

The Contestation of Religious Authority and Living Sunnah: The Conflict Between Ulama of *Dayah* and Salafis & Wahhabis in West Aceh

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Abstract This study explores the contestation over religious authority between ulama of dayah and Salafis & Wahhabis in Meulaboh, West Aceh, highlighting the struggle for theological, cultural, and political legitimacy in the Islamic public sphere. Its primary goal is to examine how the living sunnah—the practice of sunnah intertwined with local cultural customs and the rituals of dayah—confronts the strict, text-based definition of as-sunnah promoted by Salafis and Wahhabis. Using qualitative research methods and a sociology of religion framework, this study incorporates Weberian's authority theory and Bourdieu's habitus concept to analyze the power relations, identities, and social practices involved in the conflict. Findings reveal that this dispute is more than just an ideological or theological issue; it is a struggle for social, symbolic, and political-economic dominance, as seen in cases like Masjid Jabir al-Ka'by and local religious rituals along the west coast of Aceh. This study underscores that the contestation of the sunnah is not merely a religious debate but a social dynamic that shapes who has the authority to define authentic Islam, preserve local identity, and control the religious public sphere.

Abstrak Studi ini mengeksplorasi kontestasi otoritas keagamaan antara ulama dayah dan Salafi & Wahabi di Meulaboh, Aceh Barat, dengan menyoroti perebutan legitimasi teologis, kultural, dan politik di ranah publik Islam. Tujuan utamanya adalah untuk mengkaji bagaimana sunnah yang hidup—praktik sunnah yang terjalin dengan adat budaya lokal dan ritual dayah—berkonfrontasi dengan definisi as-sunnah yang ketat dan berbasis teks yang dipromosikan oleh Salafi dan Wahabi. Dengan menggunakan metode penelitian kualitatif dan kerangka sosiologi agama, studi ini menggabungkan teori otoritas Weberian dan konsep habitus Bourdieu untuk menganalisis relasi kuasa, identitas, dan praktik sosial yang terlibat dalam konflik tersebut. Temuan penelitian mengungkapkan bahwa pertikaian ini lebih dari sekadar isu ideologis atau teologis; ini adalah perebutan dominasi sosial, simbolis, dan politik-ekonomi, seperti yang terlihat dalam kasus-kasus seperti Masjid Jabir al-Ka'by dan ritual keagamaan lokal di sepanjang pesisir barat Aceh. Studi ini menggarisbawahi bahwa kontestasi sunnah bukan sekadar perdebatan keagamaan, tetapi dinamika sosial yang membentuk siapa yang berwenang mendefinisikan Islam yang otentik, melestarikan identitas lokal, dan mengendalikan ruang publik keagamaan.

Keywords Ulama of Dayah; Salafi-Wahhabi; Religious Authority



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Introduction

Disputes over religious authority between ulama of *dayah* (the traditional Islamic boarding schools in Aceh) and Salafis & Wahhabis in Aceh have frequently occurred in the past. For example, in Langsa City, community and youth organizations rejected the presence of Wahhabis and their educational institutions.¹ Several incidents, such as the burning of Masjid Taqwa Muhammadiyah Sangso in Bireuen,² riots during a Friday prayer at Masjid al-Izzah in North Aceh,³ the forced dispersal of a religious gathering at Masjid al-Makmur in Banda Aceh,⁴ and another large gathering at Masjid al-Fitrah in Keutapang, Banda Aceh,⁵ are all connected to the ongoing ideological conflict between ulama of *dayah* and Salafis & Wahhabis, which has been widely publicized for spreading heretical ideas. The question remains whether these conflicts are solely due to ideological differences, as similar incidents have also happened repeatedly in Meulaboh City on the west coast of Aceh.

The religious authority dispute in West Aceh involves two opposing groups: Salafis and Wahhabis against *ulama* of *dayah*. To make matters worse, the local government has also become involved in the conflict. It has openly tried to take control of Masjid Jabir al-Ka'by, which has been the headquarters for the Salafis and Wahhabis, deemed heretical. Here, the government appears to be acting more for political gain in perpetuating the conflict than as a neutral mediator. This Sunnah-related dispute centers on ceremonial rituals, preaching, and authority. The fight for control over the dissemination and promotion of sunnah rituals is crucial for attracting followers to worship with one of these groups. The more followers a group has, whether Salafis and Wahhabis or *ulama* of *dayah*, the greater their income and public influence. The government exploits these groups to push its political agenda and strengthen its authority.

¹ Beritalima, "Ormas dan OKP Islam Menolak Pesantren Diduga Beraliran Wahabi di Langsa," Beritalima.com, July 2020, <https://beritalima.com/ormas-dan-okp-islam-menolak-pesantren-diduga-beraliran-wahabi-di-langsa/>; Waspada, "OKP Dan Ormas Datangi Kesbangpol Langsa, Tolak Aliran Wahabi," *Waspada Medan Indonesia*, July 15, 2020, <https://waspada.id/aceh/okp-dan-ormas-datangi-kesbangpol-langsa-tolak-aliran-wahabi/>.

² Republika, "Pembakaran Mesjid Dan Parade 'Kejahilan,'" Republika Online, October 20, 2017, <https://republika.co.id/share/oy20r6396>; Fajar DetikNews, "Pemuda Muhammadiyah Protes Larangan Pembangunan Masjid Muhammadiyah Di Bireuen," Detiknews, June 8, 2016, <https://news.detik.com/berita/d-3228468/pemuda-muhammadiyah-protes-larangan-pembangunan-masjid-muhammadiyah-di-bireuen>.

³ AJNN, "Salat Jumat Di Masjid Al-Izzah Aceh Utara Ricuh," *Aceh Jurnal National Network (AJNN)*, Mei 2016, <https://www.ajnn.net/news/shalat-jumat-di-masjid-al-izzah-aceh-utara-ricuh/index.html>.

⁴ Kumparan.com, "Sekelompok Massa Hentikan Pengajian Ustaz Farhan di Masjid Oman, Aceh," kumparan, January 2020, <https://kumparan.com/acehkini/sekelompok-massa-hentikan-pengajian-ustaz-farhan-di-masjid-oman-aceh-1sj3jr2OdQG>; AcehTrend.com, *Emak-emak Rapatkan Barisan Di Masjid Oman, Tolak SK Wali Kota Tentang Pengurus BKM*, Banda Aceh, January 2020, <https://www.acehtrend.com/2020/01/31/emak-emak-rapatkan-barisan-di-masjid-oman-tolak-sk-wali-kota-tentang-pengurus-bkm/>.

⁵ BBCNews, "Ustaz Firanda ditolak di Aceh karena 'lebih cenderung ke Wahabi,'" *Indonesia, BBC News Indonesia*, June 14, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/indonesia/indonesia-48617536>; Suara.com, "Pengajian Ustaz Firanda Andirja Di Masjid Aceh Dibubarkan Warga," January 2019, <https://www.suara.com/news/2019/06/14/140653/pengajian-ustaz-firanda-andirja-di-masjid-aceh-dibubarkan-warga?page=all>.

Many writings have explored conflicts of authority, such as those between *ustadz* (Islamic religious teachers) and *kyai* (respected ulama) in Java and other regions.⁶ In this study, the role of *teungku*⁷ has been to back up the community in various religious rituals, both ceremonial and cultural. For example, the celebration of Mawlid is a major religious ritual held annually on the western and southern coasts of Aceh, along with celebrations of Isra' Mi'raj, Islamic New Year (1 Muharram), Ramadan fasting month, Eid al-Fitr, Eid al-Adha, and various family religious rituals, such as *khanduri matee*, *khanduri udeep*, weddings, *walimatul ursy*, *walimatul safar*, *walimatul khitan*, *peutroen aneuk*, *peusijuk* with its various types, and others.⁸ These different social, religious, and traditional activities have become a living sunnah for the people there. In this context, *teungku* plays a controlling role in maintaining the living sunnah.

Authorities such as *ustadz*⁹ often avoid involvement in public religious rituals and typically reject this role. These Salafis and Wahhabis see themselves mainly as followers of as-sunnah or Sunni tradition. More broadly, and with strong expressions of disapproval, these groups consider many ritual practices not explicitly mentioned in the Quran and Sunnah as *bid'ah* and misleading. They advocate for returning Islam to its original teachings, free from unnecessary rituals. Therefore, efforts to disband the Salafis and Wahhabis' congregation at Masjid Jabir al-Ka'by should be executed and supported by coordination forums and regional leaders.¹⁰ The religious fervor of Salafis and Wahhabis remained unshaken by pressure from groups trying to take control of their headquarters. They stated that it was themselves, the Masjid Jabir al-Ka'by, and the administrators of the Hadiyur Rasul Foundation, who had locked the mosque they manage.¹¹ Additionally, they are pursuing legal action against the

⁶ Dzul Fadli Sya'bana, "New Media Forum for Religious Moderation, Fragmentation and Contestation of Religious Authorities in North Sumatra: From Local Ulema to Ustaz," *Book Chapter of Proceedings Journey-Liaison Academia and Society* 2, no. 2 (October 2023): 2; Mutohharun Jinan, "New Media Dan Pergeseran Otoritas Keagamaan Islam Di Indonesia," *Jurnal Lektur Keagamaan* 10, no. 1 (June 2012): 1, <https://doi.org/10.31291/jlk.v10i1.178>; Choeroni Choeroni Choeroni, "Plarasisasi Peran Kyai Dan Ustadz Dalam Manajemen Rumah Tahfizh," *Conference on Islamic Studies FAI 2019*, no. 0 (February 2020): 0, <https://doi.org/10.30659/cois.v0i0.8000>; Annidaul Aula, "Religion, Media and Piety Construction: A Study of the Web Series Entitled Ustad Millenial," *DINIKA: Academic Journal of Islamic Studies* 7, no. 1 (July 2022): 99–134, <https://doi.org/10.22515/dinika.v7i1.5177>.

⁷ A title given to Islamic figures in Aceh.

⁸ *Khanduri Matee*: A form of death commemoration in various cultural and religious traditions. *Khanduri Udeep*: a form of thanksgiving in Acehnese society that begins at birth and continues until death, as we have described.

⁹ A term that tends to be used more often for religious figures who do not come from traditional religious education (*dayah*), especially for religious figures from Salafis and Wahhabis.

¹⁰ ANTARA News AntaraNews, "Forkompimda Aceh Barat Hentikan Pengajian Di Mushalla Jabir Al-Ka'by Meulaboh-ANTARA News Aceh," Mei 2021, <https://aceh.antaranews.com/berita/215786/forkompimda-aceh-barat-hentikan-pengajian-di-mushalla-jabir-al-kabiy-meulaboh>; AJNN net-Aceh Journal National Network, "Petugas Gabungan Aceh Barat Larang Jamaah Shalat Jumat di Masjid Jabir Al-Ka'by," AJNN.net, February 2022, <https://www.ajnn.net/news/petugas-gabungan-aceh-barat-larang-jamaah-shalat-jumat-di-masjid-jabir-al-ka-biy/index.html>; tvonenews, "Larang Salat Jumat, Petugas Gabungan Jaga Ketat Musala Jabir Al Ka'by Meulaboh," February 18, 2022, <https://www.tvonenews.com/daerah/sumatera/28108-larang-salat-jumat-petugas-gabungan-jaga-ketat-musala-jabir-al-kabiyi-meulaboh>.

¹¹ M. Z. K. News, "Pengurus Yayasan Hadyur Rasul Rantai Pintu Gerbang Musala Jabir – MZK News," March 2022, <https://mzknews.co/2022/03/25/pengurus-yayasan-hadyur-rasul-rantai-pintu-gerbang-musala-jabir/>.

community and local government, who have attempted to close the mosque and bar worshippers from Friday prayers.¹²

So far, many researchers have studied the existence of the living sunnah that has developed in society. Studies of the living sunnah have explored local wisdom,¹³ the concept of the living sunnah,¹⁴ and various related topics. This is similar to the contestation that often occurs between traditional Islamic movements and the movements of Salafis & Wahhabis, which are beginning to develop in Aceh.¹⁵ This study aims to examine how the movements of Salafis and Wahhabis in Meulaboh City confront the traditional Islamic movements led by ulama of *dayah*, while also facing the local government with strong political implications. The conflict against Salafis and Wahhabis in Meulaboh at the grassroots level is against ulama of *dayah*, and at higher levels, it opposes the policies of the ulama consultative assembly and the local government.

The sociological approach in this study falls within the field of sociology of religion. It aims to examine how religious understanding is constructed through the contestation of religious authority, recently observed between ulama of *dayah* and Salafis & Wahhabis, as well as their religious authority in the public sphere. The researcher chose the west coast of Aceh as the research site because the congregation of Masjid al-Ka'biy, managed by Salafis and Wahhabis, comes not only from Meulaboh City but also from Nagan Raya, Southwest Aceh, and Aceh Jaya. Similarly, the movement of ulama of *dayah* is not only from West Aceh but is also supported by the ulama consultative assembly, the West

¹² KBA.ONE, "Larang Salat Jumat, Bupati Aceh Barat Digugat ke Pengadilan oleh BKM Jabir Al Ka'biy," KBA.ONE, March 2022, <https://www.kba.one/news/larang-salat-jumat-bupati-aceh-barat-digugat-ke-pengadilan-oleh-bkm-jabir-al-ka-biy/index.html>; Serambinews, "Pengurus BKM Masjid Jabir Gugat Pejabat Aceh Barat - Serambinews.Com," March 2022, <https://aceh.tribunnews.com/2022/03/31/pengurus-bkm-masjid-jabir-gugat-pejabat-aceh-barat>; Serambinews, "BKM Jabir Siap Gugat Pemkab Aceh Barat, Ini Permasalahannya," Serambinews.com, February 2022, <https://aceh.tribunnews.com/2022/02/25/bkm-jabir-siap-gugat-pemkab-aceh-barat-ini-permasalahannya>.

¹³ Wahyudin Darmalaksana, Teti Ratnasih, and Saifudin Nur, "The Relationship Between Islam and Local Wisdom in the Kampung Naga Tradition: Living Sunnah Research," *Diroyah: Jurnal Studi Ilmu Hadis* 6, no. 2 (April 2022): 2, <https://doi.org/10.15575/diroyah.v6i2.15316>; Abdul Hadi, "The Internalization of Local Wisdom Value in Dayah Educational Institution," *Jurnal Ilmiah Peuradeun* 5, no. 2 (May 2017): 189–200, <https://doi.org/10.26811/peuradeun.v5i2.128>; Rofhani Rofhani, "Pola Religiositas Muslim Kelas Menengah Di Perkotaan," *Religió Jurnal Studi Agama-Agama* 3, no. 1 (March 2013): 1, <https://doi.org/10.15642/religio>; Adrika Fithrotul Aini, "Living Hadis Dalam Tradisi Malam Kamis Majelis Shalawat Diba' Bil-Mustofa," *Ar-Raniry: International Journal of Islamic Studies* 2, no. 1 (July 2020): 1, <https://doi.org/10.22373/jar.v2i1.7423>.

¹⁴ M. Khoiril Anwar, "Living Hadis," *Farabi* 12, no. 1 (June 2015): 1; Saifuddin Zuhri Qudsy, *LIVING HADIS: Geneologi, Teori dan Aplikasi*, 1 (2016); Mohamed Shaid Mathee, "A Critical Reading of Fazlur Rahman's Islamic Methodology in History : The Case of the Living Sunnah" (University of Cape Town, 2004), <https://open.uct.ac.za/handle/11427/8005>; Subkhani Kusuma Dewi, "Fungsi Performatif Dan Informatif Living Hadis Dalam Perspektif Sosiologi Reflektif," *Jurnal Living Hadis* 2, no. 2 (October 2017): 2, <https://doi.org/10.14421/livinghadis.2017.1328>; Ja'far Assagaf, "STUDI HADIS DENGAN PENDEKATAN SOSIOLOGIS: Paradigma Living-Hadis," *Holistic Al-Hadis* 1, no. 2 (December 2015): 2, <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.1341438>.

¹⁵ Muhammad Ansor, Yaser Amri, and Ismail Fahami Arrauf, "PIETY ON CONTESTATION: ETHNOGRAPHY ON PURITAN AND TRADITIONALIST MUSLIM IN ACEH TAMIANG," *Al Qalam* 31, no. 2 (December 2014): 305–33; Muhammad Arifin, Irwan Abdullah, and Atik Tri Ratnawati, "Contestation between Puritan Islam and Kejawen in the Urban Yogyakarta of Indonesia," *Al-Albab* 8, no. 2 (December 2019): 2, <https://doi.org/10.24260/alalbab.v8i2.1460>; Moch Nur Ichwan, "FATAWA AND DIFFERENCE: Official Ulama, 'Aswaja' and Salafism in Aceh, Indonesia," paper presented at Conference on Religious Authority in Indonesian Islam, Singapore, *Contestation, Pluralization, and New Actors*, Yusof Ishak Institute ISEAS-LIPI, July 2, 2018; Hasse Jubba et al., "The Contestation between Conservative and Moderate Muslims in Promoting Islamic Moderatism in Indonesia," *Cogent Social Sciences* 8, no. 1 (December 2022): 2116162, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2022.2116162>.

Aceh Regional Government, and ulama of *dayah* from other districts. Meulaboh is often described as the most pluralistic city on the southwestern coast of Aceh, as this area is inhabited and visited by various tribes and ethnic groups. Additionally, several state universities attract many people and groups to the area.

This study argues that the contestation of religious authority between ulama of *dayah* and Salafis & Wahhabis is not just about ideology or theology, but also involves underlying issues. It explores the debate over the living sunnah within society and how fundamentalist Salafis and Wahhabis try to present a version of Islam that is free from various elements.

The Living Sunnah and the Culture on the West Coast

Suppose we refer to the definition of living sunnah. In that case, Aceh resembles a community with strong kinship ties and a culture deeply embedded in various aspects of social life.¹⁶ Religious beliefs are strongly integrated within it. Living sunnah is not viewed as taboo in Acehnese society because Acehnese culture is deeply rooted in Islam, and there is no significant barrier between Islam and Acehnese culture. It is clear that Aceh is Islamic; no culture there is non-Islamic. From another perspective, Islam is believed to embody universal values of goodness, known as *sunnatullah*, which are present in all civilizations across the world. The strength of an agrarian society, along with its cultural values, generally does not conflict with Islam, even though the process of Islamization has faced some resistance.¹⁷

On the other hand, Acehnese society is required by administrative laws to implement Islamic law (Sharia) in all activities. This has sparked debate over how laws and community practices in Aceh should be developed: should Acehnese laws mirror those of the Arab world, or should the standards for Acehnese community activities follow Arab customs? It isn't easy to find a clear answer that is acceptable to the people of Aceh. Is Aceh rejecting Arab culture? Possibly not; however, Arab culture itself does not seem fully integrated into the culture of the Acehnese people, even though there is no explicit rejection of Arab culture. It appears that Acehnese culture, especially along the west coast, has its own unique traits and has flourished through the widespread spread of Islam.

¹⁶ Alvianto Wahyudi Utomo, "Transisi Agraris ke Industri (Studi Sosiologis Perubahan Sosial: Transisi Masyarakat Agraris ke Industri di Dusun Timang, Desa Wonokerto, Kabupaten Wonogiri)," *Cakrawala Jurnal Penelitian Sosial* 7, no.2 (2018): 2; Sujana TURSINAH, "Perubahan Sosial Keagamaan Masyarakat Agraris Menjadi Industri di Dusun Kemang Desa Sukanegara. Lampung Selatan" (diploma, UIN RADEN INTAN LAMPUNG, 2023), <http://repository.radenintan.ac.id/29514/>.

¹⁷ Nurul Aeni and Lilam Kadarin Nuriyanto, "Religiusitas Kelas Menengah Muslim Surakarta; Interaksi Dengan Globalisasi Dan Modernitas," *Harmoni* 19, no. 2 (December 2020): 2, <https://doi.org/10.32488/harmoni.v19i2.450>; "Islamist Strands Will Test Middle East Policymakers," *Emerald Expert Briefings* oxan-db, no. oxan-db (January 2017), <https://doi.org/10.1108/OXAN-DB217551>.

Whether acknowledged or not, Islam is a religion originating from Arabs, though some scholars, like Ahmad Baso, challenge this view.¹⁸ Religious leaders, policymakers, and the government have played numerous roles since Islam was first introduced in Aceh. These roles encompass Islam's development as a religion, its teachings, doctrines, and way of life, as well as its emergence as a political, cultural, social, and economic influence. Such roles are crucial in the context of the Muslim community's efforts to implement Islamic law in Aceh. This study aims to highlight key points forming the basis of recent religious disputes on the west coast of Aceh. Specifically, it examines the relationship between the ulama of *dayah* and Salafis & Wahhabis — between the Sunni community and those advocating the living sunnah on the west coast of Aceh.

1. The Culture of Aceh—an Islamic Culture or Islam with its Own Culture

There are various sources and theories regarding when Islam first entered the Indonesian archipelago.¹⁹ At least the two reasons mentioned above have been a common subject of study for many researchers in the past. These two reasons also led to Aceh becoming a focus in the history of Islamic civilization and culture. Clifford Geertz researched how Islam developed in Java, dedicating much of his life to the study. Geertz concluded that Javanese culture tended to dominate over Islam, which is why he wrote a book titled "Agama Jawa."²⁰ What is surprising, however, is that Geertz claimed the Islamic culture in Java was actually the Javanese religion itself, or that the Javanese religion triumphed over Islam in Java.

Aceh, with its cultural diversity, cannot separate every aspect of its culture from its religion. So far, there have been no research findings stating that Islam in Aceh is the sole religion of Aceh, unlike what Geert mentioned about the religion of Java. Islam in Aceh was built on a culture that existed long before Islam arrived in the region. Whether acknowledged or not, Acehnese culture changed when Islam began to spread in Aceh in the 12th century. Islam, on the one hand, prevailed because it integrated with the local culture. On the other hand, the earlier-grown Acehnese culture was not completely overpowered. This is what the ulama say: that Islam in Aceh is different from Islam in Saudi Arabia.²¹ Believe it or not, Islam in the Arab world also did not entirely defeat the local culture there.

A common question, which some might see as reckless, is: Isn't our culture in Aceh a religion? The celebration of Mawlid is considered a religious practice, and so are the celebrations of Isra' Mi'raj

¹⁸ Ahmad Baso, *Islamisasi Nusantara: Dari Era Khalifah Usman Bin Affan Hingga Wali Songo : Studi Tentang Asal-Usul Intelektual Islam Nusantara*, II (Tangerang: Pustaka Afid, 2019).

¹⁹ Michael Laffan, *Sejarah Islam di Nusantara*, trans. Indi Aunullah and Rini Nurul Badariah (Yogyakarta: Bentang Pustaka, 2015); Amirul Hadi, *Aceh: Sejarah, Budaya, Dan Tradisi*, Ed. 1 (Jakarta: Yayasan Pustaka Obor Indonesia, 2010).

²⁰ Clifford Geertz, *Agama Jawa: Abangan, Santri, Priyayi dalam Kebudayaan Jawa* (Jakarta: Komunitas Bambu, 2013).

²¹ Affan Ramli, *Merajam Dalil Syariat*, Cet. 1 (Banda Aceh: Bandar Pub. ; Distributor, Diandra Primamitra Media, 2010).

and Nisfu Sya'ban, along with various other cultural practices. This question is often raised during every religious and cultural activity held in Aceh. Such statements imply that religion cannot regulate culture and even suggest that Islam is subordinate to culture. Abu Qari, the chairman of the ulama consultative assembly, said, "There are two forms of worship in Islam: one is called the *mahdhah*, and the other is called *ghairu mahdhah*. It is possible that many of those who express these things do not understand these forms of worship."²² Abu Nasir, former chairman of the Ulama Consultative Assembly, expressed a similar view: "Such statements definitely come from Wahhabis, who reject Mawlid and religious activities on the grounds of bid'ah; they do not understand *mahdhah* and *ghairu mahdhah*."²³

Abu Qari and Abu Nasir agreed that Islam promotes culture and adopts it, rather than imposing it and rejecting existing cultures. Islam in Aceh also rejects cultures that the ulama consider to be shirk. Because the cultures in Aceh are preserved and monitored by the ulama, many cultures that once existed are no longer present today. This demonstrates that Islam in Aceh does not submit to culture and actively rejects it. As long as the cultures in society align with Islamic values, the ulama and the people of Aceh will preserve them. Furthermore, Abu Qari stated, "The implementation of Islamic law mandated by Aceh Government Law No.11 of 2005 gives greater freedom to the ulama in protecting and safeguarding the people."²⁴

Islamic culture is integral to Acehnese culture, and Acehnese culture is deeply rooted in Islam. This connection aligns with the theory of assimilation, which often occurs between culture and religion. As a result, the emergence of the Acehnese *hadis madja* (local philosophy) is not surprising. It states, '*adat ngoen hukom lagee dzat ngoen sifeut, kiban adat meunan keuh hukom*', meaning that customs and Islamic law in Aceh are like the substance and nature of an object—whatever the customs are in Aceh, so too is the Islamic law. These two ideas, separated by a comma, reflect a significant part of the civilization established in Acehnese Islam. The customs grounded in long-standing traditions have evolved alongside the development of religion. Because community customs are based on faith, they include not only *mahdhah* worship practices that strictly follow religious rules but also *ghairu mahdhah* practices that have developed within the community. Over time, religion has tended to play an increasingly dominant role, sometimes diminishing the influence of local customs and traditions when reviewed by ulama in terms of religious law.

²² Mahdi Kari, "KONTESTASI OTORITAS KEAGAMAAN; Ideologi dan Ruang Publik Agama antara Ulama Dayah, Salafi-Wahabi dan Pemerintah Daerah di Pantai Barat Aceh," Mei 2023, MPU Aceh Barat.

²³ Abdul Nasir, "KONTESTASI OTORITAS KEAGAMAAN; Ideologi dan Ruang Publik Agama antara Ulama Dayah, Salafi-Wahabi dan Pemerintah Daerah di Pantai Barat Aceh," Mei 2023, MPU Aceh Barat.

²⁴ Mahdi Kari, "KONTESTASI OTORITAS KEAGAMAAN; Ideologi dan Ruang Publik Agama antara Ulama Dayah, Salafi-Wahabi dan Pemerintah Daerah di Pantai Barat Aceh," Mei 2023.

2. The Acehnese Islam is not the Arab Islam.

"The Acehnese Islam is not the Arab Islam" has become a heated topic in Indonesia lately. In reality, it has been a long-standing issue in Aceh since Islamic law was implemented there in 1999.²⁵ Acehnese laws do not mirror Arab Islam because the group that formulated Islamic law at that time believed that understanding Islamic law depended on interpretation.²⁶ This aligns with Affan Ramli's idea that the principles of Islamic law for Aceh would differ from those in Arab countries or elsewhere.²⁷ Since the enactment of Islamic law in Aceh, the discussion about Arab Islam versus Aceh Islam has quieted down. However, in today's modern era, with the rise of the national Islamic movement Aksi 212 (action to defend Islam), the debate over Arab and non-Arab Islam has been reignited.

The west coast of Aceh is an area where the community's customs and culture are deeply rooted in religion and social life. Recently, after the *Aksi 212*, Arab Islam seems to be the only faithful form of Islam that should guide religion, not other expressions of Islam. In fact, many people say that the standard for Islam and Muslim life should be based on Arab countries. Debates like "Arab Islam is the only true form of Islam! If the Arab version of Islam is not accepted, then which version of Islam should be accepted?" often become topics of discussion among the people of Meulaboh when examining the traditional customs there.²⁸ However, when it becomes serious reading material, no one debates it.

Various cultures within the western coastal community are constantly enriched and strengthened by Islamic values, covering personal matters such as marriage, bridal bathing ceremonies, wedding celebrations with their various lengthy traditions, the traditional seven-month pregnancy ritual, the birth process, *aqiqah*, *turun tanah anak*, *khitan* or circumcision for boys and girls, marriage proposals, and the process of death or misfortune, which is commemorated for up to a year. Not to mention celebrations of achievements or hardships experienced by individuals, all of which fall under customs, culture, and strong religious values. Additionally, social activities include commemorating Mawlid, Isra' Mi'raj, Nisfu Sya'ban, completing the Quran, *syukuran* or housewarming celebrations, Quran recitation, mourning of ulama, *peusijuk tanoh*, *keunduri blang*, *peusijuk boat*, and various other communal events.

²⁵ Merujuk pada beberapa UU; Presiden Indonesia, "Undang-Undang Republik Indonesia Nomor 44 Tahun 1999 Tentang Penyelenggaraan Keistimewaan Propinsi Daerah Istimewa Aceh," Lembaga Negara Republik Indonesia, 1999; Presiden Republik Indonesia, "Undang-Undang Nomor 18 Tahun 2001 Tentang Otonomi Khusus," Sekretariat Negara, 2001; Presiden Republik Indonesia, "Undang-Undang Nomor 11 Tahun 2006 Tentang Pemerintahan Aceh," Sekretariat Negara, 2006.

²⁶ Noviandy, "Etika Sosial Politik Dalam Perumusan Qanun Jinayah Di Aceh," *4th Biannual International Conference on Aceh and Ocean Studies*, International Center on Aceh and Ocean Studies, June 8, 2013, 40–48; Noviandy, *Penegakan HAM Di Negeri Syariat "Proses Perumusan Qanun Jinayah Dalam Perspektif Etika"* (Yogyakarta: Kaukaba Dipantara, 2015).

²⁷ Ramli, *Merajam Dalil Syariat*.

²⁸ Haramain Nuriqmar, "KONTESTASI OTORITAS KEAGAMAAN; Ideologi dan Ruang Publik Agama antara Ulama Dayah, Salafi-Wahabi dan Pemerintah Daerah di Pantai Barat Aceh," Mei 2023, MPU Aceh Barat.

Many Arab cultures are actually relevant to Acehnese culture. Arab has dances, and so does Aceh. Furthermore, there were also dances during the time of the Prophet and his companions. If, in the time of the Prophet in the Arab world, there were societal celebrations to mark various occasions, this is similar to how our society in Aceh celebrates. The tricky part is that if we make Arab culture the standard for our own culture.²⁹ It is not the culture of a specific region that Islam brought. It must be acknowledged that Allah chose the land of the Arabs, where the prophets and messengers of Allah were sent. In the Quran and hadiths, the Prophet Muhammad explained that the Arab nation is no more noble than other nations. What matters to Allah is the piety of His servants.³⁰

Acehnese culture, like any other, does not exist in isolation. Culture results from interactions between communities and various aspects of life within a society. For example, today, Acehnese culture cannot be separated from its connections with Arab, Chinese, European, and Indian cultures, all of which have significantly influenced Acehnese society. That's why Aceh is often seen as an acronym for Arab, China, Europe, and (H)India.³¹ Acehnese culture tends to be shaped by these four civilizations.³² This is closely linked to Aceh's strategic location in the past, which was frequently visited by different fleets and traders.

3. Ulama and the Power Relation of Living Sunnah

Living sunnah in Acehnese society embodies Islamic values. Believing in practicing religious culture in every activity definitely occurs frequently in society. The ability to preserve religious cultures, called living sunnah in this study, is not only performed by congregations or the Acehnese people but must also be supported, and even commanded, by the ulama. Ulama act as pillars in maintaining Islamic values through various religious and social activities. While many might accuse ulama of being interested in promoting religious culture—perhaps not solely religious—yes, ulama do have this interest. That interest is to ensure the ongoing presence of religion in Acehnese society.³³

Whether recognized or not, religious traditions and living sunnah play a key role in maintaining Islamic values within the public sphere. The preservation of these values through cultural

²⁹ Banta Ali, "KONTESTASI OTORITAS KEAGAMAAN; Ideologi Dan Ruang Publik Agama Antara Ulama Dayah, Salafi-Wahabi Dan Pemerintah Daerah Di Pantai Barat Aceh," Mei 2023, Meulaboh.

³⁰ Kementerian Agama, *Al-Qur'an Dan Terjemahannya Edisi Penyempurnaan* (Jakarta: Lajnah Pentashihan Mushaf Al-Qur'an, 2019), <https://pustakalajnah.kemenag.go.id/detail/135> Surat Al Hujurat. Ayat 13.

³¹ Amiruddin Yahya, *Zawiyah Cot Kala, Sejarah Pendidikan Islam yang Hilang di Nusantara*, Cetakan pertama (Medan: Perdana Publishing, 2019), 156.

³² Yahya, *Zawiyah Cot Kala, Sejarah Pendidikan Islam yang Hilang di Nusantara*, 87.

³³ Mahdi Kari, "KONTESTASI OTORITAS KEAGAMAAN; Ideologi dan Ruang Publik Agama antara Ulama Dayah, Salafi-Wahabi dan Pemerintah Daerah di Pantai Barat Aceh," Mei 2023; Haramain Nuriqmar, "KONTESTASI OTORITAS KEAGAMAAN; Ideologi dan Ruang Publik Agama antara Ulama Dayah, Salafi-Wahabi dan Pemerintah Daerah di Pantai Barat Aceh," Mei 2023; Abdul Nasir, "KONTESTASI OTORITAS KEAGAMAAN; Ideologi dan Ruang Publik Agama antara Ulama Dayah, Salafi-Wahabi dan Pemerintah Daerah di Pantai Barat Aceh," Mei 2023.

rituals often involves specific figures—ulama—who are responsible for spreading Islamic teachings and leading various religious ceremonies. These ulama are regarded as competent and uphold the sanctity of rituals in society. Communities may select these figures for special events or through religious institutions. The role of religious leaders is essential in safeguarding religious values through cultural practices.

Figures such as Imum Chik, Teungku Meunasah, Teungku Khatib, Tuha Peut, Geuchik, Tuha Lapan, Teungku Rangkang, and Teungku Dayah³⁴ play a key role in preserving and upholding religious values within their communities, as well as in village administration and communication. The village leaders are primarily knowledgeable about spiritual matters and often serve as role models. Their roles in safeguarding and maintaining religious and cultural rituals are highly strategic and central. As a result, most village leaders in western Aceh possess a spiritual understanding that supports religious values through various cultural traditions thriving in the community.

Additionally, the involvement of village leaders in various religious and cultural rituals within the community brings financial benefits. For example, if a village hosts multiple celebrations, from the smallest to the largest, totaling 10 (ten) events in one month, an involved *teungku* will receive at least one million rupiah in additional fees. This amount is considered auspicious. Not to mention the food provided by each event organizer.³⁵ This phenomenon did not happen overnight. Of course, to achieve these benefits, village leaders had to leverage their power relations and social capital. There is not only personal competition among religious leaders in the community but also competition in terms of knowledge, lineage, and expertise, often demonstrated at various celebrations. These power relations extend further. The authority, knowledge, and networks of religious leaders can influence a broader socio-political sphere.³⁶ Community groups grow into masses that can support individuals who always uphold the living sunnah. Therefore, it is not uncommon that, when religious leaders speak publicly, the masses and the government consistently support their presence.³⁷

This phenomenon demonstrates that the power dynamics between ulama and their followers do not simply emerge out of nowhere; instead, power and knowledge relationships are embedded in

³⁴ The figures of Imum Chik, Teungku Meunasah, Teungku Khatib, Tuha Peut, Geuchik, Tuha Lapan, Teungku Rangkang, and Teungku Dayah represent the functional and social structures within the people and the government administration in Aceh.

³⁵ Anton Jamal, "KONTESTASI OTORITAS KEAGAMAAN; Ideologi Dan Ruang Publik Agama Antara Ulama Dayah, Salafi-Wahabi Dan Pemerintah Daerah Di Pantai Barat Aceh," Mei 2023, Meulaboh; Edi Saputra Asyek, "KONTESTASI OTORITAS KEAGAMAAN; Ideologi dan Ruang Publik Agama antara Ulama Dayah, Salafi-Wahabi dan Pemerintah Daerah di Pantai Barat Aceh," Mei 2023, Meulaboh.

³⁶ Moch Nur Ichwan, "Neo-Sufism, Shariatism, and Ulama Politics: Abuya Shaykh Amran Waly and the Tauhid-Tasawuf Movement in Aceh," in *Islam, Politics and Change : The Indonesian Experience after the Fall of Suharto*, ed. Kees van Dijk and Nico J.G. Kaptein (Leiden: Leiden University Press (LUP), 2016), <https://openaccess.leidenuniv.nl/handle/1887/38574>; Ichwan, "FATAWA AND DIFFERENCE: Official Ulama, 'Aswaja' and Salafism in Aceh, Indonesia."

³⁷ Noviandy Noviandy, "SALAFISME, ULAMA DAYAH DAN KONTESTASI OTORITAS KEAGAMAAN DI ACEH" (doctoral, UIN SUNAN KALIJAGA YOGYAKARTA, 2022), <https://digilib.uin-suka.ac.id/id/eprint/49609/>.

every living sunnah practiced by the community. Therefore, it is not surprising that the demonstration to seal Masjid Jabir al-Ka'by in Meulaboh was attended and led by religious study groups, regardless of the Salafis and Wahhabis who claimed that the crowd was hired or paid and not a genuine mass. Power relationships are crucial for religious leaders, as each religious organization commands the collective strength of its followers. This influence can then be leveraged in negotiations with other parties, both culturally and politically, within the government. In fact, it can serve as a bargaining tool to pressure authorities and garner support from the government and politicians.

The Sunnah Islam and the Anti-*Bid'ah*

The term living sunnah refers to sunnah practices that are actively part of the community's daily life, integrated into local culture, *dayah* traditions, worship methods, ritual customs, and even clothing styles and religious rituals that the community has long practiced, especially on the west coast of Aceh. This sunnah is often based not only on the Quran and hadiths but also on the interpretations of local ulama, broad acceptance, and practices passed down through generations, which are regarded as part of the community's "natural" religious life.³⁸

Salafis and Wahhabis in Aceh—and in many other places—often define sunnah more strictly, specifically as what was explicitly taught by the Prophet Muhammad PBUH through his words, actions, and approval (implied by authentic sanad). They tend to reject innovations (*bid'ah*) in religious practices that lack a clear basis in the Quran or authentic hadiths, including those that have become part of local culture but are seen as incompatible with the Salafi approach. For Salafis and Wahhabis, sunnah is more often understood as as-Sunnah in its literal, pure form, free from local cultural influences and acculturation.³⁹

Being Muslim is not necessarily understood solely in terms of living according to the sunnah or following various cultural customs that have developed within society. If worship is cultural, then this is a positive thing that should be nurtured and developed.⁴⁰ However, if culture becomes a part of worship, this presents a different issue, especially from the perspective of the Salafis & Wahhabis on the southwestern coast of Aceh. Practices like cultivating congregational prayer and fasting on Mondays and Thursdays are beautiful and should continue. But if worship is performed in accordance

³⁸ Fajriatul Ula, Nur Raihan, and Muhammad Reza Fadil, "Living Hadith on the Samadiyah Tradition in Langsa Aceh," *Al-Bukhari: Jurnal Ilmu Hadis* 5, no. 2 (December 2022): 237–57, <https://doi.org/10.32505/al-bukhari.v5i2.4840>.

³⁹ Shoujun Cui and Joshua Glinert, "Jihadi-Salafi Ideology: The Suspension of Dialectic and Radicalization of Thought," *Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies (in Asia)* 10, no. 4 (December 2016): 101–20, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19370679.2016.12023295>.

⁴⁰ Qudsy, *LIVING HADIS: Geneologi, Teori dan Aplikasi*, 232.

with local culture and not regulated by the rules of prayer, this is *bid'ah*. It is not true worshiping culture, but rather worshiping culture within religion.⁴¹

The above argument is often presented in lectures by Salafis and Wahhabis in Meulaboh City and surrounding areas. Being Muslim means worshiping God, and regardless of the deeds performed, some rules and guidelines govern them. Being Muslim is not about the culture in which a person lives. Instead, being Muslim relates to culture itself. Living according to the Quran and Hadiths reflects the core of Islamic culture. Salafis and Wahhabis are very dedicated to worship and religious rituals, emphasizing reasoning to distinguish various religious practices from *bid'ah*. They believe that avoiding *bid'ah* and adhering to the guidance of the Quran, hadiths, and the companions is the way to attain blessings.⁴²

Salafis and Wahhabis also believe that Islam should not be practiced in isolation; instead, it must be preached worldwide, and *bid'ah* practices should be eradicated from people's religious beliefs. Furthermore, preaching cannot be done individually. Their movements utilize various state facilities, which belong to a democratic country. Many of their members have studied at different universities, both domestic and international. Many have also entered government positions. These networks make them increasingly effective at promoting Sunnah Islam without *bid'ah*. The following research findings show that Sunnah Islam and anti-*bid'ah* are growing in Meulaboh.

1. Islam in Culture is Islam Itself

Salafis and Wahhabis recognize that Islam has its own distinct culture. Islam arrived and developed wherever they went, bringing its culture with them. Islam does not dissolve or become subordinate to other cultures. Muslims need to see Islam as a culture in its own right. If many people view Islam only as a religion, then Islam is not a complete way of life. It must be understood beyond just religion. This means that the Islam brought by the Prophet Muhammad is a way of life that should be believed in and practiced in all areas of Muslim life.⁴³ From there, the culture of Muslim life was shaped according to the life of the Prophet Muhammad, rather than by adopting other cultures as the culture of Muslims.

The perfection of Islam is not about adapting or, to be clear, tolerating local cultures. The word "tolerance" can be seen as implying that Islam has struggled to accept the beliefs or cultures of other communities. Muslims are very tolerant of different religious communities and their cultures. Islam is

⁴¹ Abdurrahman Abdurrahman, "KONTESTASI OTORITAS KEAGAMAAN; Ideologi dan Ruang Publik Agama antara Ulama Dayah, Salafi-Wahabi dan Pemerintah Daerah di Pantai Barat Aceh," Mei 2023, Masjid Jabir al Ka'by.

⁴² Edi Saputra Asyek, "KONTESTASI OTORITAS KEAGAMAAN; Ideologi dan Ruang Publik Agama antara Ulama Dayah, Salafi-Wahabi dan Pemerintah Daerah di Pantai Barat Aceh," Mei 2023.

⁴³ Arham Arham, "KONTESTASI OTORITAS KEAGAMAAN; Ideologi dan Ruang Publik Agama antara Ulama Dayah, Salafi-Wahabi dan Pemerintah Daerah di Pantai Barat Aceh," Mei 2023, Masjid Jabir al Ka'by.

a religion that governs more than just religious rituals. This must be acknowledged by the various communities where Islam is practiced. Islam should not be expected to be tolerant by adopting all local Islamic cultures and making them part of Islamic tradition. If Islam dissolves into the culture of the community where it exists, then it is no longer truly Islam. A well-known quote from the Salafi-Wahhabi group in Meulaboh, quoting Sheik Fauzan, states, "If *bid'ah* is prioritized, then we will abandon many sunnah."⁴⁴

Islam has always been seen as a non-secular religion. However, in practice, Islam has been turned into a secular one. It is often reduced to just a set of values. These Islamic values are integrated into the culture developing within society. At the same time, Islamic practices based on the Sunnah are often ignored. In fact, they are accused of being Wahhabis, which is ultimately considered misleading. Viewing Islam as a set of values is seen as a way to make Islam appear authentic; there are distinct types like Acehnese Islam, Batak Islam, Arab Islam, Hong Kong Islam, Javanese Islam, and so on.⁴⁵ These types of Islam stem from understanding Islamic values without actually practicing Islam. Recognizing secular Islam means acknowledging the values that will be introduced into various public spaces, especially religious ones, in Meulaboh City.

Many factors have caused Islam to lose its Islamic spirit in Aceh. One of these is Aceh's culture, which is seen as representative of Islamic culture, making it unclear where Islamic culture ends and Acehnese culture begins. Islam has become absorbed into Acehnese culture to the point that Acehnese culture appears to be Islam itself. In reality, Islam includes religious social practices designed to shape culture within society. Additionally, new cultural creations continue to develop and are laden with economic values that embellish religion in Aceh, especially in Meulaboh. As a result, it becomes difficult for the people of Aceh to distinguish between pure Islamic culture and the new religious cultural innovations that have emerged recently.⁴⁶

In fact, anyone who asks questions like, "Can we easily say that celebrating Mawlid is not part of Islamic law?" will be seen as ignorant and, even more painfully, will be considered to have no understanding of the religion. Ultimately, Islam, with its practices and values, will become unfamiliar to the people of Aceh. What may develop is the religion of Aceh, similar to Geert's research, which refers to the religion of Java. The phenomenon in Java described in Geert's research is the defeat of

⁴⁴ Edi Saputra Asyek, "KONTESTASI OTORITAS KEAGAMAAN; Ideologi dan Ruang Publik Agama antara Ulama Dayah, Salafi-Wahabi dan Pemerintah Daerah di Pantai Barat Aceh," Mei 2023.

⁴⁵ Edi Saputra Asyek, "KONTESTASI OTORITAS KEAGAMAAN; Ideologi dan Ruang Publik Agama antara Ulama Dayah, Salafi-Wahabi dan Pemerintah Daerah di Pantai Barat Aceh," Mei 2023.

⁴⁶ Arham Arham, "KONTESTASI OTORITAS KEAGAMAAN; Ideologi dan Ruang Publik Agama antara Ulama Dayah, Salafi-Wahabi dan Pemerintah Daerah di Pantai Barat Aceh," Mei 2023; Abdurrahman Abdurrahman, "KONTESTASI OTORITAS KEAGAMAAN; Ideologi dan Ruang Publik Agama antara Ulama Dayah, Salafi-Wahabi dan Pemerintah Daerah di Pantai Barat Aceh," Mei 2023.

Islam by Javanese culture, where Islam is overshadowed by Javanese social customs. Questions such as "Will Islam in Aceh be overtaken by a culture that existed before the arrival of Islam?" are critical issues in many studies of Salafis and Wahhabis in Meulaboh and the southwestern coast of Aceh.

2. Daleel is the Correct Way to Practice Islam

Philosophically, Islam is a monotheistic religion, meaning its teachings originate from the divine, not a religion that has grown and developed from various cultural constructs, ideas, and concepts. To be Muslim is to make the Creator the source of one's faith. To be Muslim is to accept the decrees of Allah and His Messengers as the sole guide for one's life. Islam is the religion of the Creator, whose decrees cannot be rejected or altered. The decrees within Islam are believed to be a perfect guide. This perfection is proven by concrete daleel (proof/evidence) that serve as the foundation for every practice in the lives of Muslims everywhere.

In today's constantly changing world, the need for religion will be tested by various social realities. The perfection of Islam will be questioned if it fails to provide a valid daleel in a world that is always evolving. This is where the ulama become guides in both religion and life. Salafi and Wahhabi followers believe that the ulama who should serve as guides are those who have a strong commitment to Allah and His Messenger. Many figures in Aceh are recognized as religious scholars. The question is: Do they truly commit to being ulama who fear Allah and His Messenger? Ulama who fear Allah and His Messenger are those who demonstrate through actions their dedication to following the sunnah of the Prophet, not the sunnah of Acehnese culture. They are not ulama who abandon the sunnah and instead embrace societal customs.

The essence of Islam is to perform all acts of worship based on sound daleel, not on fabricated ones. Many forms of *mahdhah* worship are not yet practiced by society. It is said that creativity has been added to the *mahdhah*.⁴⁷ Many forms of *ghairu mahdhah* worship are present in society. There is a need for various forms of creativity that still prioritize Islamic values. Muslims must be educated, enriched, compassionate, and become a significant political force in government, among other things. These spaces are spaces of *ghairu mahdhah* worship. It is in these spaces that Muslims must be creative, not renewing and adding to *mahdhah* worship, as if the existing *mahdhah* worship still feels less solemn, and so on.

The religion and lifestyle embraced by Salafis and Wahhabis in Meulaboh are not attempts to construct logic. Islam is not a religion of logic but a religion of daleel. If Muslims are encouraged to rely on logic, multiple interpretations within Islam could emerge. When logic takes precedence in worship,

⁴⁷ Kamarlis Kamarlis, "KONTESTASI OTORITAS KEAGAMAAN; Ideologi dan Ruang Publik Agama antara Ulama Dayah, Salafi-Wahabi dan Pemerintah Daerah di Pantai Barat Aceh," Mei 2023, Masjid Jabir al Ka'bby.

the guidance of prayer based on absolute sources will be disregarded, and all daleel in Islam will become *dhanni*, with no more *qath'i* daleel. Logical daleel should not be incorporated into worship that is *mahdhah*.⁴⁸ Many simple logics are constructed that denigrate Salafis and Wahhabis in Meulaboh, including:

*"The death of a human being is not the same as the death of a mosquito or even a chicken (this is the daleel used in general society to allow and require the performance of funeral *kanduri* and *tahlilan* in society). Our acts of worship are not as strong as those of the Prophet Muhammad and his companions, who performed additional acts of worship after prayer, by doing them together as an important message that must be carried out. We are unable to understand the Quran and the hadiths on our own. Therefore, we must refer to *ulama* (even though the explanation of the hadiths is obvious) and various acts of worship, and other religious celebrations."*⁴⁹

Simple logical daleel, like those mentioned above, are often used in debates among religious groups. A Salafi and Wahhabi preacher notes that some *ulama* from *dayah* often rely on their scientific knowledge to issue *fatwas*—legal rulings—on matters not explicitly mentioned in the Quran or hadiths. Don't all the daleel and provisions established by Allah and His Messenger contain inherent values and lessons? The directives from Allah and His Messenger are obligations we must follow as part of our obedience to Islam. If we do not base our obedience on daleel, then whom should we obey?⁵⁰ Salafis and Wahhabis in Meulaboh City tend to promote Islam through sunnah practices, specifically authentic and undisputed sunnah. No matter how flawed the sunnah or hadiths are, they are from the Prophet Muhammad, the Messenger of Allah. No matter how wise the words of professors or even *ulama* are, they cannot compare to those of Prophet Muhammad, the Messenger of Allah.⁵¹

3. The Power Relation of Sunnah in Aceh

Meulaboh City, or West Aceh, is similar to other cities or regencies in Aceh. Aceh has a distinctly Islamic and religious character, especially in its agricultural society.⁵² Agrarian communities incorporate religion into their social construction of life, with traditional characteristics. Although this has changed in urban communities,⁵³ Meulaboh is no exception. It has been difficult for Salafis and

⁴⁸ Edi Saputra Asyek, "KONTESTASI OTORITAS KEAGAMAAN; Ideologi dan Ruang Publik Agama antara Ulama Dayah, Salafi-Wahabi dan Pemerintah Daerah di Pantai Barat Aceh," Mei 2023.

⁴⁹ Banta Ali, "KONTESTASI OTORITAS KEAGAMAAN; Ideologi Dan Ruang Publik Agama Antara Ulama Dayah, Salafi-Wahabi Dan Pemerintah Daerah Di Pantai Barat Aceh," Mei 2023.

⁵⁰ Arham Arham, "KONTESTASI OTORITAS KEAGAMAAN; Ideologi dan Ruang Publik Agama antara Ulama Dayah, Salafi-Wahabi dan Pemerintah Daerah di Pantai Barat Aceh," Mei 2023.

⁵¹ Kamarlis Kamarlis, "KONTESTASI OTORITAS KEAGAMAAN; Ideologi dan Ruang Publik Agama antara Ulama Dayah, Salafi-Wahabi dan Pemerintah Daerah di Pantai Barat Aceh," Mei 2023.

Wahhabis to expand their movement in Aceh overall, especially in West Aceh, which has a strong traditional Islamic culture. This is despite Muhammadiyah's long-standing presence as a modern Islamic organization. Understandably, members of Masjid al-Ka'by find it difficult to practice Sunnah-based worship. Worship in Islam is not just a personal act or an individual activity protected by the state under Article 29 of the 1945 Constitution. It is also a communal act that must be promoted—Islam is a religion of dawah, a faith with a mission of *rahmatan lil'alamin* (mercy for all worlds).

Salafis and Wahhabis in Meulaboh faced various challenges and obstacles, including expulsion from the Masjid Jabir al-Ka'by that they had built together. Multiple accusations were made, including claims of heretical and misleading sects. Building relationships became a key strength of the sunnah bonds among Salafis and Wahhabis in Meulaboh, gradually countering various allegations and assumptions of heresy. Salafis in Meulaboh have important figures spread across different professions and occupations. The role of the community members who maintain these relationships is one of the factors that strengthen the movements of Salafis and Wahhabis to continue surviving to this day.

Most Salafi and Wahhabi communities come from an upper-middle-class society, are well-educated, and have sufficient financial means. However, according to ulama of *dayah*, those who join Salafi and Wahhabi groups tend to lack basic religious understanding and are thus influenced by their appeal. The presence of these groups has drawn the attention of regional leaders, particularly the Regent of West Aceh, T. Alaidin Syah, known as Haji Tito. Masjid Jabir al-Ka'by, which the *dayah* group in West Aceh later disputed, is a house of worship for Muslims and was inaugurated by Regent Haji Tito.⁵⁴ This means that the power relations within the Salafi and Wahhabi communities are well-established and can be used to sustain their groups' continuity.

When Masjid Jabir came under pressure from the *dayah* group through community demonstrations to close all activities,⁵⁵ Salafis & Wahhabis tended to be more relaxed and closed their activities themselves, confronting the protesters.⁵⁶ They prosecuted the protesters and reported them to the authorities.⁵⁷ In fact, Masjid Jabir al-Ka'by not only facilitates worship according to guidance (often referred to as a sunnah mosque), but also serves the community by providing support to the poor and orphans. Many congregants even perform aqeeqa ceremonies for their children at Masjid Jabir al-Ka'by, as well as for the congregants of Friday prayers. It's no surprise that the mosque frequently hosts meals after Friday prayers, attracting numerous congregants from various villages. The generosity of the

⁵⁴ Edi Saputra Asyek, "KONTESTASI OTORITAS KEAGAMAAN; Ideologi dan Ruang Publik Agama antara Ulama Dayah, Salafi-Wahabi dan Pemerintah Daerah di Pantai Barat Aceh," Mei 2023.

⁵⁵ tvonenews, "Larang Salat Jumat, Petugas Gabungan Jaga Ketat Musala Jabir Al Ka'by Meulaboh."

⁵⁶ News, "Pengurus Yayasan Hadyur Rasul Rantai Pintu Gerbang Musala Jabir – MZK News."

⁵⁷ Serambinews, "Pengurus BKM Masjid Jabir Gugat Pejabat Aceh Barat - Serambinews.Com"; KBA.ONE, "Larang Salat Jumat, Bupati Aceh Barat Digugat ke Pengadilan oleh BKM Jabir Al Ka'biy."

Masjid Jabir al-Ka'by congregation has become a foundation for building a strong movement.⁵⁸ The accusations about the evidence presented to the court, which claimed that the existence of Masjid Jabir disturbed the surrounding community, were denied by the local community themselves. They stated that Masjid Jabir al-Ka'by did not spread heretical sects and that such evidence was signed under pressure from certain parties.⁵⁹

Furthermore, this research shows that the struggle for religious authority in West Aceh has never led to a clear victory for one side. Instead, it illustrates a complex, layered interaction among theological legitimacy, local cultural influence, and political-economic interests. Ulama of *dayah*, with their strong social base, interpret Islam as a teaching that has developed and integrated with Acehnese society's context. This is reflected in religious practices that complement local traditions such as *kenduri*, *tahlilan*, congregational *wirid*, and grave pilgrimages—rituals that, for them, are not just cultural but are expressions of the living sunnah that help bring Islamic values into daily life. For communities loyal to the authority of ulama of *dayah*, these practices symbolize religious identity and serve as a way to maintain social cohesion. The support from the ulama of *dayah* by the local government and the ulama consultative assembly strengthens their position as holders of dominant religious authority, which is both religious and political.

In contrast, Salafis and Wahhabis emphasize Islam as a pure teaching based on the Quran and authentic hadiths, rejecting all forms of cultural adaptation they believe were never practiced by the Prophet or the Salaf. They interpret as-sunnah literally, which leads to strong criticism of local traditions, labeling them *bid'ah*. This view often conflicts with the community of *dayah*. In some cases, they have gained legal legitimacy, such as winning court cases to close places of worship. This shows that the conflict is not just about theology but also a struggle for legitimacy in the public sphere—determining who has the right to define “true Islam” in Aceh. Therefore, this study highlights that the contest over religious authority in West Aceh involves multiple dimensions—theology, culture, and politics—where each side sustains its presence through different means: *dayah* through cultural and political channels, and Salafis & Wahhabis through claims of textual purity and legal authority.

Living Sunnah Versus as-Sunnah

Living Sunnah is the practice of the Sunnah that “lives” in the daily routines of the community and is woven into local culture, religious customs, and the authority of local ulama. It is understood not only through authentic hadith texts but also through ulama interpretations, community acceptance, and

⁵⁸ Kamarlis Kamarlis, “KONTESTASI OTORITAS KEAGAMAAN; Ideologi dan Ruang Publik Agama antara Ulama Dayah, Salafi-Wahabi dan Pemerintah Daerah di Pantai Barat Aceh,” Mei 2023.

⁵⁹ HaKim Ketua, “Putusan Perdata Gugatan Nomor 5/Pdt.G/2022/PN Mbo,” Pengadilan Negeri MEulaboh, 2022.

hereditary transmission. In the Acehnese context, living Sunnah is reflected in *dayah* traditions such as *kenduri*, *tahlilan*, grave visits, congregational *wirid*, and Mawlid. These practices are part of the community's spiritual heritage and collective identity, helping to strengthen social bonds.

From the viewpoint of Salafis and Wahhabis, the sunnah is understood more strictly: it refers only to what explicitly originates from the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him)—sayings, deeds, and approvals—with a valid sanad. They reject innovation (*bid'ah*) and cultural practices that lack a solid basis in the Quran or authentic hadiths. For them, Islam arrived with its own culture and is not influenced by local traditions; therefore, practices like *tahlilan* or *kenduri* are viewed as deviant.

It should be emphasized that the differences between Living Sunnah and sunnah are not only epistemological—differing in the sources and methods of establishing the sunnah—but also closely tied to issues of authority, identity, and socio-religious control. Ulama of *dayah* regard the community's historical experience and the interpretations of local scholars as legitimate sources of the sunnah. Meanwhile, Salafis and Wahhabis stress the authenticity of the text and the sanad of the hadiths. Therefore, one group sees the sunnah as contextual, while the other views it as transhistorical and absolute.⁶⁰

The authority of the Living Sunnah reinforces the prominence of ulama of *dayah* as the main authority in Acehnese society, supported by official bodies such as the ulama consultative assembly and the local government. In contrast, the strict definition of sunnah by Salafis & Wahhabis challenges the authority of traditional ulama and creates a new sphere of authority based on textual purification. Identity: The Living Sunnah is part of a local identity—an Islam with an Acehnese face, aligned with the community's culture and history. Meanwhile, the sunnah version promoted by Salafis & Wahhabis forms a transnational identity—a “pure” Islam that is claimed to be universal, crossing local boundaries. Socio-Religious Control: The Living Sunnah serves as a tool for maintaining social unity and cultural legitimacy, whereas the Sunnah by Salafis & Wahhabis acts as a means to criticize, purify, and delegitimize the majority's practices. In this context, the contest over the sunnah becomes a struggle over the Islamic public sphere, determining who has the right to define valid practices and who is considered “deviant.”⁶¹

Traditional Islamic groups, traditionally led by ulama (Islamic scholars) or alumni of Islamic boarding schools (*dayah*), are clashing with Salafis and Wahhabis in Meulaboh. This is no different

⁶⁰ Chris Chaplin, “Salafi Islamic Piety as Civic Activism: Wahdah Islamiyah and Differentiated Citizenship in Indonesia,” *Citizenship Studies* 22, no. 2 (February 2018): 208–23, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13621025.2018.1445488>.

⁶¹ Alhusni, Muhammad Mustajab, and Edi Kurniawan, “FROM HERETICAL FATWA TO JUDICIAL REVIEW: SALAFI, ULAMA, AND COMMUNAL CONFLICT IN ACEH,” *Penamas* 37, no. 1 (June 2023): 131–44, <https://doi.org/10.31330/penamas.v37i1.753>.

from what happened in Banda Aceh,⁶² Yogyakarta,⁶³ and various other cities. The conflict appears likely to persist, similar to the clash between tradition and religion. Traditional movements tend to see Islam as adaptable to any culture, reinforced by the strength of Islamic values and those of Muslims, as these values won't destroy or even harm the diverse customs and cultural heritage that existed before the religion arrived. Meanwhile, the Salafis and Wahhabis are purifying movements, viewing Islam as a religion that sheds light and purifies all darkness in life, fully understanding Islam as a liberating faith brought from the Creator, without any elements that condone unethical values or practices within religious rituals.

Both traditionalists and those claiming to be the founders of the Salaf, often called Salafis and Wahhabis, compete to promote teachings they believe are true and should be spread as widely as possible. This is where the conflict began and spread throughout Aceh. The alumni and ulama of the *dayah* were offended by the teachings of *bid'ah*, denouncing each other. Some religious rituals practiced by ulama of *dayah* were often accused of *bid'ah*, such as when congregation members in villages perform dhikr or prayers together after congregational prayers. This kind of competition was suspected of *bid'ah* by Salafis and Wahhabis. Similarly, when Salafis and Wahhabis refused to perform dhikr together after congregational prayers, they were also accused by the ulama of *dayah* of being heretics.

1. Living Sunnah in the Movement

Traditional Islam, rooted in cultural values and contributing to the Islamization of Acehnese culture, embodies the spirit of the people in embracing and developing Islam across various aspects of life. Being cultured in Aceh means being Muslim because every aspect of Acehnese culture is inherently infused with Islamic principles. Therefore, it is not surprising that there is a *hadis madja* or wise Acehnese proverb often repeated by ulama and cultural figures: "*Agama ngon adat lagee dzat ngon sifeut*" "*lagee tamsee ie ngon eungkoet*," which means that Islam and Acehnese customs are like substances and properties, inseparable like water and fish. This *hadis madja* has been part of Acehnese history for a long time, dating back to the reign of Iskandar Muda. Resisting Acehnese culture is like opposing the very foundation of religion, especially rejecting cultures deeply rooted in religious rituals.

The various religious rituals performed by the community contain values imbued with meaning for life. These values are preserved and developed by ulama, especially ulama of *dayah*. These

⁶² Noviandy Noviandy, Irwan Abdullah, and Moch Nur Ichwan, "The Seizure of the Mosques as Public Spaces Between Dayah and Salafi-Wahabi Ulamas in Aceh," *Al-Tahrir: Jurnal Pemikiran Islam* 22, no. 1 (May 2022): 1-30, <https://doi.org/10.21154/altahrir.v22i1.3595>.

⁶³ Chris Chaplin, "Salafi Activism and the Promotion of a Modern Muslim Identity: Evolving Mediums of Da'wa amongst Yogyakarta University Students," *South East Asia Research* 26, no. 1 (March 2018): 3-20, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0967828X17752414>.

ulama understand these values because of their ongoing presence in society. Additionally, these ulama inherit the unique education of Acehnese culture. They continue to promote the wisdom of *dayah* students who have not yet become ulama at every community gathering. This is where the values embedded in every religious ritual in Aceh are formed. Furthermore, these students receive intensive religious education at the *dayah*.

This is what Pierre Bourdieu refers to as social, cultural, economic, and symbolic capital.⁶⁴ Ulama of *dayah* possess all four types of capital at the same time. Their cultural capital can surpass that of ulama from outside Aceh or even from other countries. From this perspective, the ulama of *dayah* in their movement have unwavering strength—even as Salafis and Wahhabis start to undermine these understandings. It is no coincidence that ulama of *dayah* stay committed to upholding the values inherent in the living sunnah and religious rituals within society.

There are many forums where alumni or ulama of *dayah* can contribute to understanding the importance of living according to the sunnah, even in countering issues that claim various practices are *bid'ah*. This framework is based on the doctrines of the ulama. The views of ulama are vital, as are the charismatic figures of ulama in Aceh, both in terms of their scholarship and the qualities they possess. A structure built across generations will remain unchallenged. Furthermore, the presence of ulama in Aceh plays a significant role in society, especially in maintaining morality. Additionally, when charismatic ulama from the *dayah* in Greater Aceh, North Aceh, or East Aceh are invited to West Aceh, the focus of these religious studies becomes even stronger. This is despite the content of the religious studies not differing from that of the local ulama.

Therefore, the existence of *dayah* (Islamic boarding schools) is essential. They serve not only as spaces where the living sunnah can be preserved but also as places to foster and reinforce the authority of the ulama of the *dayah*. The doctrines are built hierarchically, and it is at the *dayah* that the ulama's authority is spread through religious studies conducted in stages, reaching the smallest study groups in the villages. The authority of the ulama, established within the *dayah*, is strengthened and is considered a belief that the community must practice. The influence of a *dayah* is also maintained by the authority of the ulama. The more students it has, the more trust it gains.

2. The Sunnah Movement Amid the Resistance

Salafis and Wahhabis in Meulaboh, centered at Masjid Jabir al-Ka'by, are religious groups dedicated to performing various religious rituals in accordance with the Quran and the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad. This movement is not just about worship, but also about dawah and purifying

⁶⁴ Pierre Bourdieu, *Arena Produksi Kultural "Sebuah Pengkajian Sosiologi Budaya,"* II, trans. Yudi Santosa (Yogyakarta: Kreasi Wacana, 2012).

Islam in all aspects of human life. They aim to attain God's approval and mercy. God's approval and mercy cannot be granted on earth without obedience and adherence to what God and His Messenger command. This effort to promote purification is a challenging issue in Aceh, especially in West Aceh, which has various cultural traditions related to Islam.

Similar to the ulama of *dayah*, the Salafi-Wahabi movement is also built on strong religious doctrines in its dawah. This is particularly true in purifying Islamic teachings, which have long flourished within the traditional Islam of Aceh. It has not been easy for the Salafi-Wahabi movement to expand its reach amidst the strong cultural currents inherent in Islam in Aceh. However, in the spirit of establishing Acehnese Islam as Sunnah Islam⁶⁵ for the Acehnese people, this has not dampened the group's enthusiasm for dawah, as they sacrifice not only their time, energy, and funds but even their lives. This was once a complaint from ulama of *dayah* regarding the strength of the Salafi-Wahabi movement, as noted in Noviandy's research in Banda Aceh.⁶⁶

The doctrinal cosmology developed by Salafis and Wahhabis is not based on the opinions of specific ulama but on the core sources of Islam: the Quran and the Hadiths of the Prophet Muhammad. The ulama whose views are considered valid are those who rely solely on these two sources. This is evident in the various fatwas issued and the conduct of those committed to the Quran and Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad. The cosmology they construct does not idolize the leader of any particular madhhab. The views of the madhhab leader are only referenced if they are compatible with and found in the primary sources. The strength of this group's doctrine comes from grounding everything in religion and life on the Quran and Sunnah, thus avoiding differences of opinion. Anything outside of these two sources, and not based on Sunnah, is not used as a reference.

This doctrinal cosmology also results in the standardization of worship practices. This is similar to how ulama of *dayah* operate; while ulama of *dayah* base their views on the Imam Madhhab, especially Imam Shafi'i, Salafis and Wahhabis base theirs directly on daleel. This standardization tends to be stricter and interprets worship based on existing daleel. The views of these ulama are highly prone to error; therefore, they are still consulted if they are considered close to authoritative Islamic texts. Standardizing worship practices is a fundamental aspect of the doctrinal cosmology, especially in rejecting practices considered *bid'ah*.

⁶⁵ Sunnah Islam is a term frequently used by Salafi-Wahabi preachers in their religious studies, even in association with many things, such as sunnah dawah, sunnah religious studies, sunnah mosques, sunnah education or educational institutions, and so on. (field note: Meulaboh, April-May 2023)

⁶⁶ Noviandy, Abdullah, and Ichwan, "The Seizure of the Mosques as Public Spaces Between Dayah and Salafi-Wahabi Ulamas in Aceh"; Noviandy, "SALAFISME, ULAMA DAYAH DAN KONTESTASI OTORITAS KEAGAMAAN DI ACEH."

This place became the starting point for the Salafi-Wahhabi movement's dawah on the West Coast of Aceh. Accusations of heresy against this group have been ongoing. Not celebrating Mawlid (the Prophet's birthday) is considered one of their most serious deviations.

"The management of Hadiur Rasul Foundation once requested a venue at Masjid Jabir al-Ka'by for a Mawlid celebration. The mosque was compelled to grant the permit after repeated refusals and repeated pressure. The foundation then addressed the sins of bid'ah in the event, which the organizers then took responsibility for."⁶⁷

This argument sparked unrest, leading to public calls to shut down activities at the mosque. This was worsened by the Salafi-Wahabi dawah activities, which were seen as anti-Islamic practices and considered bid'ah. The protests, which the local government supported by closing Masjid Jabir al-Ka'by, posed a major challenge to the Salafi-Wahabi movement in Meulaboh. However, because of their strong commitment to dawah and following the commands of Allah and His Messenger, they faced several obstacles. Since Salafis and Wahhabis in Meulaboh are well-established and mainly come from the upper middle class, including professionals and technocrats, legal action was an option to deal with the violence on the ground. Ultimately, the Salafi-Wahabi movement overcame these obstacles, enabling them to carry out various activities at Masjid Jabir al-Ka'by freely.⁶⁸

Salafis and Wahhabis will continue to implement various initiatives, such as expanding waqf land at Masjid Jabir al-Ka'by, planning to establish integrated schools at all levels, providing services for *fardhu kifayah* according to teachings and sunnah, conducting regular religious studies at Masjid Jabir and surrounding areas, and engaging in other activities that strengthen the Salafi-Wahhabi movement in Meulaboh, particularly, and in the southwest coast in general.⁶⁹

3. The More Pious is the Winner

As in the previous subchapter, the conflict between Salafis & Wahhabis and the ulama of the *dayah* culminated in the seizure of Masjid Jabir al-Ka'by. The seizure of this mosque can be seen as a display of the authority held by an ulama, meaning that whoever successfully seizes or defends it holds significant authority in Meulaboh City. Although Salafis & Wahhabis successfully defended Masjid

⁶⁷ Kamarlis Kamarlis, "KONTESTASI OTORITAS KEAGAMAAN; Ideologi dan Ruang Publik Agama antara Ulama Dayah, Salafi-Wahabi dan Pemerintah Daerah di Pantai Barat Aceh," Mei 2023; Mahdi Kari, "KONTESTASI OTORITAS KEAGAMAAN; Ideologi dan Ruang Publik Agama antara Ulama Dayah, Salafi-Wahabi dan Pemerintah Daerah di Pantai Barat Aceh," Mei 2023.

⁶⁸ Edi Saputra Asyek, "KONTESTASI OTORITAS KEAGAMAAN; Ideologi dan Ruang Publik Agama antara Ulama Dayah, Salafi-Wahabi dan Pemerintah Daerah di Pantai Barat Aceh," Mei 2023.

⁶⁹ Kamarlis Kamarlis, "KONTESTASI OTORITAS KEAGAMAAN; Ideologi dan Ruang Publik Agama antara Ulama Dayah, Salafi-Wahabi dan Pemerintah Daerah di Pantai Barat Aceh," Mei 2023; Arham Arham, "KONTESTASI OTORITAS KEAGAMAAN; Ideologi dan Ruang Publik Agama antara Ulama Dayah, Salafi-Wahabi dan Pemerintah Daerah di Pantai Barat Aceh," Mei 2023.

Jabir al-Ka'by, this did not diminish the religious authority held by the ulama of the *dayah*. However, the *dayah* group's presence, despite its sheer size and government support, faced various disadvantages in seizing the mosque.

The most noticeable impact of the court ruling is the increased ease for those associated with Salafis and Wahhabis to perform their religious duties and activities. The ruling offers key insights into the group's activities. Meanwhile, for the ulama of *dayah*, their movement has not been interrupted, although their presence faces competition from other groups for Islamic outreach. There is an anti-bid'ah Islamic movement that condemns practices often promoted by the *dayah*. However, in terms of their physical presence, location, and activities, the ulama of *dayah* remain unaffected.

The *dayah* believes that this victory by Salafis and Wahhabis is an injustice that must be avenged. The defeat in the trial will be assessed to determine future strategic steps, including strengthening the unity of the *dayah* in addressing this issue. The lack of unity within the movement has led to numerous errors in carrying out their respective roles. Furthermore, funding and mobilization issues seem unimportant to the ulama. Currently, ulama of the *dayah* are beginning to consolidate their movement and develop anti-Salafi-Wahhabi materials within the community. At a certain point and in due time, this movement will be revived to expel the Salafis and Wahhabis from Aceh.⁷⁰

Generally, the people of Meulaboh city or West Aceh regency have not experienced the direct effects of the conflict. Some say that worship is a personal matter. If it is banned in one place, they move to another. Even if certain areas are off-limits, they will pray at home. Still, many wish to pray together. The act of praying together embodies the spirit of Islam and could help make the country a sharia-compliant nation. People are free to move between different locations or mosques to pray, even if there is no religious prohibition. The core focus is on the worship itself, not on the reason for moving from one mosque to another.

For society, piety is something everyone strives for. The definition of piety is captured in various interpretations of the worship of *mahdhah* and *ghairu mahdhah*. It is here that people observe, evaluate, experience, and even decide where to find the definition of piety for themselves and their families—whether through the *ustadz*, sermon materials, worship facilities, environmental comfort, institutional programs, and so on. This competition will become more equitable, and misguidance will be less likely to influence the authority of specific groups. Piety will serve as the standard by which the

⁷⁰ Haramain Nurqmar, "KONTESTASI OTORITAS KEAGAMAAN; Ideologi dan Ruang Publik Agama antara Ulama Dayah, Salafi-Wahabi dan Pemerintah Daerah di Pantai Barat Aceh," Mei 2023; Mahdi Kari, "KONTESTASI OTORITAS KEAGAMAAN; Ideologi dan Ruang Publik Agama antara Ulama Dayah, Salafi-Wahabi dan Pemerintah Daerah di Pantai Barat Aceh," Mei 2023; Abdul Nasir, "KONTESTASI OTORITAS KEAGAMAAN; Ideologi dan Ruang Publik Agama antara Ulama Dayah, Salafi-Wahabi dan Pemerintah Daerah di Pantai Barat Aceh," Mei 2023.

community is judged. If Salafis, Wahhabis, and ulama of *dayah* are seen as producers, then the congregation is akin to consumers, experiencing the process of becoming like Salafis, Wahhabis, or ulama of *dayah*.

The issue of being pious, as the researcher describes it, has received little attention from both opposing sides. Being pious at Masjid Jabir al-Ka'by would likely cause the ulama of *dayah* and all their practices to be considered *bid'ah*. It would also create conflicts with the Salafis and Wahhabis, whose congregations are spread across various professions and interact with each other. One point that may be overlooked is that some societies have no affiliation at all; they are not connected to the Salafis, Wahhabis, or the ulama of *dayah*. These societies prioritize comfort in worship. If they feel uncomfortable during a religious study session with certain incitements, they will simply move to another place. Their view is straightforward: Allah's paradise does not belong exclusively to the Salafis and Wahhabis, nor to the ulama of *dayah*. They aim to avoid being caught up in intergroup conflict and instead focus on developing themselves into pious individuals and seeking Allah's pleasure. Wherever there are study groups or mosques that foster comfort in forming piety, those places tend to attract people seeking spiritual fulfillment.

Conclusion

The contestation of religious authority in West Aceh shows that the diversity of Islamic beliefs and practices goes beyond theology and is also closely connected to the fight for public space and social-political legitimacy. The conflict between ulama of *dayah* and Salafis & Wahhabis is driven not only by doctrinal differences but also by the desire to preserve religious culture, maintain the ulama's legitimacy, and manage power relations with the local government. This study confirms that the dispute over Masjid Jabir al-Ka'by and different interpretations of living sunnah versus as-sunnah have become the main battlegrounds for authority, influencing the standardization of worship practices, claims of *Ahlussunnah wal Jamaah* identity, and efforts to ensure each group's role in society. Therefore, this research helps deepen understanding of how religious authority in Indonesia is shaped not just through theological debates but also through control over religious symbols and public institutions.

Furthermore, this research shows that the contestation did not lead to a clear victory for one side but instead created a complex dynamic involving theological legitimacy, local culture, and political-economic interests. For ulama of *dayah*, Islam is seen as a teaching that is embedded within the socio-cultural context. For Salafis and Wahhabis, Islam is regarded as a pure teaching that rejects the influence of local culture. A key contribution of this research is explaining that the religious conflict in West Aceh cannot be simply viewed as an ideological fight, but rather as a struggle for authority within the unique public sphere of Islamic law. Therefore, this research offers a new perspective on the

relationship between religion, culture, and local politics, while also showing how the contest over religious authority can persist, evolve, and continue to influence the spiritual landscape of Acehnese society.

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