

Udep Saree and *Matee syahid*: Local Ethical Reasoning in Acehese Anti-Colonial Resistance

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Abstract

This article examines *udep saree*, *matee syahid*; an Acehese *hadih maja* expression translated here as "shared dignified life and martyr's death" as a local ethical vocabulary through which anti-colonial resistance in Aceh can be interpreted. Although the expression functions as a single proverbial unit, this study analyzes its two constituent ethical orientations in relational terms, arguing that their meanings are mutually constitutive rather than independent. Drawing on qualitative document analysis, the study engages a corpus that includes *hadih maja* collections, Acehese cultural materials, historical accounts, colonial and postcolonial scholarship, news-based memory sources, filmic representations, and memorial inscriptions. The findings demonstrate that *udep saree* articulates an ethical orientation toward dignity, solidarity, reciprocity, and religious responsibility in communal life, while *matee syahid* designates a limit condition in which those same values, i.e., religious commitment, dignity, and communal obligation, are sustained through sacrificial readiness under colonial domination. Together, the two expressions constitute a shared moral horizon through which resistance was rendered ethically intelligible within Acehese local moral worlds. This article contributes to heritage studies and postcolonial ethics by demonstrating how proverbial traditions function as repositories of ethical reasoning and how attending to such traditions complicates reductive accounts of resistance as pathology, religious fanaticism, or violence alone.

Keywords: *Aceh, hadih maja, ethical reasoning, anti-colonial resistance, colonialism*

Abstrak

Artikel ini mengkaji *udep saree*, *matee syahid*, sebuah ungkapan *hadih maja* Aceh yang dipahami sebagai hidup bersama secara bermartabat dan mati syahid, sebagai kosakata etis lokal untuk menafsirkan perlawanan antikolonial di Aceh. Meskipun ungkapan ini hadir sebagai satu kesatuan peribahasa, penelitian ini menganalisis dua orientasi etisnya secara relasional. Dengan analisis dokumen kualitatif, artikel ini mengkaji koleksi *hadih maja*, bahan budaya Aceh, catatan historis, kajian kolonial dan pascakolonial, bahan memori berbasis berita, representasi film, serta inskripsi memorial. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa *udep saree* menegaskan martabat, solidaritas, resiprositas, dan tanggung jawab religius dalam kehidupan komunal, sedangkan *matee syahid* menandai kondisi batas ketika ajaran agama, martabat, dan tanggung jawab dibayangkan melalui komitmen pengorbanan. Artikel ini berkontribusi pada kajian warisan budaya global dengan menunjukkan

bagaimana peribahasa lokal menyimpan penalaran etis tanpa mereduksi perlawanan menjadi patologi, doktrin, atau kekerasan semata.

Kata Kunci: *Aceh; hadih maja; penalaran etis; perlawanan antikolonial; warisan budaya; kolonialisme*

Introduction

Aceh, located in the northern part of Sumatra, Indonesia, has a long history of resistance to Dutch colonialism that was not only political and military but also deeply social and moral. This resistance became an experience through which communities interpreted life, death, dignity, and obligation under prolonged colonial violence. The 1933 Lhoksukon incident, when Amat Leupon attacked a Dutch captain, shows how individual resistance entered colonial records through categories such as *Atjeh moorden* and was sometimes associated with *pungoe*, a label of madness or mental disturbance (Kloos, 2014; Warsidi, 2021). These labels reveal colonial misrecognition, yet available accounts do not allow such action to be reduced to pathology alone. They point to local moral worlds where faith, honor, and death risk shaped ethical meaning.

Existing scholarship has explained Acehnese resistance through political history, jihad discourse, colonial representation, and literary traditions. Studies on *Hikayat Prang Sabi* show how Qur'anic references, local literary forms, and communal ideals framed struggle as moral responsibility under colonial domination (Chalis et al., 2024; Fadhli et al., 2024). Other works examine *perang sabil* as a contested discursive arena between colonial authorities and local Muslims, including the colonial tendency to read resistance through fanaticism and disorder (Gedacht, 2015; Kloos, 2014). Ethical studies help clarify moral character, duty, and judgment as forms of reasoning rather than abstract doctrine alone (Blackburn, 2003; Dabashi, 2008; Driver, 2006; Hallaq, 2019). However, *hadih maja* remains underexamined as an aspect of everyday ethical reasoning within Acehnese cultural heritage.

This article aims to examine *udep saree* and *matee syahid*, two Acehnese *hadih maja* translated here as dignified life and martyrial death, as ethical reference points for interpreting resistance to Dutch colonialism. It asks how these expressions articulated moral judgments about dignity, faith, communal responsibility, and the willingness to face death under colonial pressure. It also asks how their meanings were transmitted through proverbs, historical memory, and cultural representation, without assuming a uniform Acehnese interpretation across actors, regions, genders, and historical contexts. By foregrounding *hadih maja*, this article shifts attention from heroic literature alone to everyday proverbial language as a site of ethical imagination and moral horizon.

This article argues that *udep saree* and *matee syahid* should be read relationally as ethical vocabularies within Acehnese local moral worlds. *Udep saree* names an aspiration for dignified communal life grounded in solidarity, reciprocity, religious responsibility, and everyday ethical practice. *Matee syahid* does not glorify death or justify violence without condition, but names a limit

condition in which dignity, faith, and responsibility were imagined through death risk under colonial pressure. The article's contribution lies in showing how local proverbs carry ethical reasoning within heritage and postcolonial memory. This reading also helps distinguish among different scales of resistance without merging them into a single model.

Literature Review

Hadih maja, Jihad and Acehnese Ethical Imagination

In Acehnese Islamic society, *udep saree* and *matee syahid* should be understood within a moral world shaped by jihad, communal dignity, religious obligation, and inherited proverbial wisdom. Studies of Acehnese resistance show that jihad was not simply a military vocabulary, but also a religious and social language through which sovereignty, endurance, and refusal to surrender were interpreted under Dutch colonial rule (Siegel, 2014). Earlier accounts of Aceh under Sultan Iskandar Muda also describe forms of military commitment that European observers found difficult to explain through contractual or material incentives alone (Lombard, 1991). Within this setting, *hadih maja* preserved ethical expressions about living and dying together. Hasjim M.K.'s collection, compiled from materials gathered between 1925 and 1958, records "*udep beusaree, mate beusajan*" as a formulation of shared life and shared death (Hasjim M.K., 1959). Later circulated materials also record "*udep saree matee sjahid*" as an expression linking dignified life and martyrial death with collective burial imagery (Pohan, 2014). M. A. Abdullah also presents the related phrase "*udep merdeka, mate syahid*" as a Sultan's injunction after Acehnese court deliberation against Dutch invasion, connecting freedom, Islam, justice, and readiness to defend sovereignty (M. A. Abdullah, 2018).

However, the ethical meaning of *udep saree* and *matee syahid* should not be reduced to royal command, literary mobilization, or a uniform Acehnese doctrine of war. The authority of ulama, the circulation of sermons and poetic texts, and the influence of *Hikayat Prang Sabi* were important in shaping religious imagination during the Aceh War, but these sources mainly illuminate the wider jihad discourse rather than replacing *hadih maja* as the object of analysis (Chalis et al., 2024; Fadhli et al., 2024; Hadi, 2011; Siahaan et al., 2021). This distinction matters because *hadih maja* works at the level of everyday ethical reasoning, where dignity, solidarity, reciprocity, and religious responsibility are condensed into proverbial language. Thus, *udep saree* can be read as an orientation toward dignified communal life, while *matee syahid* marks the limit condition of that life under colonial pressure.

Perang Sabil Narratives and Literary Mobilization

Perang sabil (holy war) formed an important religious vocabulary in Muslim society resistance, but the literature shows that it should not be treated as a simple synonym for violence. In studies of Aceh, *prang sabi* or *perang sabil* appears as a historically situated language of obligation, struggle, reform,

and religious legitimacy under colonial pressure (Gedacht, 2015; Hadi, 2011; Siegel, 2014). This context matters for *matee syahid* because death in struggle became meaningful within a moral horizon involving intention, discipline, communal responsibility, and the defense of religion and land. The Aceh War was therefore not only a military confrontation, but also a field of religious interpretation in which Islamic teachings, ulama authority, and local memory shaped the moral vocabulary of resistance (Setiawan et al., 2023; Wahyuni et al., 2022). In this frame, *perang sabil* provides the religious environment within which *udep saree* and *matee syahid* could be understood.

Hikayat Prang Sabi should be positioned as a powerful medium of religious imagination and literary mobilization, not as a script that uniformly determined every act of Acehnese resistance. Studies on *Hikayat Prang Sabi* show that it circulated ideas of courage, sacrifice, divine reward, and communal obligation during the Aceh War (I. T. Abdullah, 2012; Fadhli et al., 2024; Hadi, 2011, pp. 188–190). Reports that the *hikayat* was read before battle are important, but they are best understood as historically situated practices within wider religious and social mobilization rather than as universal evidence for all forms of resistance (Chalis et al., 2024; Hadi, 2011). This synthesis keeps *Hikayat Prang Sabi* as a supporting context while maintaining *hadith maja* as the article's main analytical object. Religious narratives formed part of the broader moral environment in which *udep saree* and *matee syahid* could be heard, remembered, and ethically activated.

Colonial Categories and Moral Agency

Colonial categorization is central to this article because Dutch records did not merely describe Acehnese resistance. They also named, classified, and disciplined its meaning. Postcolonial scholarship reminds us that colonial archives are not neutral repositories of fact, but sites where imperial knowledge, administrative anxiety, and categories of rule are produced (Said, 1978; Stoler, 2009). Studies of colonial psychiatry in Aceh show that *Atjeh moorden* referred to repeated attacks on Dutch residents by Acehnese actors who were often associated with aspirations for *syahid*, while colonial interpretation framed these acts through criminality, mental disorder, and religious fanaticism (Kloos, 2014). The term *pungoe* must therefore be distinguished from *Atjeh moorden*. The first refers to madness or mental disturbance in colonial discourse, while the second refers to a colonial category of attack.

Evaluating colonial categories requires reading them against Acehnese moral vocabularies without simply reversing the judgment. Anti-colonial action can be morally reasoned yet remain ethically difficult because obligations, sacrifices, and risks are not self-evident virtues. General ethical discussions help frame this difficulty by asking how duty, agency, character, and the good life operate under constraint (Baril, 2014; Blackburn, 2003; Driver, 2006). Islamic ethical and liberation-theological perspectives further sharpen this point by linking moral action to ethical self-formation, responsibility, and critique of imperial domination (Dabashi, 2008; Hallaq, 2019). Postcolonial

theory also helps show how colonial power often denies agency by representing resistance as irrational, fanatical, or morally deficient (Loomba, 2015). The article therefore reads *udep saree* and *matee syahid* as local ethical vocabularies that complicate colonial description, not as blanket justifications for violence.

Method

This study focuses on *udep saree* and *matee syahid* because these two *hadih maja* offer a local entry point for examining how Acehnese anti-colonial resistance was morally interpreted through dignity, faith, responsibility, and death risk. The study uses qualitative document analysis because the research question concerns meanings preserved in textual, historical, cultural, and memory-based materials rather than lived interviews or numerical data (Bowen, 2009). The data consist of *hadih maja* collections, Acehnese cultural materials, historical accounts, peer-reviewed scholarship, academic monographs, news-based memory materials, filmic representation, and memorial inscription. The design follows qualitative reporting standards by making the research focus, source selection, analytical procedure, and trustworthiness visible (O'Brien et al., 2014).

Sources were selected through purposive and contextual sampling based on their relevance to *hadih maja*, *udep saree*, *matee syahid*, Acehnese resistance, *Atjeh moorden*, *pungoe*, *perang sabil*, jihad discourse, and cultural memory. The corpus was organized into four evidentiary levels. *Hadih maja* collections and Acehnese cultural materials were treated as the primary object for interpreting proverb-based moral vocabulary. Peer-reviewed scholarship and academic monographs were used as historical and theoretical anchors. News articles, blogs, and popular websites were used as supporting materials for tracing memory, reception, and contemporary circulation. The Cut Nyak Dien film and the Gedung Juang inscription were used to examine how Acehnese resistance and the phrases *udep saree* and *matee syahid* are represented, visualized, and remembered in later cultural and public memory contexts. Data collection involved identifying relevant documents, recording bibliographic information, extracting passages related to moral vocabulary, and classifying each source according to its analytical function.

Data analysis proceeded in three connected stages. Narrative reading identified actors, crisis situations, moral terms, and forms of representation across the corpus. Ethical analysis examined how *udep saree* and *matee syahid* organized ideas of dignity, obligation, religious responsibility, sacrifice, restraint, and communal life. Ideological reading compared Acehnese moral vocabularies with colonial categories such as *Atjeh moorden*, *pungoe* (madness), fanaticism, irrationality, and disorder. Trustworthiness was strengthened through triangulation across source types, consistent source hierarchy, an audit trail of analytical categories, and cautious wording when evidence was indirect, retrospective, or representational (Fernando et al., 2023; Maulana & Hendri, 2025; O'Brien

et al., 2014; Tracy, 2010). This process allows cultural memory to be analyzed as part of ethical imagination while keeping each source within its proper analytical function.

Result

***Udep Saree* as Shared Dignified Life and Ethical Practice**

The materials examined in this study suggest that *udep saree* functioned as an ethical orientation toward dignified communal life rather than merely as a heroic slogan associated with anti-colonial resistance. Across *hadih maja*, adat narratives, historical accounts, and later forms of cultural memory, the expression appears as a local ethical vocabulary through which reciprocity, solidarity, religious responsibility, and social obligation were articulated and evaluated. Its significance lies not in prescribing exceptional acts of sacrifice, but in providing a moral horizon that informed everyday conduct and shaped judgments about how life ought to be lived under changing social and political circumstances. Read in this way, *udep saree* can be understood as an ethical imagination embedded within Acehnese moral worlds, in which dignity was cultivated through ordinary social practice before and during colonial domination.

The materials suggest that *udep saree* was articulated through forms of communal life that linked dignity to reciprocity, cooperation, and shared responsibility. Accounts of Acehnese social life describe collective activities such as farming, fishing, animal husbandry, and craftsmanship as commonly organized through mutual assistance, a practice recognized as *Meuseuraya* (Alfian et al., 1986; Sari, 2022). These activities were not merely economic arrangements but also social spaces in which obligations to family, neighbours, and the wider community were enacted in everyday life. Read alongside *hadih maja* that associate life with togetherness and collective responsibility, such practices indicate that *udep saree* was embedded in a moral horizon where dignity was sustained through participation in communal relationships rather than through individual action alone.

Under colonial pressure, *udep saree* acquired sharper political and ethical significance because ordinary forms of dignified life were increasingly threatened. Dutch military violence, village destruction, and the use of excessive force disrupted social relations and everyday practices through which dignity, reciprocity, and communal responsibility were ordinarily sustained (Kreike, 2012). Within these conditions, the proverb did not create resistance but provided a moral vocabulary through which experiences of domination could be understood and confronted. As customary life became increasingly difficult to maintain, commitments associated with communal wellbeing, religious responsibility, and social obligation appeared more closely connected to questions of survival and resistance. *Udep saree* thus remained rooted in everyday ethical practice even as the historical circumstances surrounding that practice changed.

The case of Amat Leupon illustrates how this ethical vocabulary could appear within situations of direct confrontation under colonial rule. In 1933, Amat Leupon attacked a Dutch military officer in Lhoksukon and was subsequently killed, an event later discussed within both colonial records and local memories of *Atjeh-moorden* (Kloos, 2014). Colonial interpretations frequently associated such actions with mental illness, desperation, or *pungoe*, yet available accounts do not support reducing the incident to pathology alone (Akbar, 2025; Matanasi, 2018). Existing reports do not indicate violence directed toward family members, neighbours, or other members of the local community, while the recorded target remained connected to the colonial apparatus (Kloos, 2021). Although the available evidence does not permit definitive conclusions regarding personal motivation, it suggests a context in which dignity, religious responsibility, and opposition to colonial domination became closely intertwined.

Other examples further demonstrate the importance of historical distinction. Teuku Ubit's attack on a Dutch controller in Seulimeum in 1942 resembles the pattern of individual action under colonial pressure, but it should not be conflated with broader forms of organized resistance (Isnorman, 2018). Figures such as Teuku Umar, Cut Nyak Dien, Cut Meutia, and Pocut Meurah Intan belong to wider histories of military leadership, guerrilla struggle, and gendered resistance rather than the narrower category of *Atjeh-moorden* (Adryamarthanino & Ningsih, 2022; Clavé, 2020). Considered together, these materials reveal different scales through which dignity, obligation, and resistance were enacted under colonial domination. Table 1 summarizes the evidentiary status and ethical dimensions of these materials, while Figures 1 and 2 illustrate how the ethical vocabulary associated with *udep saree* continued to circulate through cultural representation and public memory beyond the colonial period.

Table 1.
Materials and Ethical Dimensions of *Udep saree*

Material	Position	Ethical Dimension
<i>Hadih maja</i>	Primary Object	Dignity, solidarity, shared responsibility, and moral commitment
<i>Meuseuraya</i>	Social practice	Reciprocity, cooperation, communal obligation, and collective wellbeing
Amat Leupon	Historical case	Dignity, responsibility, and death-risk under colonial domination
Teuku Ubit	Historical case	Obligation, resistance, and individual action under colonial pressure
Cut Nyak Dien film	Cultural memory	Courage, endurance, religious commitment, and ethical imagination
Gedung Juang inscription	Cultural memory	Remembrance, sacrifice, dignity, and collective memory

Sources: processed by researchers, 2026

Table 1 shows that the ethical vocabulary associated with *udep saree* appears across materials that reflect different social and historical contexts. *Hadih maja* remains the primary object through which dignified life is articulated, while *Meuseuraya* demonstrates how such values were enacted through

reciprocity, cooperation, and communal obligation in everyday practice. Historical cases associated with Amat Leupon and Teuku Ubit illustrate how questions of dignity, responsibility, and resistance emerged under colonial pressure. At the same time, the presence of the proverb within film and memorial representation suggests that these ethical meanings continued to circulate beyond the colonial period through processes of cultural remembrance. Taken together, the materials indicate that *udep saree* functioned not only as a proverb but also as an ethical vocabulary transmitted across social practice, historical experience, and cultural memory. One example of this ongoing transmission is the cultural representation shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1.
Poster of *Tjoet Nja' Dhien* (1988), directed by Eros Djarot.



Source: IMDb

Figure 1 illustrates a later cultural representation through which values associated with *udep saree* continued to circulate beyond the colonial period. Rather than serving as direct historical evidence, the film may be read as a site of cultural memory in which ethical orientations associated with shared dignified life are rearticulated for later audiences (Djarot, 1988). Through the portrayal of Cut Nyak Dien, the narrative links courage to solidarity, religious commitment, and responsibility toward the wider community rather than to individual heroism alone. The well-known expression “*berterang-teranglah dalam gelap dan bergelap-gelaplah dalam terang*” (be visible in darkness and concealed in light) is significant as a cultural representation of how dignity and collective survival are imagined under conditions of domination. Read in relation to *udep saree*, the film illustrates how ethical commitments rooted in local moral worlds continue to be remembered and reinterpreted through cultural memory (Djono et al., 2022; Ikhwan, 2022). In this sense, the film reinforces the broader argument of this study that *udep saree* functioned not merely as a language of resistance, but as an

ethical imagination through which dignity, responsibility, and communal life continued to be understood across changing historical contexts.

A related process can also be observed in public commemorative spaces, where ethical expressions associated with *udep saree* continue to be preserved and displayed as part of collective remembrance, as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2.

The inscription “*Udep saree Matee Sjahid*” above the entrance of Gedung Juang, Near the Aceh Museum on Jalan S.A. Mahmudsyah, Banda Aceh, Aceh Province, Indonesia



Source: Listiany (2023).

Figure 2 shows the continued public presence of the phrase “*udep saree matee sjahid*” within a memorial landscape associated with Acehnese historical-cultural memory. Positioned within a landscape of collective remembrance, the inscription demonstrates how the proverb remains visible as a moral expression linking dignity, responsibility, and sacrifice. As discussed above, the film shows that the inscription reflects a later process by which the ethical vocabulary of the *Udep saree* is publicly commemorated and embedded in practices of remembrance. Its relevance lies in demonstrating how ethical language originating in *hadih maja* continues to be preserved, displayed, and reinterpreted within contemporary cultural memory.

Taken together, the materials suggest that *udep saree* was less a moral doctrine than a practical ethical orientation cultivated through everyday social life. The emphasis on *Meuseuraya*, reciprocity, communal obligation, and religious responsibility suggests that dignity was cultivated through relationships and shared commitments rather than through individual achievement alone. This pattern resonates with broader understandings of ethics as a lived practice in which moral reasoning emerges through participation in social life and the cultivation of responsibility within communities (Blackburn, 2003; Driver, 2006; Hallaq, 2019). The contrast between this moral orientation and colonial classifications of resistance further suggests that categories such as *Atjeh-moorden* often

failed to recognize the ethical frameworks through which dignity and action acquired meaning (Kloos, 2014; Loomba, 2015). In this sense, *udep saree* can be understood as an ethical imagination through which dignity was cultivated, obligations were interpreted, and communal life was sustained under both ordinary and colonial conditions.

Matee syahid as Martyrdom and Moral Duty

Matee syahid emerges from the materials not as a celebration of death but as a moral vocabulary for circumstances in which dignified life was imagined confronting its limit condition. Unlike *udep saree*, which emphasizes the cultivation of dignity through everyday social practice, *matee syahid* becomes meaningful when faith, responsibility, and communal wellbeing are perceived to be under severe threat. The proverb therefore links death to life rather than separating them into distinct ethical categories. Death acquires significance not because it is desired, but because it may be interpreted as upholding commitments already valued within communal life. Within this ethical framework, *matee syahid* functions as an extension of *udep saree*, providing moral language for understanding death-risk under conditions of colonial domination rather than a doctrine that glorifies death itself.

The materials suggest that *matee syahid* acquired meaning through religious vocabularies that connected the possibility of sacrifice to religious teaching, obligation, and responsibility. References to *jihad fi sabilillah* and *syahid* circulated through the teachings of *teungku* and the educational environment of *dayah*, where religious knowledge was transmitted alongside moral instruction (Hadi, 2011; Setiawan et al., 2023; Siegel, 2014). Through these religious and educational networks, death in struggle was not presented merely as an event but as a possibility interpreted through commitments to religion and community. Read alongside *hadih maja*, these teachings indicate that *matee syahid* was understood in relation to values already embedded within everyday ethical life. The concept, therefore, derived its significance not from death alone but from the moral responsibilities that could make sacrifice meaningful under historical circumstances.

War-related *hikayat* formed part of the moral environment through which *matee syahid* was heard, remembered, and interpreted, although their role should not be overstated. *Hikayat Prang Sabi* and related texts circulated stories of devotion, struggle, divine reward, and perseverance, and previous studies have documented their transmission through recitation, copying, teaching, and religious networks during periods of anti-colonial resistance (Chalis et al., 2024; Fadhli et al., 2024; Hadi, 2011; Wahyuni et al., 2022). These materials are most valuable for showing how religious ideas moved through narrative forms that could be shared collectively, rather than for explaining actors' motivations. Within this study, *hikayat* therefore functions as a supporting context that helps illuminate the wider moral environment in which *matee syahid* acquired meaning. Table 2 summarizes the principal layers through which this ethical vocabulary was transmitted and interpreted within Acehnese anti-colonial contexts.

Table 2.
Layers of Ethical Transmission of *Matee syahid*

Layer	Articulation	Ethical function
<i>Jihad fi sabilillah</i> and <i>syahid</i>	Religious teachings on struggle, obligation, sacrifice, and martyrdom.	Provides moral language for interpreting death in struggle under colonial domination.
<i>Teungku</i> (religious scholar) and <i>dayah</i> (Islamic traditional school)	Religious instruction, moral guidance, communal learning, and the use of the local language and proverbs to transmit religious teachings.	Translates religious teachings into socially recognized ethical responsibilities through culturally familiar forms of expression.
<i>Hikayat Prang Sabi</i> and war-related <i>hikayat</i>	Narratives of devotion, perseverance, sacrifice, and divine reward.	Extends religious teachings through narrative memory and moral imagination.
<i>Perang sabil</i> as a collective anti-colonial struggle	Collective struggle to defend religion, dignity, land, and community.	Frames resistance as a moral obligation.
Guerrilla and individual resistance	Guerrilla actions and individual confrontations under colonial pressure.	Connects the possibility of death in struggle to ethical judgment, responsibility, and communal commitment.

Sources: processed by researchers (2026)

Table 2 shows that the ethical vocabulary associated with *matee syahid* moved through several layers before appearing as judgments about sacrifice and death in struggle. Religious teachings concerning *jihad fi sabilillah* and *syahid* provided an important foundation, yet the materials suggest that these teachings acquired social meaning through religious instruction, the circulation of narratives, communal memory, and experiences of colonial domination. Rather than functioning as isolated theological concepts, they were interpreted within relationships of obligation, responsibility, and collective wellbeing. Viewed in this way, *matee syahid* cannot be understood solely as a religious doctrine. The layers summarized in the table indicate a broader process through which religious teachings were translated into ethical judgment, allowing questions of sacrifice, dignity, and responsibility to be evaluated within historical circumstances.

Taken together, the materials suggest that *matee syahid* functioned not simply as an understanding of *syahid* and death in struggle but as ethical reasoning through which sacrifice and the possibility of death were evaluated within historical circumstances. The layers summarized in Table 2 indicate that Islamic values and moral commitments did not translate directly into action but were mediated by moral instruction, narrative circulation, communal memory, and colonial experience before becoming judgments about obligation, responsibility, and sacrifice. *Udep saree* gave *matee syahid* its ethical limit by tying sacrifice to a dignified life, while *matee syahid* sharpened *udep saree* by identifying circumstances in which dignity, faith, and communal responsibility could require profound personal consequences. This pattern demonstrates that ethical action emerged through practical judgment and moral formation rather than adherence to doctrine alone (Blackburn, 2003;

Driver, 2006; Hallaq, 2019). It also reveals a tension between colonial classifications and local moral worlds, since actions interpreted through dignity, sacrifice, and communal responsibility were not necessarily understood through the same ethical framework (Kloos, 2014; Loomba, 2015). In this sense, *hadih maja* provided an ethical imagination in which *udep saree* and *matee syahid* formed a single moral horizon, allowing dignified life and sacrifice to be interpreted as ethically connected responses to colonial domination.

Discussion

The main finding of this study suggests that *udep saree* and *matee syahid* functioned as interconnected ethical vocabularies through which dignity, responsibility, sacrifice, and communal obligation were interpreted under colonial domination. Rather than representing separate ideals of life and death, the materials suggest that both expressions formed a shared moral horizon in which sacrificial commitment derived its meaning from a dignified life in common. This relationship shifts attention away from resistance understood solely as military action, religious teaching, or political mobilization. Instead, it suggests that anti-colonial resistance was also embedded in everyday ethical reasoning through which individuals and communities evaluated how life ought to be lived and, under certain circumstances, what forms of sacrifice could be considered morally meaningful.

Seen in this light, the findings suggest that anti-colonial resistance must be understood within the social worlds through which Acehnese communities experienced colonial domination. Colonial warfare disrupted not only political authority but also everyday practices that sustained reciprocity, religious responsibility, and communal well-being (Kreike, 2012; Siegel, 2014). Within such circumstances, questions of dignity became inseparable from questions of survival, obligation, and social continuity. The significance of *udep saree* and *matee syahid*, therefore, lies not simply in their association with resistance but in their capacity to provide moral vocabularies through which changing historical conditions could be interpreted and evaluated. Viewed from this perspective, resistance emerged not only on battlefields but also within ethical efforts to preserve meaningful forms of communal life under colonial pressure.

The findings also invite a different understanding of anti-colonial resistance. Existing interpretations often emphasize military struggle, religious mobilization, or political opposition as the primary dimensions of resistance. While these dimensions remain important, the materials examined here suggest that resistance was also shaped through judgments concerning dignity, obligation, reciprocity, and communal responsibility. Such judgments became particularly significant when colonial domination disrupted the social conditions through which meaningful life was ordinarily sustained. Viewed in this way, *udep saree* and *matee syahid* indicate that resistance involved not only political action but also ongoing processes of evaluating how one ought to act under conditions of constraint. Ethical action therefore emerged through practical judgments concerning

responsibility, character, and communal wellbeing rather than through adherence to doctrine or political objectives alone, a pattern that may be understood through broader discussions of ethics as practical reasoning and moral formation (Blackburn, 2003; Dabashi, 2008; Driver, 2006; Hallaq, 2019).

This perspective also provides a different way of approaching colonial representations of Acehnese resistance. Colonial classifications often sought to explain acts of resistance through categories such as criminality, fanaticism, or disorder, thereby framing anti-colonial action within administrative and disciplinary forms of knowledge (Kloos, 2014; Loomba, 2015; Stoler, 2009). The findings presented here do not deny the presence of violence, nor do they seek to romanticize it. Rather, they suggest that such classifications frequently overlooked the ethical vocabularies through which actions could be interpreted within local moral worlds. Such omissions illustrate a form of colonial misrecognition in which meanings associated with dignity, obligation, and sacrifice became difficult to recognize within colonial frameworks of knowledge. Reading *udep saree* and *matee syahid* together therefore helps reveal ethical frameworks that were not always visible within colonial modes of interpretation.

The study also contributes to existing scholarship on Acehnese resistance by repositioning *hadih maja* within discussions that have largely focused on jihad discourse, *Hikayat* Prang Sabi, ulama authority, colonial representation, and military struggle (Chalis et al., 2024; Fadhli et al., 2024; Gedacht, 2015; Hadi, 2011; Wahyuni et al., 2022). These studies have demonstrated how religious teachings, political leadership, and colonial encounters shaped anti-colonial resistance. The present analysis does not challenge those findings. Rather, it complements them by showing how ethical meanings were articulated through proverb-based expressions embedded in everyday social life. This contribution also speaks to broader discussions of how local moral vocabularies, oral traditions, and religious values shape ethical responses to domination across different societies (Orbih, 2024; Rupiassa et al., 2024; Sou, 2022). In this sense, *hadih maja* reveals how anti-colonial resistance was sustained not only through political and religious mobilization but also through ethical reasoning embedded in everyday moral worlds, where *udep saree* and *matee syahid* formed a shared moral horizon linking dignified life and sacrifice.

At the same time, the findings should not be interpreted as evidence of a single moral framework shared uniformly across Acehnese society. The meanings attached to *udep saree* and *matee syahid* likely varied according to social position, religious authority, gender, region, and historical circumstance. *Ulama*, *uleebalang*, villagers, women fighters, students, and individual actors may have drawn upon these ethical vocabularies in different ways and for different purposes. The argument advanced here is therefore not that Acehnese society possessed one fixed ethical system, but that *hadih maja* provided a repertoire of moral expressions through which questions of dignity, responsibility, and sacrifice could be interpreted. Recognizing this diversity not only strengthens

historical interpretation but also highlights how ethical reasoning under domination remains shaped by context, memory, and lived experience rather than by uniform cultural principles.

Conclusion

This article suggests that the Acehnese *hadih maja udep saree*, *matee syahid* functioned as interconnected ethical vocabularies through which anti-colonial resistance acquired meaning within Acehnese moral worlds. *Udep saree* oriented moral attention toward dignified communal life grounded in reciprocity, solidarity, religious responsibility and everyday ethical practice. *Matee syahid* named circumstances in which the defence of dignity, communal obligation, and religious commitment could be understood to require sacrifice under colonial domination. Rather than treating *Hikayat Prang Sabi*, religious authority, or jihad discourse as unimportant, this reading situates them within a wider moral environment through which resistance was interpreted and evaluated. The significance of *hadih maja*, therefore, lies not in causing resistance but in helping make resistance ethically intelligible within particular historical circumstances.

Viewed from this perspective, colonial categories such as Atjeh-moorden and *pungoe* remain historically important because they reveal how Dutch colonial authorities sought to classify violence, disorder, criminality, and religious militancy. Yet these categories become less persuasive when treated as self-explanatory accounts of action. Reading them alongside *udep saree* and *matee syahid* suggests that the same events could be interpreted through different frameworks of meaning, including colonial legality on one hand and local ethical reasoning on the other. Such differences do not resolve every moral question surrounding resistance, but they help restore analytical attention to the ethical vocabularies through which action, obligation, dignity, and sacrifice were understood. In this respect, the study contributes to broader conversations in heritage studies, postcolonial ethics, and the study of local wisdom.

Several cautions nevertheless remain important. The analysis relies primarily on documentary, historical, and cultural materials and therefore cannot fully capture the diversity of interpretations that may have existed across regions, social groups, and historical settings. Future research drawing on colonial archives, Acehnese manuscripts, oral histories, and ethnographic inquiry may further clarify how *udep saree* and *matee syahid* have been preserved, contested, and reinterpreted across changing social contexts. Comparative studies may also illuminate how proverbs and other local moral expressions mediate relationships among dignity, religious teaching and resistance in different postcolonial societies. More broadly, the findings suggest that *hadih maja* is not merely a cultural inheritance but also a form of ethical reasoning through which communities interpret historical experience under conditions of pressure and change.

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