

Aceh history has long been mainly taken into consideration in the context of Southeast Asian or Malay archipelago history. However, there is not much attention given to the fact that the Sultanate of Aceh played a very salient role globally in Islamic world. This paper argues a hypothesis that the Sultanate of Aceh had commenced a watershed apparently in its relation with the centre of Islamic world to construct a new political concept of Pan-Islamism in the very early decades of the 16<sup>th</sup> century and as its succession in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Due to this, Aceh history should be perused concerning the centre-periphery contextual situation of the Islamic world. The significance of the moulding power of the center is admittedly unquestionable. Nevertheless, it is also a fact that the center cannot exist without its periphery. The mutual relationship between the center and its periphery shares substantive responsibility in a manner of being constructive. It means the fact that the latter has some power to mould as well as give a direction to the former. Concerning the inter-relational approach between the centre and its periphery of Islamic world, the relation of the Sultanate of Aceh with the Ottoman State became one of the hallmarks of the development of the idea of Pan-Islamism. The Sultanate aimed to have a relation in almost equal terms so as to exclude the Portuguese ultimately from Southeast Asia in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, and to protect sovereignty in its homeland from the invasion of the Dutch colonialism in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This state policy should be regarded as a triggering intervention for the creation of a new concept in the Islamic history such as Pan-Islamism. Thus this article reexamines the ways in which Acehnese sultans' promoting Pan-Islamist ideology in relation with the Ottoman State on the basis of common sources and particularly the contemporary news and commentaries in the journal of *Basiret* which was published for about 60 news commencing before the appalling Dutch war until June 1874 in Constantinople.

**Key Words:** *Pan-Islamism, Basiret, Ottoman, Indian Ocean, Aceh*

## Introduction

This paper revisits not only the relationships between the Sultanate of Aceh Darussalam and the Ottoman State but also and the conceptual development of the Pan-Islamic world view in the context of the center and the periphery of Islamic world. The writer employs an approach that is an alternative view to the conventional understanding of center-periphery relations in terms of Islamic states, and the relations between the Ottoman State and the Sultanate of Aceh Darussalam. The current hypothesis in this article is developed in the light of the historical references regarding the Acehnese sultans' deliberate political investment to develop and integrate with the Ottoman State in various eras. This is a critical examination of the relationships between the centre and periphery of Islamic world regarding to 16th and 19th centuries. The subjects of this relation are the Ottoman State in the western part and the Sultanate of Aceh Darussalam in the eastern part of the Islamic world. Due to the established understandings and perceptions of the prominence and "impotency and excessive absolutism" of the centre has always caused the influences of periphery overlooked.

At the very outset it should be admittedly claimed that the Acehnese sultans' political attempts to have a relation with the Ottoman State cannot be understood by solely stressing on the military demands. Since below-mentioned explanations clarify that the basis of the correspondence of the Acehnese Sultans was very structured as seen in the very core aspects and principals put forward by Ali Mughayat Syah, the founding father of the Sultanate of Aceh Darussalam at the very beginning of the 16th century (Hasjmy 1980: 4). There is no doubt that these objectives to have given a certain determined direction to the future relations of the Sultanate with the Ottoman State. This was actually forcing international political processes to be conducted in an active and constructive manner. And throughout the history of Aceh it is witnessed that the all able rulers followed in some extent the same principals in order to mould the relations with the international circles in the perspective of a new power center in Southeast Asia.

Curiously enough, based on this concretely structured state policy and program the present writer argues that the very intentional approaches of the sultans of Aceh was to create a new paradigm in the relations between the center and the periphery, a challenge to a simply and conventionally patterned suzerain-vasal relations. It should be admittedly claimed that the Acehnese sultans' efforts to develop relations with the center, the Ottoman State, were to forge a single world system in Islamic world at the beginning of the development of the global colonial expansionism.

What makes the current issue worth of being discussed regarding political establishment in periphery, the role of the Sultanate in the interaction with the central power, say, the Ottoman State has been acted historically well-known, but not considered in the content of periphery's role. The present writer exemplifies this constructive political approach of the Sultanate of Aceh Darussalam in relation with the center and the periphery to contribute the development of the term of Pan-Islamism.

The attribution of the initiation of Pan-Islamism with the attempts of Acehese sultans has meaningful enough pertaining the colonial expansion in Southeast Asia, the diversification of the eastern Muslims, and the development of Indian Ocean faction in the Ottoman ruling elite as seen in the example of mighty Grandvizier, Sokullu Mehmed Pasha.<sup>1</sup> The eastern part of the Islamic periphery has been emphasized in the relation with the Ottoman State in the context of a suzerain and vassal relation in conventional historiography. However, since the periphery seems to have had a power –in some extent- to affect and give a shape the policies of the center it should be underscored the need to rethink the unique characteristics of the relationships between the Ottoman State and the Sultanate of Aceh Darussalam. The initiative of the Acehese founding fathers can be understood by taking into consideration of the colonial attempts of the Western powers, starting from the very early years of the 16th century, which was also a fundamental cause of founding the Sultanate as a sovereign state by the leadership of Ali Mughayat Syah, targeted to construct a territorial hegemony as a federated state in eastern Islamic periphery. Due to all these reasons Acehese sultans ought to be regarded principal pioneers of the development of the ideology of Pan-Islamism in the dawn of the modern era. The determination of Acehese sultans ought to be identified as a creation of new pattern in the center and periphery relations. As detailed below the actions of the sultans particularly in regional and international contexts are the issues which exemplify the multiplication of the Islamic states' authentic contributions in terms of a co-partnership for Islamic entity.

What makes the approach of the rulers of Aceh to the center different from other Muslim states in various geographies such as the Gulf region is that the latter was lack of communal union due to ideological disparities among ahl-i sunnah, Shiah, Khawarji etc. though all were Muslim. Besides the Safavids, renowned as one of the contemporary Muslim states warring with the Ottoman State based on political and ideological opposition intentionally conducted political channels and established an alliance with the Portuguese to drive the Ottomans from the region (Anani 1986: 74-5). In addition, Ahmadnagar, Deccan rulers are known to be suspicious of the Ottomans at least until 1560s. This approach of the Deccan rulers did not enable them to develop any political relations which might have caused any Pan-Islamist initiatives (Casale 2010: 118).

The Ottoman State started to concentrate on the involvements in the developments in the Indian Ocean relatively much in the first part of the 16th century. And this interest has drawn attention of some scholars to provide proofs that the Ottoman State had become as a maritime empire. However, the relation of the Ottoman State with the Indian Ocean cannot be understood without the impact of the Aceh Sutanate commencing from the very early period of the aforementioned century until the end of the nineteenth century with some intervals due to international and domestic politics in both Muslim states. As the main thesis of this article the writer is to analyse the reports, as a preliminary work, pertaining the determinative actions of the Acehese ruling elite during the Dutch War, in *Basiret*, a newspaper published in both Constantinople and Cairo

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<sup>1</sup>Sokullu Mehmed Pasha (d. 1579) spent 15 years as grandvizier until his death.

during the years of aforementioned war.<sup>2</sup> Even though the reports are worth of being reviewed in detail, the present writer focuses on the issue as an overview. The reports in *Basiret* seem to have various functions such as creation of a political pressure on the Ottoman court to protect the sovereignty of the Acehese State, establishing a Pan-Islamic sentimentality in public. In addition, *Basiret* also functioned as the medium of introduction of Acehese issues mentioned in a letter written in Arabic and sent by an Acehese during the same years<sup>3</sup>.

### **Initial Sentiments of Pan-Islamism**

Pan-Islamism, as a religio-political concept, seeks to vitalize the political unity under a caliphate who is accepted as both a temporal and religious leader of all Muslim communities. Though this term, in fact, potentially rooted in the understanding of Islamic political philosophy, was borrowed from the contemporaneous Pan-German movement in the 19th century. Constructing the concept of Pan-Islamism in mainstream understanding is based on the relations between European power circles and the Muslim world which was mainly almost all colonized throughout the 19th century by the former one. However, Islam as a religion and its political aspects in the worldly politics emphasizes much on the unity among the Muslims. In addition to the belief system, the worldly affairs throughout the history have moulded directly or indirectly the relationships among the Muslim states. It basically stands for the understanding of the same universe of expectations among them. Regarding the expansion of the colonial imperialism in almost all Islamic geographies in the second part of the same century, it is admitted that sentiments of Pan-Islamism in almost all Muslim communities occurred and the concept were championed by Muhammad Abduh and Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (Riddell 2001: 207; Siddiqi 2007; 152).

Afghani's Pan-Islamic movement is based on mainly in the developments in India regarding the British subjugation in 1857 and he initiated to find a common point and understanding between the Iranian and the Afghan nations against the British in the year 1880/1881 (Siddiqi 2007: 152). On the other hand, the mainstream researchers in the domain of socio-politics emphasize that the concept was initiated by Sultan Abdulhamid II to unite the Muslim world under the leadership of the Ottoman State at the end of the 19th century and at the beginning of the twentieth century. These aforementioned samples pertaining the development of Pan-Islamist ideology approximate much, particularly the era and the scope on which we cannot concentrate here. It was not long before Abdulhamid II propagated the Islamic union against the western imperialism in around the nineteenth century.

Verily, in this context the peculiarity of the Aceh Sultanate, as the spearhead of the development of modern Pan-Islamic understanding, should be considered well by revisiting the historical developments. Due to the Western colonial attempts, some rulers such as the founding fathers of the Sultanate of Aceh Darussalam favoured to establish a union among the Muslim states, a certain type of political act to mould the relations, a newly constructed way, between the center and the periphery. All attempts of the Acehese sultans in various periods amplify the

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<sup>2</sup>See: *Basiret*, 29 Rabi' al-Akhir 1290, p. 2.

<sup>3</sup>*Basiret*, 8 Rabi' al-Akhir 1290, Document (Belge) No. 1433, p. 1. (All references to *Basiret* in this paper based on the archive research at Bayezid State Library in Istanbul).

expansion of the socio-political borders of the periphery in order to encourage and stimulate the center for the establishment of a Pan-Islamic bloc. This is a kind of incentive in itself to invite the center for expanding its scope and is assumed a break with the indigenous political culture so as to provide a port of destination. In addition, since the founding father's reign, this had been a type of calculated and instrumental attitude which came into prominence in the Sultanate of Aceh.

The subjects of this relation are the Ottoman State in the western part and the Sultanate of Aceh Darussalam in the eastern part. The novel political conditions in the Indian Ocean triggered relations between the eastern and western parts to develop direct correspondences in various aspects. Due to the established understandings and perceptions of the promineny and "impotency and excessive absolutism" of the centre has always caused the influences of periphery overlooked. The present writer argues that the historical foundations of the phenomenon of Pan-Islamism is prominently rooted in the 16th century and then particularly the 19th century due to the encounters of the Western infidels with the regional Islamic powers such as the Sultanate of Aceh in Southeast Asia. It is very rational aspiration of developments in regard of the center and the periphery of the Muslim world in the age(s) of the colonialism. Even though there was a rupture pertaining the 18th century, there are strong proofs that the Acehnese interest to develop relations with the centre kept successivity, especially due to the Dutch War in the 19th century. Whilst the pioneer European colonial powers increased their economic, military and in later periods political influences as followed in the changing process from colonialism to imperialism, it did not seem logical the Islamic powers did not react and stimulate relations with the center.

The related argument of this approach is based on the universalisation of the Western thought through discoveries of the world seas. One fundamental significant aspect of this relation is the invasion of the Southeast Asian Muslim states by the Portuguese which known also as *conquistadors*. The same era should be taken into consideration as the initial initiatives for the core aspects of Pan-Islamic developments as seen the idealist construction of the Aceh Sultanate. Against this "universal west" (Aydın 2007: 15), the contemporary conditions forced – even not the simply developed by the sultans- the Sultans to react by attempting to establish a union among the Islamic states. The political aspirations of Ali Mughayat Syah including political, economic, cultural and religious co-relations between the east and west parts of Islamic world should be understood in the view of establishing a global Islamic union (Hasjmy 1980: 4). The political view of the aforementioned sultan was not an illusion or a pure ideal, instead it was based on the very concrete and material conditions of -at the first hand- the Aceh Sultanate and then the Ottoman State. The criteria of the state fundamentals developed by the first sultan of Aceh Sultanate was a desire on the basis of sound philosophy to improve the religio-political relationships between the center and the periphery. The Aceh Sultanate as emphasized in each relevant work affiliated with the history of Aceh had very unique geo-political position between east and west international trade. Thus this condition made Aceh region would become a well-developed not only international but a political hub of relations with the center. The very unique proof is seen in naming of Aceh as *Serambi Mekkah* not only in religious context, but also flow of new ideas and developments from the center to the far periphery Aceh functioned as a catalyst. This logical reason enunciates that the Pan-Islamic movement commenced by the

Aceh Sultanate's initiative whereas the Portuguese invasion became inevitable during the very early decades of the 16th century. As the Acehnese regarded the existence of the Portuguese as an evil averse power, the former stressed their concern starting from the very early period.

And then the continuous imperialistic attempts of the Dutch in Southeast Asia in the 19th century is deserved to be recounted as pioneer Pan-Islamic attempt, in a complete vision not only limited to the regional Muslim states' union but also to have a direct impact on the center, the Ottoman State. For instance, as well-documented in *Hikayat Perang Sabil*, the Dutch War was regarded as a Holy War against the infidel (Edwin 1998: 303). The invasion of Aceh by the Dutch forces which caused a feeling of union among the Muslim communities in Southeast Asia. In regard this, it is known that some prominent Acehnese living in the Penang Island managed to mobilize an aid movement against the Dutch in all Nusantara (Parkinson 1964: 291).

Due to one of the aforementioned imperialist attempts occurred in Aceh in 1873, the Acehnese authorities took the initiative to establish the political reintegration with the Ottoman State. To enable to understand the Acehnese' efforts to reactivate the relations through political apparatus the humiliating articles imposed by the Dutch general on the Acehnese court at the very outset of the war should be briefly remembered. Among the five articles, the most vital importance ones are as follow: a) Acehnese should surrender to the Dutch; b) The Acehnese government should not enter any political interactions with any European, particularly the Ottoman State; c) Instead of the Ottoman flag, the Dutch one should be unfurled.<sup>4</sup>

The political and moral basis of this Pan-Islamic union is seen in the manifestation of Aceh state's political affiliations with the Ottoman State. Though nowadays some academia differ the phenomena Pan-Islamism and Islamic union, the very early sample of the tendency of this political affiliation has not been much worked on by contemporary academicians, at least, the common political view emphasize much on the Pan-Islamism in the second part of the 19th century. What the founding fathers of the Aceh Sultanate focused on pertaining the ideals of the state leads us to think about the dialogic relationship between eastern and western part of the Muslim world. And this initiative of the Acehnese rulers should be regarded as a watershed between the center and the far periphery.

Dealing much in detail below we are going to emphasize on the status of the Ottoman State as the representative of the centre, and the Sultanate of Aceh Darussalam as the representative of the periphery. This attempt should also be seen as a critical approach to the historical relations of both Muslim states from the periphery perspective, not the center as done until today. The religio-political importance of the Aceh Sultanate does not allow anyone to overlook and discount its attempts of moulding the relations with other circles including the Islamic center.

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<sup>4</sup>Basiret, 8 Rabi' al-Akhir 1290, Belge No 1433, p. 1.

## Universalisation of the Islamic Periphery: In Aceh Context

Throughout the first one and a half centuries the Sultanate of Aceh managed to establish its control through both military/naval actions and diplomacy. As well-documented Acehnese sultans took the initiative and tried to restructure the area's political environment by sending envoys to various principalities in Middle East, South and Southeast Asia so as to "promote alliances and gain allies against the Catholic Portuguese" (Federspiel 2007: 42, 57). All these attempts should be regarded as an ensurance to establish an Islamic union, say, Pan-Islamic initiative towards the challenges by the Portuguese.

Developing the phrase "universalisation of the Islamic east" is historically based on some concrete developments. Some very crucial aspects of this issue should be put as follows: a) The Portuguese, after few friendly visits to Pasai and Pidie on the north part of Aceh during 1509 onwards, supposed that they had discovered a wealthy city states in Sumatra. Notwithstanding, the establishment of the Sultanate of Aceh Darussalam was a native Islamic circle's challenge against the infidels in a land historically played a pioneer role in the region. The years 1520 and 1524 were the very extraordinary and in some extent unpredicted developments regarding the whole relations of the Portuguese in Southeast Asia (Takeshi 1984: 12). This was the first step of the Sultanate's various and successive encounters with the Portuguese until the latter was washed away from the shores of the Malacca Straits by the Dutch in the first part of the 17th century. The symbolic meaning of this success of the Sultanate ought not to be overseen, since the reconquista regime had assumed that "any Asian kingdom –other than those of the Great Turk (*The Ottoman Khalif*) and the Great Mughal- could be conquered by a small force of European soldiery." (Boxer 2001: 159).

To realize the importance of the relations between the Aceh-Ottoman states clearly, the other Muslim states and their relations also should be taken into consideration in the centuries particularly between 1500-1700. Based on a classification of some academicians there were three great Islamic states such as the Mughals in India, the Safavids in Iran and the Ottoman (Black 2001: 193). However what the striking is that we cannot talk about constructive relations among these three powers, instead the conflict and disparity, at least as kept in mind that permanent wars and cold wars between Safavid Iran and the Ottomans until the treaty of *Kasr-i Sirin* in 1639 (Hess 2005: 103). On the other hand, even though the Sultanate of Aceh is not classified by the majority of the world historians as this world-class Islamic empire states, the power of the former was not in doubt. The political praxis of the sultans was very inspiring and it was strikingly different from what had been among the above mentioned Muslim states. For example, whilst the conflict and dispute conducted by the Safavids caused the Ottomans to have lost territorial entity, and wasting its financial and military sources during this power struggle, the attempts of the Acehnese sultans had a direct impact in an opposite way such as increasing the political and economic superiority of the Ottomans.

Whereas the Portuguese commenced the invasions of the regions successively, especially Albuquerque, the renowned leader of the Portuguese, "prophesized the universal Muslim reactions" in various regions in around the Indian Ocean (Anani 1986: 74). In addition, Diogo do Couto, the official historian emphasized the power of the Aceh Sultanate in the region and the

concern regarding the military preparations to encompass Malacca among the Portuguese in Malacca (Boxer 2001: 240). Thus the presence of the Portuguese sea power around the Indian Ocean caused a relatively strong political and commercial union among the local Muslim states, particularly in the second part of the 16th century (Chaudhuri 1985: 80). In addition, related to the development mentioned above particularly the successive attempts of the Acehese Sultans reached this eco-political union establishment into another phase which might be called courageously as a pioneer sample of Pan-Islamism. As the rising tide of resentment of the Muslim states to the Portuguese was taken into consideration (Casale 2010: 118), the function and pioneership of the Aceh Sultanate can be appreciated well due to their determined approach since the beginning of the century.

It is safe enough to claim that the Sultanate of Aceh Darussalam appeared as the religio-political power to fill a void of Islamic leadership in Southeast Asia after the fall of Malacca Sultanate until the very late era (Lombard 2000: 113). Due to this pattern of Acehese power relations with the international circles including particularly Islamic power centers we need to phrase this development as “universalisation of the Islamic east periphery”. Forging a mutual alliance between the center and the periphery seemed to have found a beneficial condition due to the establishment of the Sultanate of Aceh and foremost its religio-political determination against the Western powers. It should be emphasized that the Acehese initiative, in the sample of al-Qahhar’s attempt, to establish Pan-Islamic movement was not limited to augment cooperation with the center, but some other various regions regarding the periphery such as Java and India (Schrieke 1957: 245). This is very unique political investment to establish a universal Islamic union among the various Islamic states in the center and the periphery so as to link the eastern and western part of the Islamic world in the very early ages of the modern era.

The function of the Sultanate of Aceh in the contemporary global relations was proved by its challenge against the Portuguese not only in terms of successive military/navy attack in Malacca but also revived the international trade route between the Indian Ocean and the Red Sea starting from the 1540s onwards. With regard to Acehese shipment to the Middle Eastern ports were described as “*Náos de Achem*” (great ships of/from Aceh). The first attempts pushed the Portuguese to be in defensive position in Malacca, and the second one enabled spice, as an immediate impact of these determination shown by the Acehese sultans to be available again in the Mediterranean ports such as in Alexandria, Egypt and Venice, Italy (Boxer 1996: 279; Chaudhuri 1985: 75). The preceding sentences should be taken into consideration that the Sultanate regarding the supremacy and moulding its own sovereign land and involving the trade business which had impacts directly to the power relations in Europe circles became a constructive power. Thus the Sultanate by its own determination gave impetus to the unification of the Muslim states which exemplified the central power and the periphery countries.

The leading figures of the Sultanate turned their attention to the center as soon as they established and developing ages of of the Sultanate. However this relation was not the simple suzerain and vassal state relations, which is the one as supposed by many circles including popular and academic ones. The attempts of sultans of Aceh should not be classified under the vassal state’s demands from the superior one. Instead the initiative of the Aceh sultans should be regarded as a novel direction of the western and eastern Islamic spheres, or regarding our



argument the centre and periphery. The concrete development of this initiative is seen in the first appearance of the Acehese envoy in Constantinople. Whereas they reached the headquarter the center they were not recognized but they introduced themselves and the other eastern Muslim existencies as periphery (Hurgronje 1906: 208-9). Of all eastern Muslim periphery societies the Aceh Sultanate by its initiative appeared since the very beginning until the beginning of the 19th century as the most constructivist figure.

Since the well-structured road map pertaining regional and international relations based on the vision of Ali Mughayat Syah had been followed throughout the first century, Aceh reached the apex of its power in the middle of the first half of the 17th century. Thus the Sultanate became arguably an equal partner as a periphery state to the Ottoman State particularly during the reign of Iskandar Muda. As well-storied, the Ottoman's envoys' observation and their description of the Aceh palace the condition of the Sultanate of Aceh to the Ottoman Sultan was very striking (Seljuq 1980: 309). During this occasion the sayings of the Ottoman Sultan should be accepted as the universalisation of the Islamic east. In fact, when a careful analysis is conducted it might clearly appear that the Acehese approach was always based on equal partnership, if we describe this political demands the current international political terminology, it was a very early sample of "strategic partnership" (Casale 2010: 180). During the reign of Iskandar Muda, the history of Southeast Asia witnessed the golden era of the Muslim State. The power of the state was reflected in the titles of Muda such as calling him as " the crown of the world" (Kennedy 1993:49; Ahmad 1972: 63; Federspiel 2007: 58). The era of Muda is wort of comparing with the one of Sulaiman the Magnificent in the Ottoman State. Like the Lawgiver, Muda, too, established written law in the state and so created a state tradition (Reid 2005: 103; Federspiel 2007: 58).

Thus it is safe to admit that the Acehese sultans' attempts to develop relations with the center was far beyond military protection. However it is difficult to say that the response of the Ottomans was the one as expected by the Acehese Sultans. The interest of the Ottoman Sultans was not regained particularly after the most salient military attempt of the Ottomans in 1538 resulted in a total defeat though the attempt was a great preparation for an easy victory against the Portuguese. As witnessed by the effectiveness of the Sultanate againts the foreign powers not only as a military but also ecnoomic domain, the Sultanate took the role of the center in the context of Southeast Asian Islamic communities. On the other hand, it was received scant attention by the Ottoman State. Thus unfortunately majority of the Acehese attemtps were not responded in an appropriate manner from the Ottoman circles.

Some writers such as Giancarlo Casale's (2010) touching the letter of al-Qahhar is still significant to analyse it. The wording in this letter has been commented as the Acehese wanted to be a vassal state of the Ottomans. This aspect of issue can be regarded as true pertaining the Islamic political philosophy which orders to obey the khalifah who is accepted as the Shadow of God in this world. And this aspect is supported in relation of all the respected rulers of the Islamic sultanates with the central power structure throughout the Islamic history. However, the same wording of al-Qahhar allows us to comment as the encouraging attempt to convince the khalifah in Constantinople to take into consideration the Muslim communities in far east of the Muslim world.

The most striking intensification of the Ottoman interests developed when the letter and envoy of al-Qahhar reached Constantinople. Al-Qahhar's attempt was very stimulative and changed the interest of Constantinople from the western part of the Indian Ocean to Sumatra, Southeast Asia. Particularly, appointment of Sokullu Mehmed Pasha as the grandvizier, who is described as a member of "the Indian Ocean faction" by Giancarlo Cassale (2010), in that year bolstered the military and political involvement with the Aceh Sultanate. The order of the renowned military aid under the commandship of Kurtoglu Hızır Reis was actually a result of Sokullu's political decision in 1567-8. Though due to the rebellion in Yemen the majority of the relief vessels were used in operation against the rebellions, it seems that the Sokullu's determination to send galleys to Sumatra was realized by setting off two vessels. The concrete result of the relations between the center and the periphery gave new momentum to the struggles initiated by the Islamic rulers in around the Indian Ocean against the Portuguese whose details need not detain us here (Casale 2010: 131-3).

The political relations between the Ottomans and the Acehnese after the official correspondence between two respected sultans, Sultan Selim II and al-Qahhar, seemed that the excuse of the geographical distance the Ottoman Sultan did not want Acehnese to send yearly tax which was asked from each vassal states during that time (Hurgronje 1906: 209; Reid 1969: 398). This is not just a forgiveness of the central power, but it ought to be peculiarly regarded as a political consideration. This deliberate decision of the Ottoman Sultan might be considered as a political grant to the Aceh Sultanate to equip its autonomous state. In fact, this is a very striking decision of Sultan Selim II since almost all the whole 16th century particularly after 1540s Acehnese trade vessels appeared periodically in various Middle Eastern ports such as Jeddah in the Red Sea or at least they could reach via Gujerat vessels to Middle Eastern ports (Boxer 1996: 281). What the present writer means here that the decision of the Ottoman Sultan could not have been a result of geographical distance.

It should also be emphasized that what makes the Aceh-Ottoman relations unique was the long term determination of Aceh sultans. Whilst the Ottoman State was decreasing political and territorial hegemony, the Sultanate of Aceh was expanding its eco-political existence during the 16th century.

The relations relatively decreased between two Muslim states, it did not mean that the Aceh majorly had any dependency on the Ottoman sources and supports. Instead, on the one hand during the 17th century as mentioned somewhere, the Ottomans had been afflicted with some crisis including a palace revolution in terms of deposition of Sultan Ibrahim from the reign (Schöffner 1997: 90; Parker 1997: 2) not to be able to improve or increase the relations either in the Western or Eastern Indian Ocean, of course with Aceh as well, on the other hand Aceh saved itself from the global decreasing political and economic backwardness experienced in 17th century in almost all Southeast Asia. During this era the Sultanate might be very exceptional among the contemporary Muslim states by its prosperity, and ability to conduct "trade with whomever they wished", beyond its sovereignty (Reid 1997: 223).

The aspect of universalisation of Islamic East was also specifically exposed to the attention of Islamic world in term of the Dutch War. Particularly this war was reported successively in Basiret

in particular period such as very beginning of the war in March 1873 and during second biggest invasion attempt in 1874. The report published on 18.03.1874 (29 Muharram 1291) gave a detailed information concerning the continuity of the war. It was mentioned that the Dutch military power was challenged by the Acehese resistance and lost much military equipment in the war field and additionally more soldiers were lost their lives.

What can be added to the preceding paragraphs as a conclusion is that throughout the eco-political developments in Aceh allowed the Acehese circles to conduct regular journeys to the Red Sea. The direct impact of political encounters and commercial activity established in almost entire 16th century enabled Aceh Sultanate to become “the leading position among ports not under the control of Western trading companies”(Chaudhuri 1985: 181).

### **The Description of the Sultanate of Aceh in Basiret: The Dutch War**

The Aceh War, due to not only in the history of Islam, but also in the whole colonial history regarded as the most prolonged conflict nearly for forty years, when the Sultan Muhammad Daud surrendered to the Dutch, or seventy years until the year of the Japanese invasion, based on the Acehese perception of the struggle, was the struggle against the imperialism (Morris 1983: 54). It's worth enough to analyse how the Ottomans perceived this war.

*Basiret*, the national newspaper, which was published in both Constantinople and Cairo during the years of the Dutch War in the second part of the 19th century, is a very authentic reference to understand the perceptions of Turkish intelligentsia, their imposition on establishing an authoritarian voice of the Ottoman government and introduced a salient Southeast Asian independence movement conducted against the infidel to the Ottoman readers. In addition, not only these reports but also the editorial commentaries were the media to propagandize and develop the concept of Islamic union among the Ottoman society and caused political awareness among political elites by criticizing the invasion of the Dutch as an infringement of international laws and the arguments of the Dutch did not reflect the reality.<sup>5</sup> The Dutch War, started 26 March 1873, was considered much at least at the very beginning first a few years. The sources of these reports in *Basiret* were based on the contemporary London (such as *Times*) and Hague media received the news about the war through Batavia, Calcuta and Penang as mentioned in some various news.<sup>6</sup> In the later period Ottoman embassy in Batavia became the sources of news regarding the war. The writer determined that the news about the war started to be published on 3 Muharrem 1290 (1873) until 21 Rebiulahir 1290 (6 June 1874).

It is seen that the Turkish readers were informed by a letter written in Arabic originally in Aceh and sent to a Acehese religious scholar living in Mekkah for around twenty years. Based on this information, the Dutch commenced the war on 26th March 1873 (1288) with eight war

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<sup>5</sup>*Basiret*, 10 Rabi' alAkhir 1290, Document No. 1435, p. 1.

<sup>6</sup>For instance, the reports on some various dates 2 Rabi' alAkhir 1290, 8 Rabi' al-Akhir 1290, 29 Muharram 1291, (18.03.1874), 3 Muharram 1291 (20.02.1874), 1 Dhu al-Hijja 1290 (20.01.1874), told about the Indian and British media as the news source. (See: *Basiret*, Document No. 1412, 1430, 1433, 4113, 4117,).

filotilla and four thousand soldiers including various ethnicities from its colony. From the first day of the war until the 6th April the Dutch navy succesively bombed Bandar Aceh.<sup>7</sup>

To show the seriousness of the Sultanate to convince the Ottoman court about the political and militarily aid Abdurrahman az-Zahir Shah (1833-1879) who was the Prime Minister in Aceh and Abbas Effendi paid visits to Contantinople (Veer 1977: 128). The envoy found an opportunity to meet not only with Mithad Pasha, the Prime Minister of the Ottoman government and Rashid Pasha, the Foreign Minister in *Babiali*, but also the one of the supervisors to the Ottoman Sultan.<sup>8</sup> During the before-mentioned meeting the Acehnese envoy submitted a letter written in Arabic which emphasized some crucial issues regarding the condition in Aceh. It is mentioned in the letter that Aceh was a vassal state of the Ottomans; Aceh had been an Islamic land (Dar'ul Islam) successively starting from 1st Ramadhan 601 by Sultan Johan Syah and the Acehnese people (*rakyat*) followed the Syafii denomination and obeyed their rulers who conducted Syariah Law.<sup>9</sup>

These meetings are considered as some occasions to solve the problem in Aceh. As mentioned in various reports, the Ottoman authorities tried to find a peaceful way by prominent European powers to be able to give a response the Acehnese envoy's demands. Another news proves that there were some more envoys from Aceh. For instance, Said Effendi, an envoy from Aceh demanded from the Ottoman authorities that the Sultanate of Aceh ought to be included into territorial entity of the Ottoman State.<sup>10</sup>

During and after the envoy's visit, *Basiret* successively continued the reports about the status of the Sultanate of Aceh, since there were some rumours and references in some Western journals and newspapers that Aceh did not have any political affiliation. This issue was repetedly mentioned by the editors of *Basiret*. There is no doubt that these publications did aim to create a political determination reminding the sultanate's affiliation with the Ottomans commencing from the reign of Sultan Selim II.<sup>11</sup>

The reports, successively published throughout the first fierce years of the Dutch War (1873-74), prove that the Ottoman intelligentsia gave importance to the developments in the eastern part of the Islamic world. In addition, the reports were regarded as the establishing an awareness among the Muslim people on the one hand, and were also, without doubt, an affective mechanism to create a political pressure on current governments in Constantinople on the other. As it is seen in the news on 2nd Rabi' al-Akhir, 1290, it was emphasized that the Acehnese had been protection of the Ottoman State for a long time, and the Ottoman court would not be lenient with enmity involvements in Aceh. This matter, at the same time, became a current issue as seen in various the reports.

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<sup>7</sup>*Basiret*, 13 Shaval 1290, Document No 1587, p. 1, 5 Rabi' al-Akhir, p. 2.

<sup>8</sup>*Basiret*, 12 and 19 Rabi' al-Awwal 1290, Document No 1456, p. 1; 9 Rabi' al-Akhir 1290, Document No 1434, p. 1; 17 Rabi' al-Akhir 1290, p. 1; 12 Jumada al-Ula 1290, Document No, 1443, p. 1.

<sup>9</sup>*Basiret*, 20 Rabi' al-Awwal 1290, p. 1

<sup>10</sup>*Basiret*, 13 Rabi' al-Awwal 1290, p. 1.

<sup>11</sup>*Basiret*, 8 Rabi' al-Awwal 1290/1291, p. 1.

“Açelileri herkes biliyor ki, devlet-i aliye tebası olup idare-i ahaliilerine istiklalleri vardır. Bir devlet kendi teb’ası üzerine vuku bulan tecavüzü men’inde iktiza (lazım gelme) maslahata göre hareket edeceğinden devlet-i aliyyenin dahi tecavüzat-ı vak’aya nazar-ı müsamaha ile bakamayacağı müsellemdir.”<sup>12</sup>

The determination of the Acehese fighters against the Dutch invasion was respected as seen in the reports in *Basiret*. It is mentioned that even though the Acehese could have saved their lives and properties in condition that they had accepted the peace agreement offered by the Dutch, the former preferred to conduct war until the end of their lives to save their freedom and sovereignty.<sup>13</sup> A similar expression which shows the resolution/determination can be found in another report. A letter, somewhere mentioned in this article, written by an Acehese individual emphasizes the determination of the Acehese not to become slave of the Dutch. If the Acehese assumed that they would be defeated by the Dutch, first they would sacrifice their children and women in front of the pioneer front, then they would fight till the end of single Acehese to become martyr.<sup>14</sup>

The news on 20.01.1874 (1 Dhu al-Hijja 1290) focused on the correspondences between the Aceh Sultanate and the Dutch forces. Based on the explanation, the Dutch commander sent an envoy with a letter asking the Sultan to surrender immediately. Notwithstanding, the Acehese Sultan not only reject this humiliating approach but also to show his determination he did tear the letter and prisoned the Dutch envoy. The same news, at the same time, referred the contradictory approaches of the Aceh government. On the one hand, some groups did not agree on the struggle against the Dutch, but especially Abdurrahman Zahir Syah, the Prime Minister at that time, tried to encourage the Acehese circles either governmental bodies or the people to continue the massive resistance. Even though there was not a formal military organization in Aceh at the time of the war, the insistence of the fierce resistance by of common Acehese threatened the existence and of the Dutch military force.<sup>15</sup>

The Dutch War in Aceh land caused a very complicated relations in Europe. Historically, the colonialist powers’ existencies cannot be taken into consideration without the affect and relations with the developments in the Continental Europe. This fact was realized once more due to the Dutch War. As *Basiret* report on the date 17.01.1874 (27 Dhu al-Qa’da 1290) told that the political developments among Germany, England and the Netherlands in Europe had direct impact on the Southeast Asian issues. It is regarded inevitably that the Ottoman government could not give any reactions whilst the European powers involved in politically and militarily in Muslim world such as Malay world. As mentioned in *Basiret*, some political figures – without mentioning any specific names- in Istanbul insisted on the Ottoman government ought to involve the Southeast Asian crisis related to Aceh. And the editors commented on this issue by talking about the developments in Aceh would cause an international dividents.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>*Basiret*, 2 Rabi’ al-Akhir 1290, Document No. 1430, p. 1; 5 Rabi’ al-Akhir 1290, Document No 1432, p. 1.

<sup>13</sup>*Basiret*, 6 Safar 1291.

<sup>14</sup>*Basiret*, 13 Shawwal 1290, Document No 1587, p. 1.

<sup>15</sup>*Basiret*, 20.01.1874 (1 Dhu al-Hijja 1290), Document No 4117, p. 2.

<sup>16</sup>*Basiret*, 17.01.1874 (27 Dhu al-Qa’da 1290), Document No 4118, p. 2.

The connection between the Acehese and the Ottomans seems clearly to be based on the religious identity as mentioned in follow: "...The Acehese who have been living independently for some hundreds of years in Sumatra Island, is a vassal state of the Ottoman State and bond to khalifa due to the religious reasons...".<sup>17</sup> This type of descriptions gave a continuum of consciousness of being a part of an entity and the awareness of the religio-political struggle of Southeast Asian Muslims in the sample of the Acehese challenge during the Dutch War.

Based on the reminding relations in the old times between the two states during the official visits of Abdurrahman Zahir Shah, the Ottoman State revealed implicitly the Pan-Islamic sensitivity by taking the Dutch and Aceh confrontations into the international politics with the European powers, including America as a newly developing country in international politics (Wieringa 1998: 298). Though the ability of being a political super-power was decreasing, the Ottoman bureaucrats raised their objection to the imperialist vision of the Dutch. Thus even the former offered to converse an international conference either in Constantinople or somewhere else to deal this sensitive issue nearly reaching a war condition in Sumatra Island.<sup>18</sup> Since there had not been any developments the Acehese envoys were disappointed by almost aloofness of the Ottoman government (Veer 1977: 131).

In addition, the war in Aceh gained the interest of the Muslim communities in Southeast Asia such as in Singaporean and Javanese Muslims. Regarding the support caused military clashes between the Dutch army and Javanese Muslims.<sup>19</sup> As a unique example of building Islamic union in Southeast Asia which frustrated the Dutch administration, cannot be taken into consideration of Acehese active involvement of propaganda in their region as well.

The reports also emphasized on the strength of the Acehese struggle. For instance during the days when the Sultan of Aceh passed away the Acehese fighters did not renounce their resistance against the Dutch invasion and showed their determination to save their country until the end.<sup>20</sup> This determination of the Muslim people in the periphery demonstrates that they had a socio-religious consciousness regarding "*vatan*", including religious patriotism which is given a special importance in Islamic political philosophy (Maksudoğlu 1999: 134).

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<sup>17</sup>*Basiret*, 8 Rabi' al-Awwal 1291, p. 1.

<sup>18</sup>*Basiret*, 8 Rabi' al-Awwal 1291, p. 1.

<sup>19</sup>*Basiret*, 7 Jumada al-Ula, Document No. 1441, p. 1.

<sup>20</sup>*Basiret*, 22 Dhu al-Hijja 1290 (10.02.1874), Document No 4126, p. 1.

## Conclusion

The Acehese Sultans pioneered by taking the initiative for the establishment of the relations between the center and periphery. The article argues that the Ottoman's interest to the Indian Ocean and beyond was stimulated mainly by the demands of the Acehese Sultans starting in the 16th century and reappeared in the second part of the 19th century. The Ottoman State augmented her interest gradually, even though her attempts were unsuccessful as experienced in the biggest navy attack in the year 1538 in Diu.

The initiatives of the Acehese rulers to be able to cooperate with the center targeted to prevent the expansion of the colonial powers in the Islamic periphery. Regarding unintentional developments in and around the Indian Ocean, the Ottoman influence could not be materialized as it should have been. The significance of the Acehese attempts might have been understood better when the colonial circles started to extend increasingly their territorial jurisdiction in particularly the second part of the 19th century. Thus, emphasizing on the efforts of the Sultanate of Aceh Darussalam in an overall analysis of the relations between the center and the periphery, the core issue of this article might be regarded as an alteration of the conventional understanding the relations between the center and the periphery in Islamic world regarding the Ottoman State and the Aceh Sultanate interactions successively continued in some extent.

The deliberate stimulation of Aceh Sultans caused the Ottomans, though not a holistic change in their determination of geographical expansion such as seen always towards the Balkania and mid of Europe, at least, had to renew its political approach to the eastern part of the Islamic world. This process is also considered as a contribution to develop a sound political culture and strategy among the Muslim states. As a conclusion, the premise of this article is that the enduring relationship between the Aceh Sultanate and the Ottoman State was one of the inevitable factors to promote Pan-Islamic ideology which was put on the global agenda at the end of the nineteenth century. In addition, the status of the Ottomans as not only a dominant state in the Middle East and Europe but also a sea power due to its involvement in the developments in the Indian Ocean was based on the continuous efforts of the Acehese Sultans to establish a sound relationship with the center. It is a must to conduct some more complex and extensive examinations relevant to dialogic relations between the center and the periphery.

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