



Psychology and Islamic Law in the *Inong Balee* Tradition: Narratives of Forgiveness in the Aceh Conflict

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Abstract

This article examines the narrative of forgiveness delivered by *Inong Balee* after the Aceh conflict through the lens of Psychology and Islamic law. This research contributes to the study of the continuity of the concept of forgiveness in the context of conflict in Indonesia. This qualitative research was conducted intensively for three months. The data was collected by interviewing two *Inong Balee* and supported by adequate literature data. The results showed that the forgiveness done by the *Inong Balee* was conditional. Religious values, community social interactions, and victims' problems during the conflict influence conditional forgiveness. Furthermore, conditional forgiveness becomes a transformative attitude for *Inong Balee* in fulfilling the rights of conflict victims.

Keywords: Psychology, Islamic law, *Inong Balee* tradition, Forgiveness and the Aceh conflict.

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Introduction

The study of the *Inong Balee* movement in Aceh has interested many researchers. For example, research Clavé-Çelik (2014) traces how women's involvement in politics and war in Aceh occurred in three periods. First, the 17th century was the story of Admiral Malahayati with the reality of the reign of four Sultanahs (1641-1699). Then, the 19th century traces the history of Tjut Njak Dhien (1850-1908) and Tjut Meutia (1870-1910). Finally, the 20th century, during the independence war (1942-1945) era and the Independence Aceh Movement-Republic of Indonesia armed conflict in 1976-2005.

Meanwhile, Wahyuningroem (2005) conducted a study on *Inong Balee*, who sought justice after the conflict in Aceh. This study describes the life story of Nisah, one of the female combatants who joined the Independence Aceh Movement at the age of 16, and this paper also shows the tensions of personal and collective values in the discourse on

resistance in the name of Acehnese ‘nationalism’ and justice. Furthermore, a study conducted by Akob & Nuryanti (2019) examined changes in the behaviour and mentality of *Inong Balee* during the Military Operation Area as a form of Acehnese women's resistance to conflict.

Lastly, a study by Mutiah Nabilla Ulfah and Muhammad Fedryansyah (2022) discusses the post-conflict recovery process carried out for women former *Inong Balee* members. This study, which targets aspects of post-conflict recovery for women former *Inong Balee* members, refers to the theory of violence developed by Johan Galtung. Few studies directly related to *Inong Balee* and forgiveness, and no study specifically discusses the *Inong Balee* Aceh experience and forgiveness, and this paper seeks to fill that void.

Method

The type of research used is field research with qualitative methods by Spatz and Kardas (2008) and the Life Story approach by Etherington (2009). The data collection technique was conducted using in-depth interviews for three months with *Inong Balee* in three districts, namely *Aceh Besar*, Pidie and Banda Aceh City.

Result and Discussion

Inong Balee and the Aceh Conflict

After the reforms, photos of Acehnese women in Independence Aceh Movement uniforms and attributes appeared in national and international mass media. Journalists or the French Press Bureau took and published these photos in 1999. This photo became public attention and revived essential discourses on the women's movement and its historical roots in Aceh (Clavé-Çelik, 2014). Women's involvement in the battlefield in Aceh is a well-known phenomenon. According to Clavé-Çelik (2014), the information initially spread through local oral history traditions and later developed in the form of local Indonesian and Acehnese historiography; female figures who are often mentioned in the history of the war in Aceh include Laksamana Keumalahayati (c. 1600), Cut Nyak Dhien (1850-1908) or Cut Meutia (1870-1910).

Contemporary accounts of *Inong Balee* are predominantly described as women from ordinary or non-aristocratic families, ordinary girls, widows or married women. They joined the struggle against the Indonesian Government by being involved in the military or civilian structures of the Independence Aceh Movement. These women were not only military fighters but also served as cooks, logistics collectors, fundraisers, nurses, propagandists, and part of intelligence gathering. They are equipped to use and repair weapons in training over several weeks to three months. The women are also given an understanding of ideology, ethics, military behaviour, and guerrilla strategies and tactics. They will be considered official and legitimate Independence Aceh Movement *-Inong Balee* after a *bai'at* or oath ceremony that reads: ‘I pledge to Allah to sacrifice my wealth and life for the sake of the nation only for Allah *ta'ala*’.

The situation and conditions of the conflict were very different from one region to another, so the experiences of each *Inong Balee* in these regions cannot be reduced to a single narrative. In Linge or Central Aceh, for example, the *Inong Balee* managed logistics and mostly ran intelligence operations (*pateung*), collecting important information and providing it to the Teuntra Neugara Aceh. *Teuntra Neugara Aceh* or as abbreviation TNA. In Meureuhom Daya West Coast, female combatants who were part

of the male *Teuntra Neugara Aceh* unit took on military roles in the villages and the forest. In the Pase (East Coast) region, the *Inong Balee* were classed as a special autonomous group called the ‘*Inong Balee Troops*’. Assigned to various locations in the villages and mountains, these troops sometimes participated in guerrilla attacks and even resorted to sabotage (Clavé-Çelik, 2014).

IAM never explicitly informed the public that the *Inong Balee* troops were female combatants in the Independence Aceh Movement’s armed forces. The accurate number of *Inong Balee* troops in Aceh cannot be known with certainty, given that data related to IAM membership is also invalid. Records show that the number of Independence Aceh Movement combatants, in general, is still confusing, especially female combatants. At the time of the Helsinki Memorandum of Understanding, a peace agreement, around 3,000 former combatants were expected to join the reintegration programme. Still, the list of names officially submitted by the Independence Aceh Movement did not reach this number due to the lack of trust in the Indonesian government at the time (Clavé-Çelik, 2014).

According to a World Bank report in 2006, two models of involvement in the Independence Aceh Movement exist. *Firstly*, the phrase combatants would refer to those involved in the Independence Aceh Movement military hierarchy during the peace agreement process and *Teuntra Neugara Aceh*; *secondly*, the phrase ‘non-combatants’ would refer to Independence Aceh Movement members performing civilian duties, including those in the police and education structures (World Bank, 2006). The report only mentions women as a few active members of the Independence Aceh Movement. In a report published by Clavé-Çelik (2014), it was estimated that out of a total of 14,333 Independence Aceh Movement members, there were approximately 680 female combatants and another 3,800 women performing support roles.

Inong Balee After Aceh Conflict

After the Peace Agreement in Helsinki, the *Inong Balee* left the forest and came down from the mountains. They also participated in the Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration Programme, surrendered their weapons and returned to their home areas. Thus, these women began to rebuild their lives as ordinary citizens. The reintegration of former guerrillas was coordinated by the Aceh Reintegration Agency (ARA), an *ad hoc* body set up by the Indonesian government in conjunction with the local government of Aceh. The agency identified three pillars necessary for sustainable peace in Aceh (Rahmawati, 2021).

The post-conflict condition of *Inong Balee* is not the same as that experienced by male IAM combatants. Rahmawati (2021) revealed that the post-conflict peacebuilding programme has created inequalities. This finding underscores the importance of looking at equality and inclusiveness in a fulcrum way at every stage of peacebuilding, including where the reintegration process is concerned. Similarly, Lee-Koo (2012) also revealed that the peace process in Aceh reflected a narrow, highly masculine, public space agenda that silenced women and their associated gender issues. An example of what can be seen from what is conveyed by the two researchers above is that in the list of beneficiaries for the first phase of compensation for former Independence Aceh Movement combatants, there are 3,000 names listed. Still, none of the names come from *Inong Balee* (Suraiya Kamaruzzaman, 2008).

Forgiveness in Psychology and Islamic Perspectives

The discussion of forgiveness began to develop in the late 1980s in the Christian community in the West. Publications on forgiveness only grew dramatically in the 1990s, when scholars from various scientific backgrounds, such as religion, philosophy, politics, and psychology, showed significant developments.

The statement of a contemporary British philosopher, Joanna North influenced the study of forgiveness in psychology. According to North, forgiveness is “What we must remember is that a correct conception of forgiveness does not require that we forgo punishment altogether or that we should, in forgiving, attempt to annul the existence of the wrong done. Forgiveness does not remove the fact or event of wrongdoing but instead relies upon the recognition of wrong having been committed to make forgiveness possible” (Enright & North, 1998).

In line with what North said, Charles Griswold also said that forgiveness is a moral virtue, but it does not deny that there is a possibility of adverse effects from the offence and that it will be repeated in the future. This means that recognition of humanity alone will not suffice for forgiveness. Not forgiving is not the same as losing our humanity or violating certain moral principles (Griswold, 2007).

Different opinions in interpreting forgiveness are also conveyed by scholars, such as Michael E. McCullough et al., who say that forgiveness is a person's motivation not to make demands for revenge against the perpetrator and to stay away from the perpetrator. However, there is a desire to do good and make peace with the behaviour. McCullough also said that the personalities of people who forgive offences tend to be more pleasant, emotionally stable and more spiritual or religiously inclined. Ahmed and Braithwaite state that forgiving behaviour positively responds to offending (McCullough & Worthington, Jr., 1999).

The study of forgiveness continued to grow rapidly after Everett L. Worthington mapped a model of forgiveness based on the intrapersonal and interpersonal approaches. At a later stage, this mapping was developed by scholars such as Roy F. Baumeister, Julie J. Exline and Kristin L. Sommer by crossing the two models of forgiveness approaches, giving birth to four forms of forgiveness, namely false forgiveness, tacit forgiveness, total forgiveness, and no forgiveness (Worthington, 1998).

Some studies mention that women are more likely to forgive than men, although their research used other variables such as motivation, self-esteem, anger, and revenge (Miller et al., 2008). Pearl Ghaemmaggani et al 2011. said that age and gender differences also affect forgiveness of an offence. They said that mature and older women prefer to forgive than young people who tend to take revenge (Ghaemmaghmi et al., 2011). Catherine Romero and David B. Mitchell also said that older Roman Catholic women tend to forgive compared to younger women (Romero & Mitchell, 2008).

As for the author's opinion, forgiveness in women can change not only with religion and age differences but also with the type of conflict they experience and the offender's sincerity in apologising. Thus, we cannot marginalise the factors of the type of conflict and the offender's sincerity in apologising to determine the type of forgiveness produced by women (Romero & Mitchell, 2008).

Before becoming a scientific issue widely studied academically, forgiveness was essentially accepted as a teaching in the religious traditions of various religions, such as Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism. Therefore, forgiveness has

become a fundamental problem for human life and will always appear in every period of human civilization.

Compared to other religions, Islam, as a religion that came later, has a striking view of forgiveness. The Holy Quran only mentions giving forgiveness, and no verses mention the recommendation to ask for forgiveness. Then again, it is explicitly mentioned that giving forgiveness manifests the spaciousness of one's chest. People who do this (giving forgiveness) will be given forgiveness and compassion from Allah *Subhanahu wa ta'ala* (Gunaldi Ahmad et al., 2023).

The words forgiveness are expressed in many verses of the Qur'an, such as in the following verses, 'Let them forgive and expand their chests. You do not want to be forgiven by Allah' (QS. Al-Nur: 22). Furthermore, 'If you forgive, and expand your chests and protect, surely Allah is forgiving, and merciful.' (QS. Al-Thaghabun: 14). Furthermore, 'Forgive them and make room for them. Verily, Allah loves those who do good.' (QS. Al-Maidah: 13). Based on these verses, it has been illustrated that the emphasis on giving forgiveness takes precedence in Islamic teachings over apologies.

Forgiveness in Acehese Culture

As for the life of the Acehese people, there are narratives of forgiveness that have long developed, and this is also used as the philosophy of life of the Acehese as well as the beginning of the emergence of the concept of peacebuilding.

Kamaruzzaman Bustamam-Ahmad or better known as KBA. He mentioned that three things shape the identity of the Acehese: the spirit of Islam, culture, and knowledge. The Islamic Kingdoms in Aceh strongly influenced these three spirits: the Kingdom of Perlak, Samudera Pasai and the Aceh Darussalam Kingdom. This spirit was lost when Aceh became a zone of war and conflict, such as the fight with the Portuguese, the Dutch, the Japanese and the Indonesian Government. However, this spirit began to return even though it was unclear when Aceh obtained the privilege of running its own government.

Acehnese people have three philosophies of life that are always held: remember balance and gratitude. Firstly, the concept of remembering is a concept that has been translated into Acehese as *haba peuingat* in English reminding, which connects people to God. Acehese people often warn each other not to forget God in Acehese *bek teuwe keu Allah*. The concept of remembering is also a social interaction in the community to remind people of the past, such as the origin of the village, descent, the origin of the teacher in Acehese *meuguree bak soe* and others. After the interaction, if there is the same thing, for example, one college, it will create an Acehese *meu syedara* in English brotherhood. These concepts of Acehese *haba peuingat* then appear in Saga and da'wah.

Second, the concept of balance in Acehese is known as *timbang* in English parallel, meaning that Acehese people always try to balance their lives with God, humans and nature. If they do, the elders Acehese *endatu* will deliver *haba peuingat*. The concept of *peutimbang* does not always present something positive, but this concept is also used to reward someone for providing a deterrent effect. For example, when the words *han ek kupeutimbang le* in English are not considered anymore, they come out. Then usually Acehese people will ignore him for a long time until he realises and apologises.

Third, the Acehese philosophy of life is gratitude. The concept gave birth to symbolic rituals such as *khanduri* or *pajoh mangat* in Acehese *kenduri*. *Kenduri* is usually held when good news or achievements are received by inviting kings, scholars

(*teungku*) and the community. The food is usually also delicious and conditioned, usually for the ulama (who read the prayer) in the rice put boiled eggs as a symbol of the glory of the ulama in Aceh is *peumulia ulama*, and *peumulia pesan* in English, the glory of an envelope given to the ulama is also more significant than that of other people. All this is done by the Acehnese when they get *haba mangat* and *pajoh mangat* as a symbol of gratitude to God (Ahmad, 2017).

As described above, the Acehnese philosophy of life has long been applied in Acehnese society and is related to the spirit of Acehnese. The spirit of *keacehan*, which includes the spirit of Islam, culture and knowledge of God, humans and nature, has been used as a norm for behaviour and interaction, including in conflict resolution (the path to forgiveness) developed in Acehnese society.

In Acehnese local wisdom, there are four forms of conflict resolution. This longstanding and rooted conflict resolution is known to be very democratic because it allows for forgiveness without bloodshed or grudges between victims and perpetrators. The forms of forgiveness in Acehnese local wisdom are *Di'et* (diyat), *Sayam*, *Suloh*, and *Peumat Jarou* (Abbas, 2009).

These are the roots of Acehnese forgiveness manifested in Acehnese customs when resolving conflicts, prioritizing human values and the joints of peace towards fellow human beings. With such an attitude shown by the people of Aceh, it is no exaggeration if the author says that the Acehnese people understand and uphold the spirit of Acehnese until now, namely the spirit of Islam, culture and science. However, it cannot be denied that with the development of the times, things have shifted slightly from this spirit.

Narratives of *Inong Balee's* Forgiveness of the Aceh Conflict

Violence against the people of Aceh, especially women, lasted for approximately 30 years (Bustamam-Ahmad, 2017; Davies, 2006). Many Acehnese women experienced violence during the Aceh conflict in the *Inong Balee* group. For example, Sri, a member of *Inong Balee* in Aceh Besar, experienced this. She started joining the group and doing military training at the age of 16. She also mentioned that she joined the *Inong Balee* forces because of her conscience; most of her family members had already joined the movement. Sri also became one of the *Inong Balee* trainers in the Aceh Besar region after the siege in *Tiro Pidie*.

Sri's traumatic experience came when the authorities arrested her husband. At that time, there were GAM members who came down from the mountain because they were sick and asked to live in a complex with them. Not long after, they were caught by the authorities because someone reported that several GAM members were living in the compound. Previously, as Sri said, their life there tended to be safe because their names were similar to those of Javanese, Sri Handayani, and Kusmaidiyanto (Husband), mainly because they sold meatballs.

When they were surrounded by the authorities, Sri, her husband and other GAM members were arrested. But luck was still on Sri's side because the authorities did not take her. After all, there was a small child who could just walk. Five days after the arrest, she went to Kopassus Indrapuri to look for her husband. However, she never found her husband at that time, and until now, she does not know about his corpse.

The bitter problems Sri experienced and felt during the conflict still make her heartbroken and make her say honestly that she forgives. However, as a victim, she still holds a grudge against the perpetrators because her husband was shot, and her sister also

became a victim during the conflict. Furthermore, she mentioned that the violations during the Aceh conflict could not be forgotten and eliminated from her mind.

Suppose we pay attention to the narrative of forgiveness conveyed by Sri. In that case, it can be concluded that her forgiveness does not mean she has to eliminate the scars inherited by the conflict or the offenders as victims. The realities and facts that have occurred during the conflict in Aceh have never left Sri's memory. Such a condition is natural because remembering the facts of the conflict in the past does not mean holding a grudge but so that the offence will not be repeated in the future.

Berliana also experienced the same thing, and she joined GAM in 2003. According to her, GAM members entered the village to recruit new members. Initially, they asked Berliana's older sister to join them and train at Glee Siron in Aceh Besar. Berliana volunteered to join them, even though her sister was indifferent to giving her permission because she was only 16. Berliana eventually travelled to Glee Siron to join the other *Inong Balee* troops.

Berliana's first traumatic experience was when her biological brother was shot dead by the authorities. In her family, one of her siblings joined the TNI, while the other three became members of GAM. Along the way, Berliana was persuaded by her soldier brother to surrender, but she advised him to join GAM so they would have one struggle. However, the negotiation process was fruitless, and they chose their path.

Berliana has experienced various problems directly during the Aceh conflict. According to her, the Aceh conflict must be viewed in three ways related to forgiveness. Firstly, she said the Aceh conflict could not be forgiven if the state did not admit its guilt. Secondly, he mentioned that forgiving individuals and the perpetrators who have apologised are highly likely to be forgiven. Thirdly, the perpetrators who apologise, some victims immediately apologise in accordance with Islamic provisions.

The forgiveness conveyed by Berliana is very complex; she cannot forgive if the conflict has damaged the old systems established in Aceh, such as religion, sociality, and indigenous Acehese culture. Griswold mentions that if there are still people who think there are types of violations that are considered beyond the limits of human reason, then these violations are unforgivable, even if there are conditions under which forgiveness is possible. On the other hand, Berliana stated that forgiveness is possible if an apology is made and the victim forgives. This means that Berliana will do forgiveness if intrapersonal and interpersonal relationships are achieved (Afif, 2019; Griswold, 2007; J. E. L. Worthington, 2013).

Conditional Forgiveness of the Aceh Conflict

The reading of the concept of forgiveness began to drastically change around the 1990s, when scholars from various scientific backgrounds, such as religion, philosophy, politics and psychology, began to pay attention to the study of forgiveness (Afif, 2015). Initially, forgiveness was considered a moral issue, a whole of values, and regarded as a virtue, sincerity, and sincerity given to people who do not deserve it.

Everett Worthington looked at the issue of forgiveness from a psychological perspective using two approaches, namely the intrapersonal and interpersonal models of forgiveness (McCullough & Worthington, Jr., 1999). Baumeister, Exline, and Sommer disagree with Worthington's idea about forgiveness, which only sees forgiveness as limited to intrapersonal and interpersonal relationships. The results of forgiveness

combined by Baumeister et al. have created four types of forgiveness: false forgiveness, tacit forgiveness, total forgiveness and no forgiveness (Worthington, 2006).

The forgiveness practiced by *Inong Balee* through their narratives relates to Worthington's intrapersonal and interpersonal relationships model. Intrapersonal conditions can be seen from the narrative that the teachings of forgiveness have been obtained from the stories of parents and social communities that call for conflict issues to be seen with a peaceful perspective. The interpersonal problem occurred when several figures from the central government tried to convey their apologies for the behaviour of the perpetrators or parties who had committed violence and murder against the people of Aceh during the conflict, such as those delivered by General Wiranto, President BJ Habibie, and Prabowo Subianto. This means that interpersonally, the parties involved in the Aceh conflict have tried to apologise.

Interpersonal efforts can also be seen in the government's efforts to improve the condition of Aceh through the privileges granted, such as running self-government regulated in the Law on Aceh Government Number 11 of 2006, as well as programmes mandated to Aceh Agency for Rehabilitation and Reconstruction, and Aceh Reintegration Board to provide job security for former combatants, political prisoners, and civilians affected by the conflict, as well as the establishment of the Aceh Rapid Response Team.

Inong Balee's forgiveness also needs to be seen through the lens of Baumeister, Exline and Somer, who connect the two dimensions of forgiveness, intrapersonal forgiveness and interpersonal forgiveness, resulting in four types: false forgiveness, tacit forgiveness, total forgiveness and no forgiveness. Based on the narrative of forgiveness conveyed by them, if it is connected to the two-dimensional relationship forgiveness model, it is closer to the type of total forgiveness. In the case of *Inong Balee* Aceh, if we look deeper through the narratives they convey, at the intrapersonal stage, *Inong Balee* has forgiven by looking at the values taught in religion, their relationship with female victims and seeing the conflict using peaceful glasses with the hope of a better life in the future.

However, if seen more deeply based on the narrative of forgiveness by *Inong Balee*, the concept of true forgiveness is still debatable because the narratives of forgiveness conveyed by *Inong Balee* are always associated with the fulfilment of the rights of Acehese women who are victims of conflict, especially victims of rape sexual abuse and female combatants who have not been fully fulfilled or even not at all.

Based on the narrative of forgiveness delivered by *Inong Balee* mentioned above, the author concludes that the type of forgiveness towards the Aceh conflict is conditional forgiveness. Conditional forgiveness by Acehese women activists is influenced by three main things: religious values, social interactions and issues related to victims' rights. *Inong Balee* sees the Aceh conflict with a peaceful perspective forward orientation and is more concerned with the non-violent approach (resolving disputes without violence).

Conclusion

This research shows that *Inong Balee* has forgiven the perpetrators of the Aceh conflict, but the forgiveness conveyed by them is in the form of conditional forgiveness. *Inong Balee* still demands the fulfilment of the rights of Acehese women who were victims of the conflict, especially victims of sexual harassment, rape, and female combatants. Conditional forgiveness is influenced by three things, namely religious values, social interactions, and victims' rights. The type of conditional forgiveness

referred to here is a form of forgiveness with certain conditions that are only agreed upon or occur if the rights of conflict victims are fully fulfilled. In addition, research related to the theme of forgiveness still leaves a lot of room to be developed by future researchers. One of them is to examine the issues of forgiveness associated with politics or better known as the politics of forgiveness.

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