



Forced Legibility and Relational Dignity in *Marwah di Ujung Bara*

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Abstract

This article examines how Fitriadi's Acehnese novel Marwah di Ujung Bara (2011) represents civilian insecurity amid political violence and redefines dignity through interpersonal relations. Using qualitative interpretative close reading, the study analyzes scenes of surveillance, loyalty testing, ethnic resentment, student activism, negotiation, apology, and blood donation. It develops two concepts from the text. Forced legibility describes the pressure placed on civilians to make their political or ethnic identity readable through rigid categories of loyalty and suspicion. Relational dignity emerges when characters recognize the humanity of those whom political conflict has taught them to distrust. Their willingness to protect another person's life challenges the assumption that ethnic identity determines human worth. The findings also reveal how civilians become vulnerable when ordinary conduct is interpreted as evidence of political allegiance. Yet, they do not simply submit to these pressures. Through public dissent and personal relationships, they challenge the judgments imposed upon them. These findings extend discussions of war literature and world literature by drawing on two concepts from Aceh's particular historical experience that may also illuminate literary representations of conflict elsewhere.

1. Introduction

Armed conflict has again become a major global concern. In 2025, the Uppsala Conflict Data Program recorded 65 state-based conflicts and approximately 244,600 deaths from organized violence (Davies et al., 2026). For literary studies, these figures matter because war is experienced not only through battlefield violence but also through fear, suspicion, displacement, weakened trust, and the everyday interpretation of identity. Human-security research similarly emphasizes that insecurity includes threats to dignity, agency, and social relations, not only threats to territorial sovereignty (UNDP, 2022).

Surveillance and military targeting at the time of war have been the concern of war to observe how it shapes civilian experiences, which include gendered experiences of conflict. The studies explored the psychological dimensions of violence caused by the war (Auchter, 2023; Brazeal, 2024; He, 2024; Mehta, 2025; Pukhonska, 2023). Mihsin (2025) and Sarkar and Nabila (2025), for example, show how literary texts register transnational patterns of testimony and psychological injury. However, a related problem remains underdeveloped, related to how civilians become endangered before direct violence occurs, when institutions and communities demand visible signs of political loyalty, ethnicity, or affiliation.

Fitriadi's *Marwah di Ujung Bara* (2011), an Acehnese novel, addresses this issue through the portrayal of conflict between the Indonesian state and the Free Aceh Movement, well known as GAM. Its plot connects student activism, intelligence operations, family trauma, ethnic resentment, political negotiation, and intimate friendship. Through Fauzan's characterization, Fitriadi challenges martial law through student activism alongside his fellow students at UNSYIAH and IAIN Ar-Raniry universities.

Al Hijri is both a student and an intelligence agent. Meurah Muda directs his conflict-related grief toward Indah Ningrum because of her Javanese ancestry. Husein's depiction problematizes the narrative as he tries to negotiate to avoid the planned militarization. *Marwah di Ujung Bara* brings the readers to see the transformations of the conflict from armed confrontation to institutional practices and personal relationships. We use the forced legibility to depict the pressure placed on civilians to become politically legible through simplified categories such as loyalists or separatists, Acehnese or Javanese, and patriots or traitors. It adapts the political idea of legibility, in which institutions seek information to monitor populations (Blair, 2025).

Furthermore, the novel shifts our attention to the emotional and ethical risks created when uncertain lives are forced into rigid labelization. Relational dignity is produced through the acknowledgment of humanity and the inherent worth of one's existence, regardless of ethnic and political affiliation. It is also expressed through bodily protection and the refusal to reduce another person to a political or ethnic sign. In the novel, this concept emerges through the shifting meaning of *marwah*, which shifts from institutional honor and public reputation to the protection of vulnerable life.

The objectives of this study are to examine how *Marwah di Ujung Bara* represents civilian insecurity when individuals are pressured to reveal their political and ethnic identities and their responses to such pressures through civilian agency. We then analyze how the meaning of *marwah* shifts from institutional honor to a form of dignity grounded in human relationships. Finally, our last aim is to explore the two concepts that contribute to ongoing debates in contemporary world literature.

This article makes two contributions to the study of war literature and world literature. Conceptually, the reading of *Marwah di Ujung Bara* suggests that the pressure to classify civilians according to their presumed political and ethnic identities becomes a source of insecurity. The methodological aspect of this study raises a wider question about how regional literary works are approached within world literature (Chaudhuri, 2021; Ganguly, 2023a, 2023b; Gerday, 2022). Reading the novel in this context allows us to consider how an Acehnese novel might contribute concepts to wider literary debates without separating those concepts from the historical circumstances in which they emerge.

2. Literature Review

War Literature, Human Security, and Civilian Agency

Recent studies of war literature have begun to question the extent to which we can read literary narratives as accounts of what happened during a conflict. For Engberg-Pedersen and Ramsey (2023), literary writing should be approached as a means through which knowledge about war is shaped and communicated. Rawlinson (2023) critiques the brief narrative portion in which the civilians are represented. The issue has been further explored by Brazeal (2024), who observes the complicated representation between victims and perpetrators. Pukhonska (2023), meanwhile, examines the interplay between emotional responses to war and the understanding of its consequences. The existing literature provides a useful point of reference for reading *Marwah di Ujung Bara*.

The novel does not focus on soldiers' narration in combat. Fitriadi presents the issue of civilians' ordinary lives becoming entangled with political violence. Their experiences reveal how war reaches into civilian life even when armed confrontation remains outside the immediate narrative.

Other scholars are concerned with the body, gender, affect, and temporality of violence. He (2024), for instance, shows that war narratives may depict pre-traumatic structures and retrospective trauma. Mehta (2025) has shown that women's writing from conflict zones challenges the official narratives by emphasizing embodied and ordinary effects of militarization. The study by He and Mehta leads us to observe the shift from spectacular violence to the structures that make violence meaningful. To examine the structure, this present article shows the interpretive conditions that precede and organize direct violence: suspicion, surveillance, labeling, and demands for visible allegiance.

Another perspective has been offered by human-security scholarship, which provides a complementary framework. The framework emphasizes that protection requires both social solidarity and mutual trust. In this context, agency enables individuals to exercise their role (UNDP, 2022). However, civilian protection remains politically and institutionally contested (Bellamy, 2024; Kilroy et al., 2024), and Masullo (2021) views noncooperation as a form of contesting agency. Schubiger (2021) shows how state violence can reshape civilian mobilization. In their study, Jentzsch and Masullo (2022) compare violent and non-violent insistence, whereas Julian (2024) demonstrates the ability of the unarmed civilians to create their protective space.

For literary analysis, our main concern is how systems of protection classify people, as such classifications can turn ordinary civilian behavior into grounds for political suspicion. Auchter's (2023) discussion of targeting is relevant for understanding how targeting depends on practices of seeing, knowing, and categorizing. In the novel, danger emerges when uncertain knowledge is converted into official or communal certainty. The novel, therefore, makes the epistemology of security a central literary problem.

World Literature after the Global Turn

World literature has traditionally been discussed around circulation, translation, comparison, and scale. However, questions about the neutrality of the "world" that such frameworks assume have been investigated by Chaudhuri, Gerday, and Gremels et al. Chaudhuri (2021) emphasizes that "world literature" should be understood in the circumstances in which the literary works are produced and interpreted. Gerday (2022) treats the "world" of world literature as a contested category. For Gremels et al. (2022), literature from the Global South cannot be adequately understood within national boundaries. In this light, the approach aligns with Acehnese literature, as it enables a regional text to be read comparatively.

The institutions that determine literary visibility also matter. Bucaioni (2023) shows how cultural agencies shape the international circulation in the context of African Lusophone writing. Cui and Bai (2023) examine the role of publishers, translators, and readers in producing global readability and place translation at the center of world-literary circulation (Huang & Valdeón, 2022). Ganguly (2023a, 2023b) advocates for literary reading across linguistic and geographical boundaries. She questions the Western standards as a measure of literary significance.

In other words, a decolonial world-literary approach is not only about how texts from the periphery move to the centers but also what concepts they offer. Lalbakhsh and Torkamaneh (2021) connect world literature, coloniality, and translation to the problem of preserving diversity while enabling comparison. Bahrawi (2022) goes further by showing that an Indonesian literary-theoretical tradition can offer its local concepts to the world. This article follows this pattern in which *Marwah di Ujung Bara* matters not simply because Aceh is underrepresented. Its narrative structures can sharpen comparative understandings of the relationship between security practices and the political classification of human dignity.

Conflict Writing in Acehnese Literature

Previous studies of Acehnese literature have established a useful starting point for examining political violence and civilian experiences in *Marwah di Ujung Bara*. Ritonga et al. (2025) interpret the recurring image of "night" in contemporary Acehnese novels, another

novel from Aceh, as a representation of collective trauma. Qalbi and Mulyati (2024) show that the narratives in Aceh represent hostility and ethnic chauvinism towards Javanese descendants. Pratiwi et al. (2026) studied structural violence and gendered everyday resistance in *Seulanga*. These studies demonstrate that Acehnese conflict writing transforms historical violence through metaphor, ethnicity, gender, memory, and ordinary moral agency rather than functioning as straightforward documentation.

Research on Acehnese political culture also shows that the meanings of conflict continue to change after the 2005 Helsinki peace agreement. Sari et al. (2022) trace the transformation of *Hikayat Prang Sabi* from a “song of war” toward a “song of peace.” Rahman et al. (2026) examine how conflict memory remains entangled with the tsunami experience and post-crisis recovery. This is further elaborated by Daniels and Sanjaume-Calvet (2026), who demonstrate the shifting legitimacy of territorial claims. These studies make Aceh an especially productive setting for examining how political categories persist, mutate, and are renegotiated.

This study, therefore, sees that the relationship between literary form and imposed political readability remains insufficiently developed. While existing scholarship has examined the enduring and political consequences of conflict, less attention has been paid to how these narratives expose civilians to dangerous political classifications. *Marwah di Ujung Bara* connects these problems: trauma becomes ethnic suspicion, security becomes classification, activism becomes evidence of affiliation, and dignity becomes a contest between institutional reputation and human relations. The research gap is therefore conceptual: a vocabulary is needed for describing how conflict forces people to become readable and how literature imagines ethical resistance to that demand.

Conceptual Framework: Forced Legibility and Relational Dignity

Forced legibility adapts the political concept of legibility to a literary problem. Blair (2025) describes legibility-building as the expansion of monitoring, administration, and control in conflict-affected border areas. In this article, forced legibility refers to a situation in which institutions or communities pressure individuals to display signs of political loyalty, ethnicity, or status, thereby placing them in a fixed category. The novel shows that political classifications often rely on incomplete information but can still have serious consequences for civilians. Through shifts in narrative perspective and the concealment of characters’ identities, the novel reveals the gap between who people really are and how others perceive them. Under conditions of political suspicion, such misjudgments can have dangerous consequences. In this study, forced legibility occurs when ordinary behavior is treated as evidence of political allegiance or a potential threat.

Relational dignity describes the opposite ethical movement. It builds on recent dignity scholarship that treats dignity as a basis for protection, moral status, and resistance to exclusion (Garfinkel, 2023; Mieth & Williams, 2023; Pollmann, 2024). In this article, however, the concept is specified through the novel’s use of *marwah*. Relational dignity asserts the value of a person affirmed through direct relations through listening, sheltering, apologizing, donating blood, negotiating, and protecting life rather than through prestige or rank alone. In the textual analysis, a scene is perceived as relational dignity when characters refuse to treat others as mere symbols of ethnicity or security.

3. Methodology

This study used a qualitative interpretative close reading of Fitriadi’s *Marwah di Ujung Bara* (2011). The analysis focuses on recurring scenes in which characters face political scrutiny and ethnic discrimination. At the same time, they are compelled to demonstrate their loyalty or choose between institutional security and civilian safety. We also examined scenes in which the novel depicts challenges by student-led resistance and personal relationships against the classifications. We approach the novel as a literary work and not as a biographical account. The historical context and circumstances of martial law during the Aceh conflict have

been used to support our interpretation. The fictional characters are not treated as representations of particular historical individuals.

The reading proceeded in three stages. First, the novel was examined for recurring lexical and narrative patterns related to security, fear, identity, *marwah*, peace, ethnicity, intelligence activity, and civilian action. Second, the selected scenes were grouped into four interpretive categories: coercive classification, civilian agency, ethicized trauma, and relational dignity. Third, these categories were interpreted in dialogue with recent scholarship on civilian protection, legibility, dignity, Acehnese conflict writing, and world literature. This abductive procedure allows concepts to emerge from the literary text while testing their explanatory value against interdisciplinary scholarship.

Our close reading concentrates on the tension between official categorizations and the realities of civilian experience. In the novel, the measures intended to secure, for example, often leave civilians fearful of being wrongly suspected. At the same time, an ethnic background, such as Javanese descent, can be converted into a presumed political affiliation and the source of hostility. Conversely, acts such as Meurah's blood donation to Indah expose the instability of the categories that organize hostility. These contradictions are treated not as incidental plot details but as formal sites where the novel tests the moral and political assumptions of conflict discourse.

The four analytical categories are operationalized as follows. Coercive classification includes surveillance, ethnic labeling, wanted lists, and loyalty tests that turn ambiguity into suspicion. Civilian agencies include petitions, organizations, refusals, negotiations, and non-violent protection. Ethicized trauma refers to the movement from grief and historical injury toward inherited ethnic judgment, as well as efforts to interrupt that movement through apology. Relational dignity appears when *marwah* is redefined through friendship, care, blood donation, peace, and mutual recognition. Together, the categories enable a systematic comparison between coercive security practices and civilian forms of ethical and political action.

4. Results and Discussion

Security as Forced Legibility

We observe the clearest representation of forced legibility in the students' debate over an anti-martial-law demonstration. Although the representatives of the students' body intend to protest peacefully, some of them worry that their participation could be interpreted as supporting GAM or the referendum movement. They fear that their names would be placed on a wanted list by the military, even though their declared movement is non-violent (Fitriadi, 2011, pp. 26–27). The scene shows how political neutrality becomes unstable: public dissent can be read as separatist affiliation, while silence permits militarization to proceed without challenge. Security, therefore, operates as an interpretive regime in which behavior is translated into presumed loyalty.

A later discussion of military operations exposes a similar contradiction. A character acknowledges that "*Tidak ada satu pun pihak yang mempunyai data valid*" [no side has valid data] (Fitriadi, 2011, p. 386). Despite this uncertainty, the military operation itself is described as a "*misi pembeda*" [mission of differentiation/categorizations] (p. 386). The system is expected to distinguish allies from enemies with unreliable information. This is the central mechanism of forced legibility. Uncertainty does not suspend judgment. Instead, it intensifies the demand for visible signs through which people can be sorted into fixed categories.

The danger is reciprocal. Contact with GAM may generate military suspicion, while contact with military figures may produce danger from the opposing side (Fitriadi, 2011, p. 386). This confirms that during conflict, ordinary relations can be reinterpreted as evidence of affiliation. Blair's work (2025) helps explain why conflict institutions seek information for monitoring and selective control. Auchter (2023) shows how practices of seeing and categorizing can erase

civilian ambiguity. Fitriadi's novel adds an ethical finding: when rigid categories are imposed on incomplete knowledge, legibility can become coercive rather than protective.

Forced legibility also reshapes economic behavior. Residents avoid appearing wealthy, use older vehicles, move money outside the conflict area, and treat visible assets as liabilities because visibility may attract coercive attention (Fitriadi, 2011, pp. 157–158). The result is a paradox of survival: institutions demand greater readability, while civilians learn to minimize the signs by which they can be read. Conflict is therefore represented not only through spectacular destruction but through self-reduction, concealment, and the erosion of ordinary social trust. This extends human-security analysis by showing how classification affects everyday conduct before direct violence occurs.

Civilian Agency and the Student Third Space

Against forced legibility, the novel creates a fragile civilian third space through student activism. Fauzan rejects the available binary: he opposes martial law without being represented as an armed separatist and frames his position in terms of the interests of both Aceh and Indonesia. In his petition, he warns that emergency rule will “*makin membakar dendam amarah*” [inflare resentment and anger] (Fitriadi, 2011, p. 200). His argument redefines security temporally: a policy may produce immediate control while generating future resentment, distrust, and ethnic division. Civilian security, therefore, depends on preserving political relations, not merely on enforcing order.

The reading of this novel corresponds with studies that understand civilians as political actors rather than passive victims. According to Masullo (2021), refusing to cooperate with both sides can become a form of resistance. Jentsch and Masullo (2022) show that resistance may be violent or non-violent by examining the circumstances. Schubiger (2021) considers that state violence can generate civilian mobilization and create what Julian (2024) views as spaces of protection. Yet, the novel also emphasizes fragility through fear, arrest, and suspicion in the student coalition. This confirms that civilian agency operates within the structures of violence (Krause, 2022).

Al Hijri makes this instability especially visible by simultaneously participating in the students' movement and working as an intelligence agent. His position allows him to use his personal relationship to gather information for the security apparatus. This shows how the security apparatus produces ambiguity by turning friendship into a channel of surveillance. When he later reports, “*Fauzan berhasil ku lumpuhkan*” [I managed to subdue Fauzan] (Fitriadi, 2011, p. 408), intimate knowledge and coercive power converge. The episode suggests that forced legibility does not always originate from direct institutional surveillance; it can be generated within the relationships.

Civilian agency in the novel should therefore not be romanticized as morally pure or politically decisive. Fauzan's speeches do not abolish surveillance, and the student movement remains vulnerable to institutional power. Its significance lies instead in preserving a political position that refuses both armed rebellion and obedient silence. This finding strengthens the connection between the literary text and civilian-protection scholarship. Bellamy (2024) and Kilroy et al. (2024) emphasize that protection is a contested practice and that a substantial gap often exists between normative principles and operational realities.

The Blood Metaphor and Ethicized Trauma

The conflict's public categories enter intimate life most sharply through Meurah Muda and Indah Ningrum. Meurah's father was killed, and his brothers were pursued because of alleged separatist links. His grief, however, does not remain directed at specific perpetrators; it expands into resentment toward Javanese people and is projected onto Indah because of her Javanese ancestry. The novel thereby traces a movement from political trauma to ethnic stereotyping: a historically produced injury becomes attached to ancestry rather than to evidence.

This mechanism echoes Qalbi and Mulyati's (2024) finding that anti-Javanese sentiment recurs in contemporary representations of the Aceh conflict. It also supports Ritonga et al.'s

(2025) argument that literary imagery carries unresolved violence into the post-conflict present. Fitriadi adds an ethical turning point when Meurah recognizes the self-reproducing logic of hatred and apologizes for making Indah bear pain she did not cause (Fitriadi, 2011, p. 396). The novel does not ask him to forget historical violence; it asks him to separate memory from the inherited category through which he has interpreted another person.

The scene that illustrates the change in Meurah's attitude when Indah is hospitalized becomes meaningful. Meurah secretly donates blood in order to "*berbagi darah dan harapan hidup*" [share blood and the hope of life] (Fitriadi, 2011, p. 404). The act challenges the earlier logic of ethnic classification. Blood, previously associated with inherited identity or a marker of difference, now becomes a means of transferable and life-sustaining. The past remains real, but it no longer dictates the present relation. The novel thus converts embodied vulnerability into a critique of the categories through which trauma has been ethnicized.

This scene is a central instance of relational dignity. Meurah does not merely arrive at an abstract belief in universal humanity. He accepts risk, secrecy, and bodily involvement in order to preserve the life of someone he had previously reduced to ethnicity. The movement is, therefore, from tolerance to interdependence. Tolerance permits the other to exist; relational dignity recognizes that another person's survival makes a claim on one's own action. This is why the blood metaphor is comparatively portable: it offers a way of reading contexts in which grief becomes racialized, ethnicized, or nationalized without assuming that those contexts are historically identical.

From Institutional Honor to Relational Dignity

The term *marwah* structures the novel's central ethical tension. This is exemplified by Fauzan–Abu Hamzah's dialogue. As a senior political figure, Hamzah worries that his son's public intervention has damaged his *marwah* as the chair of Aceh Regional House Representatives (Fitriadi, 2011, p. 197). For Hamzah, *marwah* is closely tied to his reputation and authority as a political leader. Fauzan, however, is more concerned about the consequences of political decisions that expose civilians to suspicion and threaten their lives. The two positions show different understandings of dignity that confront one another: the dignity attached to institutional position and the dignity of vulnerable life.

Recent scholarship on dignity clarifies the distinction. Garfinkel (2023) treats dignity as a principle capable of filling gaps in protection; Mieth and Williams (2023) show how exclusion and hostility can undermine moral status; and Pollmann (2024) connects dignity theory to histories of war, degradation, and injustice. Applied to *Marwah di Ujung Bara*, these perspectives support a relational reading of *marwah*. The novel does not discard dignity as a form of honor. Instead, it tests honor by its effects. Does an institution's claim to prestige protect people, preserve recognition, and enable coexistence? Or does it sacrifice civilians to appearances of control?

The novel's emphasis on negotiation makes the answer explicit. A political exchange states that "The war over there will never be ended by war" and that peace can only be achieved through negotiation (Fitriadi, 2011, p. 390). Husein later calls peace itself the ultimate political success when he states, "*Prestasi perdamaian tentunya*" [the achievement of peace] (p. 392). His words imply that *marwah* should be measured by any effort to restore a peaceful relationship rather than by armed intervention. In Pelsner's (2021) terms, institutional respect must be expressed in conduct; the novel's practical test of dignity is therefore whether political action makes vulnerable lives safer.

Relational dignity is thus the ethical counterforce to forced legibility. Forced legibility reduces people to signs that permit rapid judgment; relational dignity delays and contests that reduction by insisting that a person exceeds the category imposed on them. Friendship, apology, blood donation, civic dissent, and negotiation all enact this refusal. The two concepts are not merely parallel themes; they are structurally connected findings. As conflict more

coercively demands fixed identities, the novel locates dignity in relations that preserve ambiguity, recognition, and the possibility of coexistence.

Bringing the World to Aceh: Local Concepts with Global Readability

The international relevance of *Marwah di Ujung Bara* does not depend on claiming that Aceh is equivalent to every other conflict zone. Such equivalence would erase the history that gives the novel its force. A stronger world-literary comparison treats comparability as a relation across differences. Chaudhuri (2021), Gerday (2022), and Gremels et al. (2022) challenge simple assumptions about what constitutes the literary “world.” Research on Aceh also shows that conflict memory, peace, and legitimacy remain historically dynamic (Daniels & Sanjaume-Calvet, 2026; Rahman et al., 2026; Sari et al., 2022; Strandh & Yusrizza, 2021). From this perspective, Aceh contributes to world literature by making historically specific concepts available for reflection rather than by serving as a generic war setting.

Forced legibility demonstrates this portability. Conflict research shows why states seek information that distinguishes civilians from armed actors and, under some conditions, may improve security (Blair, 2025). The novel reveals the opposite risk: becoming legible can itself become dangerous when classification relies on incomplete information and rigid binaries. The concept may therefore help readers approach other literary settings shaped by coercive classification. These settings may include checkpoints, emergency law, counterinsurgency, occupation, border control, or communal violence. Such a comparison must remain analogical rather than identical; the purpose is to allow an Acehnese narrative to generate a question that can travel, not to turn Aceh into a universal model.

Relational dignity is equally portable precisely because it remains rooted in the culturally resonant term *marwah*. The term carries meanings beyond the English notion of honor and pride. Fitriadi addresses this complexity by contrasting the meanings between public reputation and the responsibility to protect vulnerable lives and peace. Translation scholarship reminds us that world literature is shaped by acts of framing and rewriting (Cui & Bai, 2023; Huang & Valdeón, 2022). Retaining “*marwah*” while explaining its relational transformation, therefore, preserves cultural specificity and still enables comparative interpretation.

The broader methodological implication concerns how world literature is studied. Scholars should attend not only to circulation, translation, and shared themes, but also to concepts generated in less-canonized locations. Lalbakhsh and Torkamaneh (2021) caution against achieving comparability by flattening diversity. *Marwah di Ujung Bara* offers an alternative: concepts can travel while their historical conditions remain visible. The novel’s unresolved ending reinforces this point. Fauzan is incapacitated, arrests are anticipated, and several narrative lines remain open (Fitriadi, 2011, pp. 408–409). Rather than resolving ambiguity, the text leaves readers with the interpretive instability that attempts at legibility seek to suppress.

5. Conclusion

This article has argued that *Marwah di Ujung Bara* contributes to the study of war literature and world literature by showing how political violence reorganizes the interpretation of ordinary civilian life. The concept of forced legibility captures the novel’s representation of civilians who are pressured to become legible through rigid markers of loyalty, ethnicity, and affiliation, even when the information used to classify them is uncertain. The concept of relational dignity identifies the novel’s ethical response: *marwah* is gradually redirected from institutional reputation toward recognition, care, bodily protection, negotiation, and the preservation of vulnerable life. The relationship between Meurah and Indah makes this shift especially visible. Their inherited ethnic resentment is interrupted not by forgetting historical injury, but by an act of blood donation that makes survival relational. Civilians in the novel, therefore, appear not only as victims or witnesses but also as interpreters and agents who contest the meanings imposed by conflict.

Our study is limited by its focus on a single novel, so the concepts of forced legibility and relational dignity should not be assumed to characterize Acehnese conflict literature as a whole.

Comparative work across other Acehnese novels, genres, and historical moments is needed to test their wider explanatory value. Another limitation concerns the interpretative nature of close reading. Alternative theoretical approaches may emphasize different textual patterns or assign different significance to the same narrative events. These limitations establish the boundaries of the present analysis while opening possibilities for further inquiry. Future research could analyze whether the two concepts remain useful across a larger corpus. Comparisons with conflict narratives from other regions may also extend their explanatory value, provided that the historical circumstances of literary works remain central to the analysis.

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