Questioning the Mantra ‘All for One and One for All’: The Reintegration of Aceh’s Female Ex-combatants

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Abstract

The involvement of female combatants in the Aceh conflict challenges the stereotype of peaceful women, but these women have largely been overlooked in formal peace-building programmes. Using a qualitative approach, this chapter reveals the complex ways in which gender obstructs just and fair reintegration. Three areas are looked at closely: social reintegration (public acceptance of ex-combatants), economic reintegration (access to compensation) and political reintegration (support for female ex-combatants’ candidacy to the local parliament). The chapter finds that gender in intersection with other identities influences which female ex-combatants benefit from reintegration programmes. It explores explanatory factors such as loyalty to the struggle for freedom, the timing of disarmament, and kinship with male elites (men in power)—identifying the last of these as the most important. Although female ex-combatants do not face social stigma in this context, their access to economic and political reintegration benefits is limited and strongly influenced by their kinship with and proximity to men in power. Consequently, Aceh’s female ex-combatants cannot be seen as homogenous. Post-conflict peacebuilding programmes have created inequalities, and the old mantra ‘all for one, one for all’ has lost its meaning. These findings underscore the importance of looking at equality and inclusivity in an intersectional way at every stage of peacebuilding, including where reintegration processes are concerned.

1 Introduction

During the conflict in Aceh, a group of women combatants disrupted simplistic stories of women as victims and in need of protection from men. They were called the Inong Balee, the women’s military wing of the Free Aceh Movement (in Indonesian, Gerakan Aceh Merdeka (GAM)). They number around 2,500 and constitute almost 2 per cent of all former GAM members (Rahmawati,

2019). The existence of the Inong Balee affirmed women's important roles not only at the micro (households), meso (economic activity) and macro (the community's social and cultural rituals) levels (Abdullah, 2017) but also in the public political sphere. Unfortunately, when hostilities ceased these female combatants, as well Aceh's women in general, were largely excluded from the peace process. During the Helsinki peace negotiation process in 2005 not a single woman sat at the table nor was their existence formally recognised in the Helsinki Agreement. The absence of women's representation and the failure to recognise their important roles show how peacebuilding practice is gendered. This has been highlighted by the feminist literature that emphasises women's marginalisation historically (Pankhurst, 2000; Pilcher and Whelehan, 2004).

Yet as the literature on intersectionality reveals, gender often intersects with other dimensions of identities (see the introduction to the present volume). And this is the case with the situation of female ex-combatants in post-conflict Aceh, where gender performs in dynamic ways and intersects with other social identities. This intersection creates hierarchies and heterogeneity (Sigiro, 2020) among female former combatants. To gain a better understanding of the ways in which gender intersects with other dimensions of identity during the reintegration of female ex-combatants in Aceh, this chapter seeks to answer two key questions: How has reintegration occurred in Aceh? How do we explain female ex-combatants' access to and participation (or lack thereof) in this process? Though female ex-combatants in Aceh are idolised to the point of 'shero worship' (female heroics, especially those performed in the name of gender equality), the economic and political reintegration processes in Aceh have only empowered a few such ex-combatants; most have, ironically, been disempowered. Economic and political reintegration is primarily influenced by proximity to and access to (male) elites, often established through kinship bonds. There thus exists a hierarchy of female former combatants. They no longer belong to an egalitarian and homogenous group, and the mantra 'all for one, one for all'—formerly used to generate community and solidarity within the Inong Balee—no longer applies. Female ex-combatants who maintain access to, or even kinship with, those in power—that is, former GAM leaders, all of whom are men—have greater access to economic and political reintegration. Female ex-combatants without such access or kinship bonds, meanwhile, have little to no access to economic and political reintegration resources.

This chapter uses intersectionality analysis as a framework for understanding how female ex-combatants' social identities affect their ability to access social, economic and political resources (Crenshaw, 1991). Such a framework provides an improved and more comprehensive understanding of peacebuilding and reintegration in Aceh and allows us to investigate why female

ex-combatants are excluded in various ways during reintegration and why some are excluded more than others. Empirically, women are often excluded from access to or control of decision-making processes; and where women have been included, they have been seen as exceptions. At the conceptual level, social inclusion and exclusion mechanisms are intertwined with the process of female identity formation. Normatively, former combatants' unequal access to reintegration resources means the loss of potential opportunities. This study asserts two important findings regarding gender in post-conflict Aceh. First, there are patriarchal practices that remain strong within society and among former combatants. Second, women's social identities are defined primarily by their kinship with and access to men in power, both of which afford them greater control of resources. Both have contributed to the restoration of male-dominated social and power structures, within which women's positions have changed little (Vlachová and Biason, 2005). Overall, this chapter demonstrates the workings of the structuring logic of gender in (re)creating divisions among female ex-combatants in the context of reintegration processes. It also reveals the ways in which gender logics of identity shape these women's reintegration experiences.

The analysis in this chapter is mainly based on in-depth interviews with three Inong Balee members. These women were selected as main interviewees based on their similar experiences as female combatants: all joined GAM voluntarily in the late 1990s while teenagers; each received a secondary education; all had family members who supported GAM and their involvement in the movement; and each played a leadership role as a *mualem* (military trainer) or as a platoon commander. All three have also been active in the Aceh Party (*Partai Aceh*, or PA), a political party established by former GAM members. They are:

- Zuraida, also known as Cut Matang or Icut (henceforth 'Ida'), from Bireun. Now 36 years old and unmarried, Ida holds a university degree and works as an honorary staff member of the Bireun Regent's office. She also helps her mother with small-scale farming. Ida began helping GAM in her third year of elementary school, when she would bring food and cigarettes to combatants. She formally joined the Inong Balee in 1998, when she was 17 years old. She comes from a GAM family; her uncle, Abdullah Syafei, was a commander, and her parents were active members whose home was frequently used for meetings. While a member of GAM, Ida served as a *mualem* for both male and female troops.
- Indra Wahyuni, also known as Cut Intan, Iin, or Nurshima (henceforth 'Cut Intan'), from Aceh Besar. Now 37 years old, she is married and has four children. Cut Intan joined the Inong Balee in 1998, at the age of 17,

after graduating from a secondary education economics institute; she subsequently spent two years as an honorary staff member of the Aceh Reintegration Agency (BRA). Like Ida, Cut Intan came from a GAM family. Her father was a GAM advisor, while her younger brother also spent a year as guerrilla fighter, returning home only after being afflicted by severe protein malnutrition. Indeed, she had been interested in the military equipment he wore, and joined GAM following his invitation.

- Agustina—also known as Tina—from Aceh Besar joined GAM in 1999 after graduating from a junior high school. She came from a family and village that supported GAM, and thus grew familiar with GAM ideology and became interested in joining the movement. In 2002, Tina married a local GAM commander. She continued her military training until 2003, when she returned home to give birth. Thirty-five days later, the infant was left with Tina's mother and Tina returned to the mountains. She contracted malaria however due to her weakened condition and soon descended from the mountains, living with someone in Bireun—a regency far from her homeland—for two years. Tina returned home in 2005 after the tsunami, but her baby called her *kakak* (sister) and no longer recognised her as its mother.

This chapter's analysis also draws on data from other in-depth interviews, with family members of the main informants, members of the Executive Body of the Aceh Reintegration Agency (BRA), male ex-combatants and female former GAM leaders. Four focus group discussions (FGDs) with other female ex-combatants were conducted between 2015 and 2017 to collect further information and gain a better understanding of Aceh's post-conflict situation and of progress with regard to reintegration. An overview of the characteristics of all Inong Balee members interviewed and those who participated in the FGDs is provided in this chapter's appendix. All interviewee were informed of the purpose of the research and gave their permission to be identified by name. Data collection was conducted between 2015 and 2018 and utilised both the national and the local language (Indonesian and Acehnese, respectively). Local researchers assisted with translation and transcription.

2 The Aceh Conflict and the Inong Balee

GAM waged a separatist struggle against the Indonesian government between 1976 and 2005. It was a vertical conflict that involved many factors (Zuhri, 2015). From a structural point of view, it can be categorised as a deep-rooted conflict (Bloomfield and Reilly, 1998) with its origins in strong ethno-political identity and perceived injustices in redistribution that left Aceh 'rich, but poor'

(Heiduk, 2006). Owing to its specific political identity, the Aceh conflict may be characterised as an 'ethno-nationalist struggle against the Indonesian state' (Bertrand, 2004, 161).

The public perception that the national government had failed to recognise and respect Aceh's important contributions to the Indonesian National Revolution was another contributing factor (Reid, 2005). Such sentiments were evident in the Darul Islam Rebellion (1953–1962), led by the charismatic *ulama* and former revolutionary Teungku Daud Beureueh (Dewanto, 2016). Fourteen years later, Hasan Tiro mobilised similar sentiments to establish GAM (1976–2005). Both movements had the political fantasy of establishing an independent Acehnese state, one that existed outside the Unitary Republic of Indonesia and 'shone as brightly as in the time of Sultan Iskandar Muda' (Dewanto, 2016, 21). Nevertheless, some criticised GAM's stated goals as nothing but a 'tactical political manoeuvre' (Schulte, Nordholt and van Klinken, 2007).

Rebellion, accommodation and peace talks continued in cycles for decades (Reid, 2005), subjecting the Acehnese people to extensive suffering. Violence peaked between 1998 and 2000, when Indonesian security forces occupied Aceh and transformed the province into a 'killing field' (Sihbudi and Irewati, 2001, 39). Even before then the Indonesian Army had designated the province a military operations area (1989); this endured until the Helsinki Peace Agreement was signed in 2005. Approximately 1.5 million Acehnese (39 per cent of the province's population) were detrimentally affected by the conflict (Noble et al., 2009). The National Violence Monitoring System recorded more than 8,000 deaths in Aceh between 1998 and 2005 (Government of Indonesia and the World Bank Group, 2007), while Aspinall (2009) writes that some 12,000 to 20,000 Acehnese were killed during the struggle.

Many Acehnese, especially in rural areas, supported GAM's struggle for freedom, which lasted 29 years. According to the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), 210,000 Acehnese—approximately 5 per cent of the population—were involved in GAM at some point (IOM, 2008). These individuals' roles varied: some were lobbyists, while others handled fundraising, collected intelligence, participated in conflict or provided support (logistics, shelter, information). The endurance and strength of the Acehnese people cannot be separated from their passion for 'fighting on God's path', which can be traced back to Islam's arrival in the region in the seventh century (Alfian, 2005). The Acehnese people understand righteous war as '*wajib ain*'—something 'compulsory for all Muslims, male and female, young and old, including children' (Alfian, 2005, 200). GAM's struggle took place in an era of 'all for one and one for all', a phrase that emphasised the solidarity and support that then existed within society.

Thus, it is not surprising that many women have shaped the history of the Acehese people, through both their leadership as sultanas and their courageous opposition to colonialism. Their courage and strength turned Aceh's notable women into 'sheroines', role models, and 'points of reference' for the young women who joined GAM. An estimated 3,800 of GAM's members were women; 680 were actively involved in combat (Noble et al., 2009). Unfortunately GAM kept no record of its members or of its female combatants. Combatant numbers, male and female, thus vary greatly depending on the definition used to identify them (MSR, 2009). The Inong Balee itself estimated that between 2,000 and 2,500 women were active combatants.¹

The Inong Balee, also known as Askariyah/Askarimah or Laskar Tjoet Njak Dien (Hamzah and Abdullah, 2014, 545), was established by GAM in the 1990s to accommodate female combatants. Although the term *inong balee* literally means 'widow' or 'woman who has been abandoned by her husband', it has historically had a more specific meaning: a woman who has taken up arms after her husband's death in the fight against colonialism. It has been used, for example, to refer to the women troop led by Admiral Malahayati, who successfully fought back a Dutch armada in 1599 during the reign of Sultan Al Mukammil (Majid, 2014).

During the Aceh conflict, Inong Balee members were adult or adolescent women (married, unmarried, and widowed). They had diverse levels of education: some were still in senior high school while others had completed their elementary, junior high, and senior high school studies. Most came from rural areas, particularly those where support for GAM was highest. These young women joined the fighting voluntarily, either via recruiters or on their own initiative. Most received military training, just like male fighters, and were taught physical fitness, military discipline, political ideology, religious knowledge, human rights, international law and intelligence-gathering techniques (Rahmawati, 2019). Having received this training, the women were sworn into GAM by local leaders. They wore military uniforms, bore arms and lived in the mountains and forests of Aceh for months at a time, always ready to engage with or to evacuate and flee from the Indonesian military (Tentara Nasional Indonesia, TNI).

GAM required all female fighters to receive their parents' permission before joining the organisation, and indeed many parents were proud that their daughters had joined GAM. As Ida's mother and Cut Intan's father, respectively, explained: 'We approved of [Cut Intan] being there. We knew it was because

1 FGD with female ex-combatants, Banda Aceh, 12 May 2015.

of Allah, fighting for Allah. It was because of history; religious history. Yes, this made us willing to support the holy war.' And, 'I told her [Cut Intan] to put herself forward. She was still young. But don't do wrong, because any wrong would become known. For instance, if something is considered wrong according to religious teachings, it must be avoided'.

The author's previous study of young Acehese women's decision to become Inong Balee members found that their involvement was due to push, pull and legitimisation factors (Rahmawati, 2019). Their participation as GAM combatants was a political action aimed at addressing grievances, but also enabled them to 'continue the history' of women's involvement in the Acehese nation-building process while simultaneously reaffirming their right to justice and dignity by fighting 'on God's path'. A history of family involvement in opposition movements, pressure and support from family, friends and neighbours and a sense of insecurity resulting from 29 years of economic and social deprivation pushed young women to become Inong Balee members. Meanwhile, a major pull factor was the 'sheroic' image of bravery and courage that members projected. Several narratives emerged, including imitating the heroes of old, appearing strong in a military uniform and bearing arms, and wanting to become a police officer or soldier. These push and pull factors were reinforced by another factor—namely, legitimacy: the belief that it was the responsibility of all Acehese, including women, to defend the justice and dignity of the Acehese people. Thus, Inong Balee members can be identified as reluctant guerillas as defined by Viterna (2013), simultaneously recruited and politicised.

3 Aceh's Post-conflict Context

An enormous earthquake measuring 8.9 on the Richter scale and a subsequent tsunami struck Aceh in December 2004. The humanitarian crisis that followed pushed GAM and the Indonesian government to dedicate themselves seriously to ending the violent conflict. Peace talks began anew—facilitated by the governments of Finland and several European Union member states and mediated by President Martti Ahtisaari—and ultimately resulted in the signing of the Helsinki Agreement on August 15, 2005 (Merikallio and Mitchell, 2006). The Agreement was an institutional and legal document, one that functioned as a policy umbrella for peacebuilding while simultaneously validating the integration of Aceh into the Indonesian Republic. Aceh thus began to rebuild. At the same time, significant shifts occurred in local government, with the province receiving special autonomy through Law No. 11 of 2006, which explicitly recognised Aceh's political, economic and sociocultural

uniqueness. Under this autonomy law, Aceh was entitled to special funds from the central government, amounting to USD 9.77 billion (IDR 88.7 trillion) by 2020 (Safrina, 2020). It has been a new chapter in the history of the Acehnese people, who have experienced significant sociocultural, political and economic shifts since.

New social and political relationships emerged. During the conflict, Indonesian security apparatuses—the military and the police—and GAM dominated society and the polity. Since the signing of the peace agreement, however, this hierarchical arrangement has made room for civil society actors. Meanwhile, the formal implementation of Islamic law (*sharia*) in Aceh has also changed peoples' everyday lives. In the name of enforcing Islamic law, far-reaching social changes have been introduced, many of which regulate women, their bodies and their sexuality. Local regulations (*qanun*) also control women through the patriarchal Acehnese culture in the name of religion.

At the same time, numerous local parties have emerged in Aceh and dominated its political landscape; these include the Aceh Party, the Nanggroe Aceh Party, the People's Party of Aceh and the Aceh Peace Party. The first two dominate post-conflict Aceh's elections in the executive and legislative branches (Shahab, 2012). National parties, though still present, have been unable to find a strong footing or assume a dominant role.

In the realm of economics there has been consistent contestation between local and national actors, as well as between local actors themselves (primarily between those from a GAM background and those without such a background). For the most part, former GAM members wield political power, and this has resulted in the unequal distribution of economic resources. Former GAM members have also benefited from better economic incentives (Ansori et al., 2015) and enjoyed more access to development projects (Aspinall, 2009). The division of economic resources has, however, been uneven among former GAM members too; elites have enjoyed the greatest share, while rank-and-file members have received little.

While these sociocultural, economic and political changes have affected both men and women, a study of post-conflict Aceh conducted by Lee-Koo (2012) finds that peace in Aceh has 'reconstituted the power hierarchy that undermined women and used state-making processes to restrict their ability to struggle for equality' (Lee-Koo, 2012, 2). In this sense, Aceh's post-conflict and post-crisis experiences are little different from those of Sri Lanka (Harris, 2004), Haiti (Duramy, 2014) or Kashmir (Parashar, 2018). Government and non-governmental efforts to rebuild Aceh, involving local, national and international actors, have often employed an emergency policy approach that

prioritises resolving emergencies and restoring normalcy. Gender equality, as Lee-Koo (2012) stresses, is commonly seen as ‘something that could be addressed later, as in a time of crisis it is a luxury’. This approach has been commonplace in areas dominated by men, where masculine perspectives are employed (Justino et al., 2012) and women in general are marginalised and labelled ‘victims of conflict’.

At the same time, however, the Helsinki Agreement has also had tangible positive effects. It has, for instance, brought physical security and thus peace of mind. In one FGD, a female ex-combatant expressed her satisfaction with the post-conflict situation:²

I'm happy ... happy because now if people want to go anywhere, they can do so freely. Before, after evening prayers, the villages were silent. Now? Not so much. Before ... forget the adults, even the children wouldn't dare cry. Going to school was trouble, and studying religion at night was terrifying. Everybody [was afraid].

Since the end of the conflict, the people of Aceh have been free of the spectre of sweeps and identity checks.³ ‘Now, things are good. We're free. There are no longer those sweeps happening at three in the morning; no longer any identity checks. No threats, in short. Since peace, people have been free.’

During another FGD, an *inong balee* explained how peace had benefited women and improved their lives:⁴ ‘Yeah, things are better now that we have peace. During the conflict, we all had to hide. If we left, well ... we had to see if they [the military/police] were there or not. Now, we're free.’

Their improved physical security has enabled women ex-combatants to consider the futures of their families once again: ‘... now our children can go to school. Before, the children were frightened, couldn't learn. When pregnant, we would worry that our children would grow up dumb.’

4 Reintegration and Female Ex-combatants

The day after the Helsinki Peace Agreement was signed, the *inong balee* left the forests and descended from the mountains. They, too, were required to participate in disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) programmes,

2 FGD with female ex-combatants, Aceh Besar, 5 May 2015.

3 FGD with female ex-combatants, Banda Aceh, 12 May 2015.

4 FGD with female ex-combatants, Banda Aceh, 14 February 2016.

to surrender their weapons, and to return to their home towns. Thus, women began to rebuild their lives as ordinary citizens. The reintegration of ex-combatants was coordinated by the Aceh Reintegration Agency (BRA), an ad hoc institution established by the Indonesian government in conjunction with the Acehese local government. The Agency identified three main pillars as being necessary for the creation of a sustainable peace in Aceh: (1) return, reconstruction and reintegration; (2) truth, reconciliation and social cohesion; and (3) peace consolidation and conflict prevention (BRA, 2009).

Studies around the globe have highlighted the complex and contradictory gender relations involved in the reintegration of female ex-combatants (Democratic Progress Institute, 2016). In Sierra Leone (Lema, 2009), Nepal (Luna, 2019) and Colombia (Giraldo, 2012) female former combatants have been perceived as deviating from their femininity, straying from their natural role of tending to their husbands, their children, and their families. In Sierra Leone, female ex-combatants were formally recognised and one clause of peace agreement between the Government of Sierra Leone and the Revolutionary United Front (*Lome Peace Agreement*) made specific provisions for them. In Nepal, although female combatants were not identified specifically in the peace agreement they were targeted by DDR programmes. In Colombia meanwhile, female former combatants have neither received formal recognition nor been specifically targeted by ongoing DDR programmes. The experiences of female former combatants in Aceh most resemble those of their counterparts in Colombia. The Helsinki negotiations, for example, excluded the Inong Balee, and ultimately produced an agreement that failed to recognise female combatants' contributions, needs and interests. Consequently, the reintegration of Aceh has been almost exclusively the domain of men, taking a male perspective and predominantly involving male actors. Since the signing of the Helsinki Agreement, male former combatants have dominated the political and economic sectors, winning local and provincial elections in 2006 and 2012. During the 2009 legislative election, the Aceh Party—a vehicle that has been used to accommodate former GAM members—won 33 of the 69 seats available in the Aceh Parliament (Shahab, 2012); of these, only three went to women (Ansori et al., 2015). Male former combatants have also benefited from better economic incentives and enjoyed more access to development projects (Aspinall, 2009).

In an attempt to fully understand the complexity of the reintegration of Aceh's female ex-combatants, as well as the gender intersections contained within, the following section will discuss three elements of reintegration: social, economic, and political (United Nations, 2014). This discussion reveals that women's access to and participation in social, economic and

political reintegration has been informed significantly by their social identities. Two identities have been particularly prominent: (1) their kinship or other bonds with GAM elites and/or men in power, and (2) their perceived loyalty to the struggle, measured based on their date of withdrawal (i.e. before or after the signing of the Helsinki Peace Agreement).

4.1 *Social Reintegration*

According to the operational guide to Integrated Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration Standards (IDDRS) issued by the United Nations, social reintegration is intended to ensure that former combatants are accepted by their communities of origin and by society in general (UN, 2014). Successful social reintegration is a prerequisite for other forms of reintegration, including economic and political reintegration.

As part of Aceh's DDR programmes, the Inong Balee had to surrender its weapons and members had to return to their home towns. They were no longer combatants, but civilians, and were required to live as such. At the same time, however, they have not faced ostracism and have not been compelled to hide their identities (as is the case in Liberia; see Specht and Attree, 2006). Indeed, the Acehnese people perceive the active involvement of women in the conflict as having been unavoidable. History shows that numerous women have led Aceh or taken up arms to defend it, both on land and at sea.

The *inong balee* themselves feel proud to have been part of such a struggle, to have continued the tradition of Acehnese sheroism. Indeed, during the conflict, GAM even used these women's involvement for propaganda purposes, propagating news of its ethnonationalist struggle to the international media and showing the international community that its struggle was that of all Acehnese people: male and female, old and young, urban and rural. One informant, a woman leader who had represented GAM at one of the failed peace talks that preceded Helsinki, mentioned this:⁵ 'So, I see it like this. They [GAM] were shaping women [female combatants], not to empower them but just as part of a propaganda process. That was their interest: international relations.'

Still, women felt proud of their struggle. They had received their parents' blessings and brought honour to their communities⁶: 'We were proud that we could bear weapons, so proud. When we returned to our villages they said, "Eh, the *inong balee* are back". People would be proud.'

⁵ Interview with Cut Farah, Banda Aceh, 15 February 2016.

⁶ FGD with Inong Balee, Aceh Besar, 5 May 2015.

It is thus not surprising that, as social reintegration began, Inong Balee members were warmly welcomed in their home towns. Some were even welcomed with the *peusijuek* ritual, a Hindu tradition that remains in use today to seek happiness, harmony and salvation. Today this ritual is led by customary and religious leaders, and usually involves the recitation of Islamic prayers at a mosque (*meunasah*).

Tina received such a *peusijuek*, and explained that villagers welcomed her with tears of joy and a chicken dinner—at the time a luxury owing to the scarcity of meat in post-earthquake and post-tsunami Aceh.

When I first came down the mountain with the troops, I was the only woman, and people were all crying. Crying because I was one woman among men. They gave me food, fried up some chicken—a chicken, left over from before the tsunami, was slaughtered. Yes, they were all very good, those villagers, when it came to helping GAM. When I came back from training, we had a glorious *peusijuek* in the mosque.

Having returned to her home town and received a warm welcome, Tina assumed her normative role as a housewife and helped her husband work their land. She was also actively involved in local social activities, such as prayer groups and women's associations. She became an active member of the Aceh Party, established by former GAM members. The party flag she hangs in her home shows Tina's continued pride in her involvement in GAM and in PA.

Tina's experience illustrates how the social reintegration of Aceh's female ex-combatants occurred readily, without any significant obstacles, as most combatants—including female combatants—came from families and villages that supported GAM. Successful social reintegration made it possible for women ex-combatants to return to their normative roles. These duties are often described as 'domestic labour' but nonetheless reach far beyond the domestic sphere. Traditionally and historically, Acehnese women have a range of obligations and duties, and are responsible for 'their families (husbands, children and extended family) and their rice fields, as well as [for] proving their commitment to their communities by contributing to economic and religious activities' (Abdullah, 2017, 2). Thus, it is no surprise that many have been able to readily assume administrative, religious and political duties in post-conflict Aceh.

However, successful social reintegration does not always result in successful economic and political reintegration. The following subsections discuss how female ex-combatants' access to economic and political opportunities overlap

with their social identities, particularly their kinship and their perceived loyalty to GAM.

4.2 *Economic Reintegration*

As already explained, the Helsinki Agreement makes recommendations regarding the reintegration of Aceh's former combatants. Point 3.2—Reintegration in society—is of particular importance. It highlights the importance of the economic reintegration and empowerment of former combatants, political prisoners and victims, ensuring their access to employment and incomes. It holds that beneficiaries will receive financial support or be provided access to temporary employment to improve their welfare. Economic reintegration intends to create economic opportunities, thereby increasing the incomes of former combatants and enabling them to live ordinary lives as civilians (UN, 2014). When conducted successfully, economic reintegration has a positive psychological effect, enabling former combatants to become more confident, to take pride in their new civilian identities and to obtain the trust of their communities.

Diverse actors have assisted in Aceh's reintegration process, which has been inexorably related to the area's post-earthquake and post-tsunami recovery and reconstruction programmes. These actors have sought to reintegrate combatants into Acehnese society as part of a broader framework of sustainable peacebuilding. Programmes have directly and indirectly targeted individuals, groups, communities, local infrastructure and local governments, and ranged from economic empowerment to home/road rebuilding and healthcare (Gayatri, 2008; Noble et al., 2009). Funds have come not only from the Indonesian government, but also from some 38 donor institutions, including several foreign governments. Implementation of these programmes, meanwhile, has involved 89 institutions and agencies, which have been responsible for approximately 140 programmes throughout Aceh that had cumulatively cost USD 365.6 million (IDR 3.7 trillion) by 2008 (Noble et al., 2009).

Although this aid has had a tangible effect on its beneficiaries, the International Crisis Group critically notes that these programmes have suffered from 'unclear goals, poor implementation and a lack of transparency' (Crisis Group Asia, 2007, 10). For instance, many Acehnese who identify as former combatants or as victims have yet to receive any compensation. Cut Intan, for example, was undoubtedly a former combatant, but at the time of our interview had yet to receive any compensation; Ida and Tina, meanwhile,

received compensation, though they did not mention the amount. Cut Intan expressed anger that she had been excluded.⁷

[...] I'm sad to talk of it. There's no end. No end to my story. [...] most people are enjoying things, but [...] our troops have not gotten to enjoy things. Not the ones who bore arms. It's the civilians, the spies, who got the best use of it. Those of us who were involved directly ... like me ... there's no victory for us [...]. There's peace, but no justice for us.

Cut Intan felt that her efforts as a combatant, and even as a military trainer, had gone unrecognised. According to Ida, combatants who received compensation were those who had descended from the mountains the day after the Helsinki Agreement was signed. These were perceived as having been brave and loyal to GAM until the end; conversely, the men and women who left the mountains before the Helsinki Agreement was signed have been deemed disloyal and thus unworthy of compensation.

Ida said that combatants were promised USD 1,785 (IDR 25 million) each; this amount was written in a document she signed after she had surrendered her weapon for decommissioning.⁸ She did not, however, receive the promised amount. The real number of combatants was significantly higher than the 3,000 identified in the Helsinki Agreement; a multi-stakeholder review (Noble et al., 2009), for instance, holds that GAM had 14,300 combatants. Thus, the amount of compensation specified in the Agreement had to be divided among far more people. Amounts varied, from USD 1,785 to USD 428 to USD 214, to as little as USD 35. The GAM commander determined the amount of compensation, as well as the recipients.⁹

Two key elements influenced whether female ex-combatants received compensation funds: their perceived loyalty and their kinship with men in power. Table 2.1 in the appendix to this chapter illustrates the influence of these factors, as do the cases under discussion here. Both Ida and Tina descended from the mountains after the Helsinki Agreement was signed; Cut Intan descended before then. All three have been politically active since the signing of the Helsinki Agreement. All are members and cadres of a GAM-established local political party, specifically the Aceh Party. They recognised the importance of continuing their struggle, not through military but through political means, and thus demonstrated significant loyalty. All

7 Interview with Cut Intan, Aceh Besar 8 April 2017.

8 Interview with Ida, Bireun, 22 April 2017.

9 FGD with female ex-combatants, Bireun, 27 January 2017.

three have continued to show strong support for and allegiance to GAM's ideals, and have thus demonstrated great loyalty to the movement. Ultimately, it was their perceived loyalty that enabled them to access compensation.

Regarding the ex-combatants' kinship with male GAM leaders, of the three informants Cut Intan's kinship with men in power is the most tenuous. Her older brother was a GAM leader at the village level, but he died before the conflict ended. This was also the case for Ida. She, however, is the niece of Abdullah Syafei, GAM's supreme leader, who was shot and killed by Indonesian soldiers in 2004, and benefited from being associated with his prestige. Finally, Tina's husband was formerly a GAM leader at the local level and has remained active in subsequent GAM-driven institutions. Both Ida and Tina received compensation while Cut Intan did not.

In conclusion, female ex-combatants' ties and cultural perceptions—influenced by their intersectional identities—have affected how they have been viewed and treated in post-combat society. Female combatants' kinship bonds with male GAM leaders primarily inform the former's access to economic resources. In other words, there is an intersection between female ex-combatants' social identities and the way they have been viewed and treated. This finding also shows that patriarchal practices remain strong in Aceh, determining what is available and unavailable to women by virtue of women's ties to men, creating a highly gendered narrative of female ex-combatants' access to economic reintegration.

4.3 *Political Reintegration*

Theoretically, political reintegration is designed to create opportunities for former combatants to become involved and participate in decision-making processes at the village, local and national levels. It is intended to provide former combatants with the opportunity to voice their concerns and interests through legal and non-violent means. In this chapter, political reintegration is understood as encompassing former combatants' participation in local politics and decision-making processes.

As stated previously, Aceh's sociocultural context since the signing of the Helsinki Peace Agreement has returned women to the domestic sphere, and local formal regulations (*qanun*) have limited their sociopolitical activities. Informants felt this tangibly, especially as they sought to become involved in village-level decision-making processes.¹⁰

10 FGD with female ex-combatants, Aceh Besar, 5 May 2015.

Yes, we've got the same rights [in law] as men. But in every village activity, in every part of village development, women aren't involved. Though we don't ask them for [all our] rights, we must ask for some. At the very least we need to know what they're talking about. What they'll do. It's not satisfactory for us, but that's the way it is.

At the same time, however, the three main informants recognised that their experiences as *inong balee* had imbued them with strength and courage, enabling them to persevere in times of great adversity. All had become politically active and realised the importance of continuing their struggle, not through military but through political means. The three of them believed that the Aceh Party was continuing GAM's struggle, and had thus participated actively in its operations, serving as cadres, coordinators and campaign staff in rural villages during Aceh's local elections. Cut Intan, for example, was so loyal to PA she had no interest in joining another political party.¹¹

I'm active with PA. When someone asked me to join another party, I said "My blood flows in PA. Not in PNA, not in PAN, not in Golkar". I said that. Because PA, it's a historic party. It's got a history. It's not an ahistorical party. Not created simply to spend money, or because a group of friends said, "Let's form a party". No, not like that, not like that. PA is the party whose blood flows through me, I said. PA is a fighter. Because we're not at war now we must fight through our parties. Our war must not use weapons, but political parties.

Representing PA, two informants—Ida and Cut Intan—used their leadership experiences as *mualem* as capital when contesting local parliamentary elections in 2009. Beforehand, however, they required the party's support. Their access to such support, as in the case of economic reintegration, was influenced by their social identity and their kinship networks in particular. Even though both Ida and Cut Intan contested the election, the former received financial support while the latter did not. Again, Ida's kinship networks enabled her to receive financial support from the party. Cut Intan, in contrast, had no kinship bonds and thus received no support.

In the end the results were disappointing for both candidates: neither Ida nor Cut Intan was elected, and thus their desire to convey the aspirations of the people went unfulfilled.¹² Cut Intan felt betrayed by PA. To finance her campaign

11 Interview with Cut Intan, Aceh Besar, 7 May 2015.

12 Interview with Ida, Bireun, 22 April 2017.

she had sold her home, and this resulted in bankruptcy. After the election, she and her family (her husband and their three children) lived with Cut Intan's parents. She subsequently had no interest in participating in local politics. Ida, meanwhile, though disappointed with her electoral result, allowed the votes she received to be taken by a male PA candidate from her constituency, as she recognised that her own campaign had relied heavily on PA financing. Ida has continued her political activism, and proven herself to be an agent with the capacity to contest structural inequalities. She has criticised the patriarchal practices that remain strong in Aceh, including religious leaders' ongoing efforts to limit what is available and unavailable to women in politics.¹³

In Aceh, if we go to the Islamic schools, they say, "Don't vote for a woman, because women cannot become leaders". I do not agree, because parliament isn't for leaders; it's for voicing people's hopes. If a woman were to lead, to become governor, sometimes women are fairer and more just than men.

5 Conclusion and Recommendations

The current understandings of the peacebuilding processes in Aceh have touched little on gender issues and intersectionality. The present analysis complexifies interpretations of women's role in post-war reconstruction, using GAM's female combatants as its main narrators. Although female ex-combatants have been celebrated as sheroes of the war, generally they have gone unheard and unseen. Moreover, not all of them have been able to better their lives. The *inong balee* are far from egalitarian and homogenous; nor have they maintained the solidarity implied by the motto 'all for one, one for all'. Reintegration has revived inequality, as felt particularly strongly by former combatants from non-elite backgrounds who lack kinship ties with men in power. Access to economic and political resources, as well as participation in reintegration, has depended on these women's social status.

The reintegration of female former combatants underscores the importance of inclusivity in peacebuilding processes as well as the necessity of programmes that are sensitive to the intersections of gender with other social status positions. It is important to consider women's different experiences during and after violent conflict; by doing so, their agency and beliefs can be recognised,

¹³ Interview with Ida, Bireun, 22 April 2017.

as can their desire to reintegrate themselves into the polity as ordinary citizens. The sheroic narratives of female combatants must not be exploited for political propaganda, but used as a potential resource to improve women’s status in conservative societies such as that of Aceh. Inclusivity cannot be realised where access is offered solely to female ex-combatants from elite families.

Appendix

TABLE 2.1 Characteristics of *inong balee* interviewed

Informant	Status during conflict			Post-conflict structural benefits		
	Kinship with GAM elites (power)	Leadership in PIB (leadership)	Leaving mountains after Helsinki (courage and loyalty)	Receipt of compensation	Formal employment (access to resources)	Legislative candidacy (political)
<i>Inong 1</i>	+	+		+	+	+
<i>Inong 2</i> (Tina)	+	+	+	+	+	
<i>Inong 3</i>						
<i>Inong 4</i> (Ida)	+	+	+	+	+	+
<i>Inong 5</i> (Cut Intan)		+			+	+
<i>Inong 6</i>			+			
<i>Inong 7</i>		+	+		+	
<i>Inong 8</i>			+	+		
<i>Inong 9</i>			+			
<i>Inong 10</i>			+		+	

SOURCE: AUTHOR

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