

# Dayah Ulama and Modern Negotiations in Aceh

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## ABSTRACT

This article analyzes the interpretation of Islamic religious clerics on the narrative of religious moderation within the framework of Islamic law in Aceh. This study focuses on several issues, including; The first is the acceptance and rejection of the ulama towards the rhetoric of tolerance. Second, the interpretation of the scholars of religious differences. Third, the binding element for managing tolerance and religious differences. The purpose of writing this article is to produce a study of strengthening democracy and national identity based on Islamic sharia values which are the standard of behavior in public life in Aceh. The study was conducted using a qualitative research approach through in-dept interviews. Sources of data were also obtained through focus group-based surveys. As for the results of the study it is known that; first, there is no rejectionism of the dayah scholars towards the narrative of religious moderation. On the other hand, the emphasis on acceptance must be in harmony with the principles of Islamic law within the framework of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia. This is because what has been awakened in the imagination of the Ulama towards Aceh is a sense of place that Aceh is the verandah of Mecca (Islam). Second, the form of the acceptance of the dayah ulama towards the narrative of tolerance and diversity in Aceh is moderate. Third, the binding element for the management of institutionalized tolerance and diversity in Islamic law and Acehese customs. For dayah scholars, tolerance is only in muammalah affairs, not in private matters (aqidah and worship). This means that tolerance may not sacrifice the principles of belief (aqidah), just as religious beliefs may not be sacrificed for the sake of tolerance.

**Keyword:** *Ulama, Religious Moderation, Islamic Sharia, Aceh*

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## INTRODUCTION

Aceh is the epicenter of Islam in Indonesia. Among the many regions of the archipelago, Aceh is one of the special sites storing the oldest Islamic history and civilization. It can be said that Islam spread and developed in the archipelago also crossed influences from Aceh. It was the Islamic Kingdom of Samudera Pasai (1042-1427 AD), the Islamic kingdom that had laid the foundation of Islam on the earth of Seuramoe Mecca for more than four centuries. Until it reached its peak of glory during the Darussalam Sultanate (1496-1873 AD) [1]. From here Islam expanded throughout the archipelago, even to the Southeast Asian region [2]. With the excitement of Islamic civilization in Aceh, there is a strategic role of dayah scholars who in their duties also build and determine the continuity of Islam in Aceh [3]. And it lasts until now. Not only about education, the work of dayah scholars also participates in solving various problems of the people, including government affairs and Acehese customs [4] [5] [6] [7].

Ulama and dayah are an inexhaustible world to study and unearth. There are quite a lot of studies and studies that make scholars and dayah the object of study. Not only domestic and foreign scholars are also interested in studying it [8] [9] [10] [11] [12] [13] [14] [15] [16] [17]. This shows how scholars and dayah are rich treasures with a variety of perspectives. Nevertheless, there is always an important empty space that has not been revealed. This includes the question of the dayah scholar's interpretation of religious and political relations which is still being discussed and debated in the public sphere. Moreover, later in the day, the intersection of the issue of tolerance and Islamic law dominated more than the problems that arose. The application of Islamic Sharia in Aceh becomes a soft ground clashed with the discourse of freedom with the proposition in the name of democracy.

Aggravated, Aceh, which has Islamic law, has always been stigmatized as an area with the lowest tolerance rate in Indonesia [18].

This assumption is indeed easy to happen, because Aceh has always been placed on two extreme

poles. For the group that idealizes Islamic Sharia law, Aceh is envisioned as a peaceful, beautiful and ideal area of residence. Meanwhile, for other groups (liberals), the situation is the opposite. They envision Aceh as an area whose people are very intolerant of non-Muslim religions. At the same time, questioning the relevance of Islamic Sharia to the Cosmopolite society in Aceh [19].

It is not difficult to guess why Aceh is considered that way. Especially in the post-truth era (post truth society) which is all open and not singular, resulting in a tsunami of information that is difficult to contain. In addition, the dominant mainstream media reported on Aceh only about hijab raids, tight clothing, caning laws, bans on new year celebrations, about establishing houses of worship and others. The dominance of news like this that came out, made many people imagine Aceh as an intolerant, underdeveloped, stod, repressive area, giving no space for freedom for groups outside Islam. Here's the thing. Complexes even occur fragmentation.

Referring to the dynamics above, the issue of interpretation of the narrative of religious moderation is important to know. Because this is also a reflection of the dynamics of national life in Aceh today and in the future. Moreover, the discourse is associated with the existence of scholars who have been considered to have a central role in life in Aceh. Ultimately, the trend of how dayah clerics play a role in the formation of religious values more or less refers to the question "how is the narrative of religious moderation that scholars then interpret to society later".

## BIBLIOGRAPHY REVIEW

### 2.1. Social Constructivism

This approach refers to the theory of social construction by Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann. This perspective is important as one of the points of view in seeing social symptoms or social reality. The essence of the idea by interactionalists is that knowledge is a product of symbolic interaction among certain groups of people. Social reality is constructed by social, cultural and group environments [20]. Reality in social life is different from physical reality. Natural reality (mountains, trees, and so on) is something natural, given. How people interpret physical reality is socially shaped. The formation of social reality also applies to something invisible, for example, social roles, relationships between people. This means that social actors find texts that are natural and clear, but are considered human inventions [21]. Berger and Luckmann's theory of social construction works in the phenomenological tradition, which is a critique of Durkheim's paradigm of social facts. Berger and Luckmann put forward a dialectical view when

looking at the relationship between man and society; Man creates society so does society create man known in the concepts of externalization, objectivization and internalization [22].

The theories in this tradition seek to provide an understanding of the meanings, norms, roles and rules of work in communication. The theories in this tradition explore the interactional world and state that the set of outer order is not objective, but constructed through the process of interaction within groups, communities, and cultures [23] [24]. The pressing point of Peter Berger's theory of the construction of social reality is to discuss the process of how people build a common understanding of meaning. Meaning is shaped and developed, by cooperating with others rather than by each individual separately. Then the center of attention of social construction is to build something, have something, or create something into existence from what previously did not exist. Although the concept needs to be clarified to understand the differences between the terms. This concept (constructivism or constructionism) as recognized [25] and [26] is an abstract term. However, these two concepts have a great influence in the world of science.

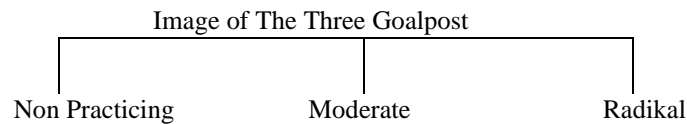
### 2.2. Religious Moderation

#### A. Understanding Religious Moderation

The word moderation comes from the Latin *moderatio*, which means "medium" (no excess and no shortage). The word also means self-mastery (from an attitude of great advantages and disadvantages). In other words, moderate means putting forward balance in terms of thoughts, actions, beliefs and values, both when treating others as individuals, and when dealing with state institutions.

While in Arabic, it is known as *wasath* or *wasathiyah*, which has equivalent meanings to *tawassuth* (middle of the middle), *i'tidal* (fair), and *tawazun* (balanced). People who apply the principle of *wasathiyah* can be called *wasith*. So *wasathiyah* is also interpreted as "the best choice". Whatever word is used, they all imply one common meaning which is to choose a middle ground among various extreme choices. As for the opposite of the word moderation is excessive, or *tatharruf* (Arabic), which contains meaning; extreme, radical, and excessive. In Arabic, the word extreme is equated with the terms *al-guluw*, and *tasyaddud*.

If analogous, moderation is like movement from the edge that always tends towards the center or axis (centripetal), while extremism is the opposite movement away from the center or axis, towards the outermost side (centrifugal). Understanding this moderation of religion can be illustrated in the following image;



Sumber: C. Hamilton [27]

To borrow this analogy, in a religious context, religious moderation can then be understood as a way of viewing, attitude, and behavior that takes a position in the middle, acts fairly, and is not extreme in religion. It is not religion that is moderated, but the way we understand religion that needs to be moderated.

#### B. Basic Principles of Religious Moderation

The basic principle of religious moderation is always to maintain a fair and balanced attitude. Fair is defined as unbiased/impartial; siding with the truth; and deserved/not arbitrary. Meanwhile, the principle of balance is to describe perspectives, attitudes, and commitments to always side with justice, humanity, and equality. The tendency to be balanced does not mean that you have no opinion. Those who have a balanced attitude mean firm, but not harsh because they always side with justice, it's just that their partiality does not deprive others of their rights to the detriment. Mohammad Hashim Kamali explained that the principles of balance and justice in the concept of moderation (*wasathiyah*) mean that in religion, a person should not be extreme in his views, but must always look for common ground [28]. Moderation is not only taught by Islam, but also other religions [29]. So being moderate, is a virtue that encourages the creation of social harmony and balance in personal, family and community life to wider human relations.

#### C. Indicators of Religious Moderation

Religious moderation not only aims to mediate those who tend to have ultraconservative religious understandings, but also groups that have liberal religious views, attitudes, and behaviors. For the purposes of this study, the indicators of religious moderation used are three things, namely: 1) nationality; 2) tolerance and non-violence; and 3) accommodating to local culture. These three indicators are used to recognize how strongly religious moderation is practiced by a person, and how much vulnerability they have. These vulnerabilities need to be recognized so that we can take appropriate steps to strengthen religious moderation.

### RESEARCH METHODS

This research uses qualitative methods that are considered the right approach used in identifying

objects naturally or finding explanations descriptively. In addition, this method is able to reveal a dual reality, more sensitive, and adaptive to the patterns of values encountered. The data analysis is carried out inductively, where the analysis of specific data from the field into units and continued with categorization. Respondent retrieval is purposive. And the results of the study were negotiated and agreed upon jointly between the researcher and the respondents. This is done to avoid misinterpretation of the data obtained because respondents understand the context better than researchers. And to measure the criteria of trustworthiness, this study is characterized by the presence of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability [30].

#### 4.1. Specialties and Specificities of Aceh

Aceh is a province in Indonesia whose capital is Banda Aceh. Aceh is one of the provinces in Indonesia that is given the status of a special region and is also authorized with special autonomy. Aceh is located on the northern tip of the island of Sumatra and is the westernmost province in Indonesia. According to the results of the 2020 census of the Central Statistics Agency, the total population of the province is approximately 5,274,871 inhabitants with a total area of 57,956.00 km<sup>2</sup>. Aceh Province consists of 18 districts, 5 cities, 289 sub-districts, and 6,497 gampong. In the following year, data on the distribution of Aceh's population increased, amounting to 5.38 million people.

Of these, 5.26 million people (98.4%) are Muslims. Thus the majority of Aceh's population is Muslim. Meanwhile, the population of Aceh who converted to Christianity reached 1.19%, the Catholic 0.1%, the Buddhist 0.13%. In addition to having a percentage of the majority Muslim population, Aceh is also considered the starting place for the spread of Islam in Indonesia and played an important role in the spread of Islam in Southeast Asia.

When viewed from religious diversity in terms of ethnic approach, Acehnese ethnic groups remain the most in quantity. Followed by other religions such as Christianity which is embraced by migrants who are mostly ethnic Batak. In addition, people of Chinese descent are mostly ethnic Hakka adhering to Buddhism, some embracing Christianity,

Catholicism. For Confucianism, it is not recorded probably because it does not reveal its identity and prefers to join Buddhism or Catholicism. Others adhere to Hinduism which is embraced by ethnic Balinese migrants and some peranakans (Indian/Tamil/Hindi) which are quite small in population.

In its governance practices, Aceh has privileges compared to other provinces. This is stated based on Law (UU) number 44 of 1999 concerning the Implementation of Provincial Privileges of the Aceh Special Region. With this status, Aceh is granted juridical legitimacy formal privileges which include: (1) The implementation of religious life; (2) The implementation of indigenous life; (3) Implementation of education; and (4) The role of scholars in the determination of regional policies. Thus, to run a government with this special status, Aceh is granted special autonomy rights as stated in Law No. 11 of 2006 concerning the Government of Aceh.

#### **4.2. Understanding the Work of Dayah Aceh Ulama**

##### **1. As a Holder of Religious Authority**

Etymologically, the word *ulama* is Arabic from the root of the word; 'Alima, Ya'lamu, 'Ilman, 'Alimun. The term *ulama* in isim fa'il 'Alimun which is pluralized to *Ulama* (plural of estimates). Isim fa'il has the meaning of being a practitioner of science, and or meaning scientist. Thus, scholars can be interpreted as scientists. However, the word *ulama* in Indonesian society refers to a collection of people who own and master and are involved in the field of religious science (especially Islam). In this context, they have religious authority to guide and teach the rules of the Quran, hadith and jurisprudence at a certain level.

When referring to the definition of the *ulama*, there are actually so many scholars in Aceh. However, the meaning of *ulama* in the view of the Acehnese people, has been specified in two main categories. Namely *dayah* scholars and outside *dayah* scholars, traditional scholars and new-style clerics (Salafi *ustad*). And most Acehnese people, position *dayah* (*pesantren*-based) scholars as role models and references in practice. Acehnese people refer to *dayah* scholars as people who have a book, meaning they have religious knowledge based on the education of the *turats* (yellow book). Meanwhile, outside *dayah* scholars are called *malem sikula*, meaning that they are represented by scholars whose background comes from formal education such as *madrasah aliyah education*, religious teacher education, as well as Islamic religious universities and the like.

These groups of scholars have different tasks according to the functions possessed. Although all groups are experts in the field of Islamic religion and education, the pattern, dimensions and scope of the

role of each group of scholars differ from one group to another.

The designations for them are also very diverse. Like *Kyai* in the tradition of Javanese people. For the *Minang* people (West Sumatra) they are referred to as *Buya*. *Ajengan* in Sundanese society. Meanwhile, the people in North Sumatra are called *Sheikh* and by the people of Lombok Nusa Tenggara, Kalimantan is called *Tuan Guru*. In the Aceh region itself, they are familiarly called *Abu*, *Abi*, *Abon*, *Abati*, *Abiya*, *Waled*, or *Teungku*. Although different, they are interpreted by local people as elites and actors holding discourses of religious authority. By Ichwan [31] also said they had a strong influence on the traditions and religion of the Acehnese people. In addition, they are also active in various social dynamics. Nurlaila [32] also revealed that the role of clerics in Aceh is not only about religion, even traditional processions such as inheritance, customary land, marriage, *peusujuk*, *peucicap aneuk* (introduce the taste of food for the first time to the baby), *peutroen aneuk* (lowering the baby to the ground), celebration of entering a new house, giving names to children also involves *ulama*.

It is not an exaggeration that the role of *dayah ulama* has a very important position in the local community of Aceh. In addition to having a solid mass base at the grassroots. Through his integrity, scholarship and charisma his clericalism became attributes that not everyone had. This ethico-social affinity with society is also respected, respected, appreciated, and glorified. There is even a *hadih majah* (proverb) inherent in Acehnese culture; *Taek u gle tajak koh kayee*, *High peureudee teumpang luek meukuwaa*, *Mau ham tapateh amanat guree*, *Dudoe meuteumee apui nurakaa* (Up to the hill mowing wood, Stay the base for the place where *perkutut* sings, If not obedient to the teacher's mandate, In the afterlife later gets hellfire). At the heart of the proverb is in the final two lines, which is obedience to the teacher's mandate. Which if not, then I'm in the afterlife and get tortured by hellfire. Even in the research of Bianca and Woodward [33] also Ichwan [34] also said of his great influence in society, making them in addition to religious leaders, customs, educational teachers, also positioned as political elites, symbols of peace and social movements in both rural and urban areas.

##### **2. Expressions of Political Communication of Dayah Aceh Ulama**

The role of Acehnese *dayah* scholars has made an extraordinary contribution since the sultanate until now. The involvement of *dayah* scholars is not only in the world of education, but also in various fields, such as; social, economic, even political. Based on data from the Ministry of Religion (Kemenag) as of January 2022, the number of Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia was recorded at 26,975 units

until April 2022. Of these, the most Islamic boarding schools in West Java. Meanwhile, specifically in the Aceh region, at least 1,177 dayah have been established and developed, and accommodate more than 120 thousand students. This data also explains that, Aceh is the fifth largest dayah province in Indonesia after Central Java, East Java, Banten, and the most is West Java. This shows that there are 1,177 dayah clerics scattered throughout Aceh. The rest are scholars whose dayah educational institutions have not been accredited or are still categorized as recitation halls. In addition to having the most dayah in Indonesia, Aceh is also one of the regions that has the oldest dayah in Indonesia.

If you refer to the models and schools of each scholar in Aceh, it is indeed very varied. The Waljamaah Ahlisunnah with the Shafii fiqh school are the majority group in number. But the existence of Salafiyah, Wahabiyah, and Shia can still be found. Evidence of the existence of Shia imamah is explicitly illustrated by the existence of HTI in Aceh. In addition, scholars in Aceh strongly represent organizations or movements that are the medium of their activities, such as, Inshafuddin, HUDA, MPTT, Rabithah Thaliban Aceh (RTA), MUNA, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), Muhammadiyah, al-Washliyah or the Tasawuf Tauhid and Fiqh Council (Tastafi).

Looking at the character of these clerics, it can be seen that dayah scholars are involved in many organizations and political activities in Aceh. They argue that, scholars should also have a national spirit. Dayah scholars must also care about state consciousness and democratic principles. The form of involvement of clerics is not only to provide moral support, but also to become a partner of the government, even on other occasions to participate in the conflict to color the political dynamics of Aceh and even nationally.

Some of the dayah scholars who are already very well known and respected such as Abu Sheikh H. Hasanoel Bashry HG (Abu Mudi), Tgk. Muhammad Amin Mahmud (Abu Tu Min Blang Bladeh), Waled Nuruz Zahri (Waled Nu Samalanga), Tgk . H. Muhammad Yusuf A. Wahab (Tu Sop Jeunieb), Tgk Tu Bulqaini, Tgk. Nurdin Judon (Abi Nas Jeunieb), Tgk Faisal Ali (Abu Sibreh), Tgk Muhammad Amin (Abu Keumala), Tgk Rusli Daud (Waled Rusli), Tgk Rasyidin Ahmad (Waled Nura), Tgk Muhibban Hajat, Tgk Zulfadli Ismail (Waled Landeng), Tgk Anwar Usman (Abiya Kuta Krueng) and others. They are all dayah scholars who are consistent in paying attention to the socio-political dynamics in Aceh.

However, there are also those who do not involve themselves in political affairs. These dayah scholars are usually not many. These dayah clerics usually don't care about the political dynamics that are

going on. They are indifferent and even tend to avoid political interests. They are more devoted to taking care of dayah, focusing on recitation activities, tharekat individually and collectively. The rest is filled with social activities.

## 2.1. Dayah Scholars and Interpretations of Religious Moderation: A Discussion

### 1. The National Narrative is Final

There are some important notes worth saying regarding how dayah scholars interpret the narrative of religious moderation. One of these interpretations is the commitment of nationality (nationstate). The dimension of nationality is interpreted as an attitude and understanding of the principles of nationality and the state system, including the ideology of Pancasila, the 1945 Constitution, the form of the Republic of Indonesia, Bhineka Tunggal Ika and accepting the format of a legitimate Government. The dimension of nationality is also understood as an attitude of acceptance to the principle of citizenship which includes the principles of justice, equality, recognition, and individual rights. In addition, there is the principle of solidarity which refers to the capacity of the individual to unite with others to fight for what is rightfully held to him by holding to unity, mutual trust, responsibility for the common good [35]

From the interview data, it shows that the majority of respondents of dayah scholars accept the concept of a nation-state narrative. They have no problem, and consider the national narrative to be complete. Nevertheless, their acceptance rates seem to vary. If we describe it in more detail, the character of attitude acceptance tends to be moderate to conservative. This conservative stance is an accommodating form that actively campaigns for the enforcement of Islamic sharia, but does not want to establish an Islamic state. Conservative clerics are understood as clerics who accept the current reality of nationality, such as the Republic of Indonesia, the system of government, Pancasila, accepting diversity. However, this acceptance is accompanied by certain conditions, for example, the Republic of Indonesia without Shia, Ahmadiyya, the Aceh government implementing Islamic law and others. That is, as guardians of religious orthodoxy they tend to try to be careful when contextualizing their religious ideas in an Indonesian context. The following is an overview of the views obtained from the results of the researcher's interviews with respondents;

"The movement of the HUDA organization, for example, which was initiated by the dayah clerics themselves defines the development of Islamic politics as not making Aceh an Islamic state (khilafah Islamiyah), not rejecting democracy, let alone calling for jihad against the government. On the other hand, HUDA tends to take a substantialistic approach to

Islamic cultural doctrines and values, while at the same time rejecting purely formalistic and symbolic political development. In the nation and state, especially in Aceh, the most important thing is how the political system can reflect Islamic values in it. (Results of interview with Teungku Bulqaini Tanjongan, 19 July 2022).

Referring to the views expressed, the position of the dayah ulama is not only limited to their role in voicing the aspirations of political development based on Islamic values, but also not being blind to the chaotic socio-political developments that are currently taking place in Aceh. The response of the dayah clerics such as the HUDA organization movement is an example of breaking the ice of social and religious life and rebuilding "theology of liberation" in the individual and communal lives of the people of Aceh. Dayah scholars who accept the nation state seem to have finished with the format of the nation state through their reinterpretation of religious doctrine. However, they often express disappointment when assessing social, political and economic situations, such as forest destruction, drugs, corruption and poverty. They complain about the dysfunctional state in solving problems.

### 1. Intersectional Dalam Khilafiyah

Furthermore, in the matter of tolerance towards differences in religious beliefs, Islamic religious scholars seem to be more careful not to blame each other for other schools of thought. Quantitatively, the majority of Islamic scholars accept and respect the existence of different schools of thought in Islam. No one refuses let alone blame. However, it becomes a problem when the established pattern of community religion that has been built by the previous clerics is then harassed by "a group of new preachers" under the pretext of purification in religion. For the narrow madhhab fanaticism of Islamic religious scholars, it will give rise to divisions and conflicts among the ummah. The fanaticism of a sect is only permissible if it does not claim to be the most righteous, let alone blame others. The following are the results of interviews with respondents; "Differences in style in interpreting religious teachings is a necessity that cannot be denied. Each individual group of people cannot be condemned as wrong if they have the correct argument, namely the source of the Quran, Hadith, Ijma, and qiyas. Any attempt to try to make interpretations uniform is futile, because it is not in accordance with the basic character of Allah's decree, namely creating different creatures for the benefit of all, let alone forcing them to be uniform. (Results of interview with Teungku Abi Zahrul, 10 July 2022). From these interviews it is known that the diversity of interpretations in religion is a necessity, but these differences are not a justification for other people being guilty and need to be justified. It is not the sect

that is in question, but it is important how to reconcile radical-extreme thoughts in preaching. Especially at the level of understanding of the previous scholars up to the current generation. The power of different understanding followed by the dynamics of the sociocultural community of the people is also different. This makes the packaging of understanding of Islam also different. The following are the results of interviews with respondents;

"There is a group of movements that they call salafiwahabi. So far they have been trying to carry out their da'wah agenda which is claimed to save people from "storms of misguidance and jealousy, such as school taqlid, idol worship, cult of graves, tahlilan/samadiyah, festivities, and others. They also in their da'wah always say to cleanse Islam from superstition, bid'ah and superstition and others. For this group, the problem is a problem that seems to have no common ground. This group then also claims to be the only successor to the teachings of the ulema as-salaf ashshalih (the companions of the Prophet Muhammad, Tabiin, and Tabiu of Tabiin) which are based on the Al-Quran and Hadith. However, for us this group has misguided in implementing it, the call to return to Islamic teachings is sometimes very paradoxical with the Islamic values that they carry out, you can even say that in many ways they have deviated from the teachings themselves. They don't want to stand in silence and dialogue with us to find the equivalent of truth in Islam. This is the problem." (Results of interview with Teungku Bulqaini Tanjongan, 19 July 2022).

From the dynamics above, it is clear that there is a contestation between the desire to purify Islamic teachings which are considered heretical, superstition and bid'ah with the desire to preserve the establishment of the majority religious tradition which is also considered true and for the people. Whereas for the people of Aceh it is very sensitive. Of course, many ulemas and even the people of Aceh, the majority of whom adhere to the Imam Syafi'i school, tend to be displeased with the accusations made by this group. Indeed, quantitatively the behavior and practices of the "Exclusive Islam" group are certainly much less than the "Moderate Islamic" actors. However, qualitatively, this phenomenon is a social reality in Aceh.

"Responding to the current phenomenon of da'wah, it is indeed causing anxiety, we call it Salafi Wahhabi preaching. They are more likely to look for differences than similarities, like to find fault rather than the truth in other groups. In their da'wah, they should understand the Islamic character of the majority of the population so that there is no friction. Even though we agree, Islam teaches us to tolerate differences. If deviations related to main matters (ushul) cannot be tolerated, but must be straightened out, however, differences in branches (furu') must be

respected with a big heart. We also agree to prevent heresy that exists but needs a deep understanding

(Results of interview with Teungku H. Teungku Rusli Daud, 19 July 2022).

Image: Mass Rejecting Wahhabism



Note: About ten thousand people and students took action to reject the Wahhabi-Shia ideology in Aceh (Source: <https://www.bbc.com/indonesia/indonesia-61104399>)

before we act wrongly and judge people who commit bid'ah. For this reason, it must also be understood regarding what cannot be tolerated and what is permissible. There is bid'ah which is prohibited in religion which is the main thing, because there are clear and definite arguments (qath'iy) both in the creed and sharia that never change. For anyone who changes it, it should not be allowed because it is misleading. As for the issue of furu' (branches), which is the arena of ijtihad of scholars and results in differences of opinion, it is not included in the category of bid'ah.

The incidents above give the impression of the sharp sensitivity of the differences in the different sects. Even so, differences for Islamic scholars are something that is commonplace and must be respected as long as they do not damage the faith and leave Islamic law. However, due to the dryness of wasathiyah Islamic narratives by the Wahhabi salafi group, they failed to grasp the messages of Islam which are Rahmatan lil'alamin so that they were trapped in narrow and stunted thinking. This situation eventually gave rise to a wave of disbelief, heresy and accusations of heresy among Muslims. Because of the accusations resulting from differences in khilafiyah, it has the potential to inflame the anger of fellow Muslims in Aceh, the majority of whom adhere to the Imam Syafi'i school of thought. This is because religion with a series of teachings, rituals of worship and its symbols, including its customs, is a very sensitive text for Aceh. It is this situation that Aceh describes in its majah hadih; Adat is like poteumeuruhom, hukum is like Syiah Kuala. Adat ngeun hukum lagee zet ngeun sifeut.

## 2. Rejecting Heterodoxy and Diversity of

he issue of differences in the khilafiyah mazhab in Aceh has indeed occurred and has captured the public's attention. In fact, the response to these differences ultimately accumulated in the rejection by residents. In 2015, thousands of residents took to the streets to reject the Wahhabi salafi movement [37]. Also in 2019, Ustadz Firanda also refused. He was rejected in Aceh because his lectures were accused of being disturbing and considered deviant [38].

### Beliefs

It is not only a matter of differences in schools of thought, there have also been incidents of rejection of the existence of heterodox Islam which is considered heretical. Quantitatively, Islamic religious scholars accept and respect every citizen, but on the other hand reject the existence of heterodox Muslims who are considered "deviant" from the understanding of the majority of Muslims in Aceh. However, for dayah clerics, rejection of differences in beliefs does not allow acts of violence. The handling must be carried out by the government's legal apparatus. Previously, based on the stipulation of the Islamic Sharia Office, together with the Aceh MPU, they had issued a list of prohibited sects including; Teachings of Milata Abraham (Bireuen), Teachings of the Nusantara Fajar Movement (Gafatar), Darul Arqam (Banda Aceh), Abidin's Mysticism Teachings (Sabang), Shiaism, Teachings of Muhammad Ilyas bin M Yusuf (Aceh), Tariqah Haji Ibrahim Bonjol (Central Aceh), Congregation of Qur'an Hadith (North Aceh), Teachings of Ahmadiyah Qadiyan, Teachings of Abdul Majid Abdullah (East Aceh), Teachings of Ilman Lubis (Suak Lamatan, Teupah Sel District, Simeulue), Tariq Mufarridiyah (Aceh),



Teachings of Ahmad Arifin (Aceh Southeast). The teachings of Makrifatullah (Banda Aceh). Following are the results of interviews with researchers regarding the response to the existence of deviant sects in Aceh;

“Our stance on the issue of deviant sects is very firm in rejecting it, because there is legal certainty. Even so, Muslims should not act alone in handling it. This means that we as fellow human beings must not commit acts of violence or injure in handling heretical sects arbitrarily, leave it to the legal apparatus to act. Indeed, there have been cases of violence against religious groups considered heretical in Aceh. In 2012, Teungku Aiyub Syakuban and two of his students died and their house was burned down after a mass attack because they were thought to be spreading heretical sects in Bireuen. But for us, acts of violence in Islam are unlawful and an tyranny, people should be able to restrain their emotions and hand them over to the authorities.” Interview results with Teungku H. M. Yusuf A. Wahab, 6 July 2022). From the description of the interview data, it is known that in general the Islamic clerics strongly reject the use of violence for any reason, including addressing the existence of deviant sects in Aceh. From some of the responses to the above issues, it turns out that the Islamic religious scholars have outlined a number of provisions in the context of religious tolerance, namely; that there are differences that cannot be tolerated, and there are differences that are allowed. If there are differences that cause damage to aqeedah or the main teachings of Islam. So it must be firm and straightened. However, there are contexts of differences that can be allowed and not to undermine religious norms. It means there is no tolerance without respect. Diversity is a necessity but uniforming is destruction.

For dayah scholars, it is an ethic of tolerance in a society where there are many differences. Of course, the tolerance in question must be in line with established Islamic principles. Tolerance must not sacrifice the principles of religious belief (aqidah), just as religious belief must not be sacrificed for the sake of tolerance. This construction of tolerance gives a signal that in addition to having the responsibility of caring for tolerance, dayah clerics also maintain the orthodoxy of religious beliefs in Aceh.

### **3. Meeting Points and Firm Points in Tolerance of Religious Differences**

One of the results of the study obtained in the practice of communication on religious differences, is that Islamic religious scholars still adhere to their views. However, it does not deny the existence of other different religions. Dayah scholars are used to differences of opinion, even with their teachers, but they still respect and subdue their ego. In other words, the intensity of differences is not linearly proportional

to the level of hatred and hostility. This also illustrates that there is no gap between social attitudes and religious attitudes if they are still within the corridors of the Shari'a.

As for the dynamics of tolerance practices in terms of religious differences in Aceh, at least it can be understood from the results of interviews that have been conducted, that all respondents (dayah scholars) are very tolerant of religious differences in Aceh. Dayah scholars also emphasized that non-Muslims must be protected, not to interfere with the worship of other religions, not even to force other religions to join in Islamic beliefs. For dayah scholars, this view is also an Islamic rule in society.

It is also known from the results of the interviews, even though all dayah scholars are very tolerant and don't feel disturbed by the existence of other religions. However, the attitude of tolerance referred to is only related to muamalah affairs, not to matters of faith and worship. This dual perception and attitude is based on the fact that interreligious relations must have "meeting points" and "firm points". Because these perceptions are formed by social religious factors themselves. Moreover, a religious tradition that is dominated by one belief (Islam) must be accepted as it is by other religions because it is a social reality in Acehese society. The following are the results of interviews with respondents;

"Islam has taught what tolerance means. Tolerance in Islam only applies to matters of muamalah (human relations in world affairs), including freedom of religion and freedom to practice religion. Not in terms of aqidah and worship. In fact, we are prohibited from insulting, ridiculing the practices of other religions. This is the form of tolerance that is taught in the AlQuran Surah Al Kafirun. Your religion is for you and my religion for me” (Results of interview with Teungku Waled Sirajuddin Bin Hanafi, 24 July 2022).

Not only do they accept the existence of non-Muslims in Aceh, Islamic religious scholars also argue that their existence must be protected and should not be intimidated or forced Islamization activities on non-Muslims. From these data, the dayah scholars agree on the clause on the meaning of tolerance for religious diversity. But still from the internal point of view of Islamic law in Aceh, not the meaning of tolerance based on a Western perspective. The form of tolerance for religious differences was also expressed by Teungku H. Faisal Ali as chairman of the Aceh MPU. The following are the results of interviews with respondents;

"Aceh indeed has Islamic law, however, there is no compulsion in Islam, as well as non-Muslim residents in Aceh. Even though their population is small, they can still live in harmony, peace and side by side without any discrimination, including in worship. We have never bothered them, because they have always lived in Aceh. There is authentic evidence that has



been maintained so far, for example in the areas of Banda Aceh, Sabang, Lhokseumawe, Meulaboh, Langsa and others, there are several non-Muslim places of worship such as churches and monasteries that have never experienced intimidation. They are free to perform their rituals of worship. And we respect it. This indicates that we can accept the presence of non-Muslims in the midst of Muslimmajority society. In addition, in terms of enforcing Islamic rules it does not apply to non-Muslims. If a non-Muslim makes a mistake, he will not be forced to be punished according to Islamic law. In terms of determining sanctions and punishments, it is seen from what religion. Rules like this are no longer taboo, and have been in effect for a long time.” (Results of interview with Teungku H. Faisal Ali, 20 July 2022).

Looking at the data and responses of the respondents above, in general it shows that there is no problem with the attitude of the dayah scholars towards inter-religious relations. Dayah clerics do not want confrontation, let alone violence. Even so, tensions in the relations between Islam and Christianity have emerged and experienced a bit of "shocking" in 2015. Especially the burning of one church and the closing of several other churches in Singkil. Also the closure of churches (to be precise shop houses that were turned into churches) in Banda Aceh and Langsa where it was alleged that each place did not have a permit to build a house of worship. However, these tensions did not immediately lead to religious conflict; between Islam and Christianity. Following are the results of interviews with respondents regarding the construction of houses of worship;

“What happened in Aceh Singkil in the past was not a matter of intolerance, but a matter of miscommunication and delays by the local government in handling and regulating the existence of an unlicensed (illegal) house of worship. This is the real root of the problem, thus triggering a horizontal conflict. Muslims have never banned Christian worship. Moreover, they are hostile to Christians as a religious community. The people only asked the local government to regulate the construction of churches that were established without a permit. Apart from that, there are indications of apostasy activities that have caused unrest among Muslim residents there. Even this still needs to be reviewed whether it really happened or not. We don't want that to happen. We have to respect each other's people who have embraced their religion, don't be forced to migrate.” (Results of interview with Teungku Bulqaini Tanjungan, 19 July 2022).

From the interview results above, it is understood that Islamic religious scholars have a clear concept of tolerance. It states “there is no compulsion in religion, for you your religion, and for us our religion. Every

religious community is also free to carry out their worship without intimidation and discrimination. However, there are firm points that need to be understood in the matter of building houses of worship. Based on the survey data above, the majority of scholars do not question origin according to the place and have obtained clear permits. Apart from that, several incidents of intolerance towards religious houses of worship were also allegedly due to non-belief between religious communities. Social relations in the community still harbor suspicions of proselytization or persuasion of religious conversions (apostasy) in society. This suspicion was manifested in several incidents. For example, the proselytization behind social assistance after the conflict and after the 2004 earthquake and tsunami. It is suspected that there was Christianization behind the disaster relief. Not only through social assistance, but there are indications of the process of apostasy being carried out by missionaries and local and international NGOs at that time. Acehese Muslims think that this is not only a matter of the earthquake and seawater tsunami, but also the tsunami of aqidah. Acehese Muslims are worried that apostasy is also targeting children. This activity has occurred several times and is repeated until now.

It can be said that Aceh is an easy target for Christianization. For example, the latest 2020 in Langsa. A mother and her two children became converts when they were invited to Medan by acquaintances. The same incident happened in Bener Meriah (2013) where two Muslims were invited to study an agricultural course which ultimately turned out to be baptized in Berastagi. In the same year, apostasy occurred in Alue Bilie and Nagan Raya. In Durong Aceh Besar (2012), two Christians from Sulawesi and Medan tried to baptize a housewife. In Meulaboh, West Aceh, Christianization efforts took place through educational schools through books and magazines [39]. This case after case of apostasy in Aceh has made residents skeptical. So that this suspicion peaked and accumulated which eventually led to conflict.

This suspicion of non-Muslim religions carrying out apostasy appears to be one of the drivers of tension in Aceh. There is even a phrase that is often heard, the people of Aceh are safe if you don't disturb Islam. But if disturbing will be a problem. There is no word of negotiation, let alone related to the dignity of the Acehese Muslim community. The Acehese express it in their Hadih Maja; meunyo kreuh beu butoi kreuh, beulagee kayee jeut keu tameh rumoh. Meunyo leumoh beu butoi leumoh, beulagee taloe peukat bubong rumoh (If it's hard, it has to be very hard, like the wood that forms the foundation of a house. If it's soft, then it's very soft, like the ropes that tie the roof of a house). This is a form of tolerance for Aceh.

## CONCLUSION

The significance of the findings of this study, especially from the qualitative data from the interviews. The fact is that on the one hand this study confirms several research findings related to the interpretation of Islamic religious moderation by Islamic scholars, especially regarding religious tolerance and diversity. However, on the other hand the results of this study also refute the results of previous studies, related to the growing intolerance in Aceh. The results of the interview concluded that; first, the interpretation of religious moderation by Islamic religious scholars tends to be fluid, dynamic and varied. That is, in one case can have contradictory views. For example, on the one hand, they have a view that is tolerant and open to differences, but on the other hand, their perspective tends to the intolerant (exclusive) spectrum, for example rejecting heterodox Islam. The response of these dayah scholars indicates a form of fragmentation in their acceptance of religious moderation, where they accept dimensions in certain aspects, but can reject other dimensions from existing aspects.

Second, from the entire interpretation of the Islamic religious moderation narrative on religious moderation, it indicates that in substance it is actually very moderate. This is because the attitude of rejection or exclusivity towards the narrative of religious moderation is still in a conditional form, that is, it must rely on Islamic sharia principles and Acehese traditional customs. If these elements or conditions are met, the exclusive attitude will fall by itself. For dayah scholars, Aceh is Islam. So, the story about Aceh cannot be separated from Islam. Because, Aceh has privileges and specificities. One specialty is implementing Islamic law. By looking at this escalation, of course "forcing" members of other religions to formulate a pattern of relationship between them and Acehese Islam, not the other way around. So it can be said, when questioning the existence of intolerance due to the application of Islamic law in Aceh, it is really the accusation that is intolerance.

Third, from the results of the study it is understood that the problem of tolerance and diversity must rely on the character and culture of the object under study. Everything that comes in should be negotiable and put forward more universal values. Every nation, place, or region must have values, rules (sense of place) that are not the same and also cannot be equated. Every difference cannot be used as a weapon of intolerance. Moreover, Aceh has a distinctive character that is different from other regions. The spirit of diversity and tolerance based on Islamic law cannot be generalized as a form of intolerance. This is because the product of Islamic sharia law in Aceh itself is a product of democracy in

accordance with the constitution. Because of this, including the indicators of "equal rights, privileges for certain religious groups and others" which are quoted from the liberal concept is very risky and sensitive to be used as an indicator of intolerance in Aceh.

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