

Dayah Ulama's Interpretation of Religious Moderation Narratives: Negotiable

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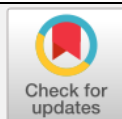
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ARTICLE INFO

Publication Info:

Research Article



How to cite:

Zulkarnaen, I., Muntasir, M., Fauzi, F., & Hidayat, B. (2023). Dayah Ulama's Interpretation of Religious Moderation Narratives: Negotiable. *Society*, 11(2), 474-489.

DOI: [10.33019/society.v11i2.452](https://doi.org/10.33019/society.v11i2.452)

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Received: November 26, 2022;

Accepted: December 30, 2023;

Published: December 31, 2023;

ABSTRACT

The rise of exclusive-formalistic religious interpretations is a series of facts that emphasize how the graph of the seeds of religious radicalism in Indonesia and Aceh, in particular, is increasingly undeniable. Referring to this phenomenon, this research aims to study the strengthening of political democracy and national identity based on local values and culture, which is the standard of political behavior in Aceh. This research method uses descriptive qualitative data from interviews, FGDs, questionnaires, and literature studies. The results obtained: First, the interpretation of Dayah Ulama towards the narrative of religious moderation looks dynamic and varied. On the one hand, in quantity, most Dayah Ulama do not question the narrative of religious moderation, including accepting its derivative concepts. On the other hand, it indicates a form of fragmentation in accepting the narrative of religious moderation. Second, the majority of Dayah Ulama show acceptance of the narrative of religious moderation with pre-conditions. The attitude shown must be based on existing Islamic Sharia and Acehnese customs regulations. Third, conservative and exclusive attitudes appear negotiable, meaning that these attitudes can fade if religious interests are not disturbed.

Keywords: Dayah Ulama; National Identity; Political Democracy; Religious Moderation; Religious Radicalism

1. Introduction

Aceh, as part of Indonesia, has a socio-historic background that is quite extensive, not without turmoil. This signifies that Aceh has never been free from issues related to national politics. One is the conflict between the Indonesian government and the Free Aceh Movement (Gerakan Aceh Merdeka or GAM). The movement, led by Teungku Hasan Muhammad di Tiro (Hasan di Tiro), began in 1976 ([Hasbullah, 2020](#)). Its main objective was clear: "Aceh's independence from the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia (secessionist movement)." The separation of Aceh from Indonesia was motivated by various reasons, with the most dominant being justice issues. In political and economic matters, Aceh felt "cheated" and unfairly treated by Jakarta.

Apart from being claimed as a prolonged ethnonationalism conflict in Aceh, this movement also resulted in the loss of nearly 15,000 lives. However, August 15, 2005, ended hostilities between GAM and the Indonesian government. This was marked by a memorandum of understanding (MoU) between GAM and the Indonesian government in Helsinki, Finland (MoU Helsinki). The MoU emphasized a commitment to resolving the Aceh conflict peacefully, comprehensively, sustainably, and with dignity for all. One of the agreements was that the central government would grant Aceh the privilege to reorganize the legal code while respecting Aceh's historical traditions and customs ([Aspinall, 2005](#)). This agreement also established Islamic law as the official, legal, and constitutional source of law in Aceh.

Implementing Islamic law in the Qanun was considered a maximum option to make Aceh a Shariah region within the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia framework. It is considering that Aceh is a region where the majority of the population is Muslim, as of June 2021, with approximately 5.24 million people or 98.56% of the total population of 5.33 million ([Kusnandar, 2021](#)). Culturally and ideologically, Islam has become the identity of Aceh, even forming an association that perceives "Aceh is Islam" ([Ichwan, 2019](#)). Therefore, Islamic law becomes a crucial factor in public discourse in Aceh and is projected as a binding element in creating an open communication space for building a peaceful life.

While Aceh strives to maintain peace and implement Islamic law, there is a new chapter with the emergence of fundamentalist-radical Islamic tendencies in public Aceh. Peace is again disrupted as these groups try to dominate the public stage, undermining the established national and state logic in Seramoe Mekkah Aceh. The rise of these groups is marked by increasing intolerance and violence often carried out in the name of religion, jihad, the struggle in the path of Allah, and promoting good and preventing evil (*Amar Ma'ruf Nahi Munkar*). From a different perspective, it becomes challenging to ignore the shadow of radical movements and the labeling of Aceh as intolerant. Many cases of intolerant movements in Aceh also claim to act in the name of jihad to promote Islam. Yusuf Qardhawi refers to this as the "language of militance" ([Qardhawi, 2014](#)).

Evidence from the Executive Summary of the Tolerant City Index for 2021, released by the Setara Institute for Democracy and Peace, reveals that Banda Aceh ranks second lowest in tolerance among Indonesian cities. Similarly, Langsa and Sabang are ranked fifth and sixth in the category of lowest tolerant cities. These three cities have consistently ranked as the lowest tolerant cities from 2015 to 2021 ([Setara Institute for Democracy and Peace, 2022](#)).

Not only is Aceh claimed to be the least tolerant city in Indonesia, but it is also asserted as one of the bases for radicalism-terrorism movements. In August, the Special Detachment (Densus) 88 Anti-Terror arrested 15 terrorist coordinators in the Aceh Tamiang region, with 13 linked to the Jamaah Islamiyah network and 2 to the Anshorut Daulah terrorist network ([Andriansyah, 2022](#)). After the arrest of these terrorist coordinators, 530 individuals exposed to

radicalism pledged their loyalty to the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia (Bakar, 2022). In 2010, the Jalin area, specifically in the mountains of Jantho, Aceh Besar, was used as the headquarters for military training by a terrorist network. This continued in 2018 in the Gunung Salak area, North Aceh, which was also used as a training location for the Abu Hamzah terrorist group. Between 2016 and 2020, the Indonesian National Counterterrorism Agency identified Aceh as one of the 12 red zones for terrorism activities in Indonesia (Djumena, 2016). Yudi Zulfahri (former Aceh terrorist) confirmed that radical groups always view Tanah Rencong as a potential base for their activities, especially in issues related to deviant beliefs, apostasy (Christianization), and the clash of thoughts leading to the formation of an Islamic "caliphate." These three issues are the breeding ground for intolerance-radicalism movements in society, reflecting empirical realities (Bustamam & Amiruddin, 2013).

The increasing prevalence of exclusive-formalistic religious interpretations is undeniable, indicating the rise of religious radicalism in Aceh. Serious attention is required to address this issue, especially from the government, society, and religious authorities (Ulama). Ulama, in particular, plays a crucial role in tackling this problem, as radical groups have often wrapped their violent motives in religious motifs. Ulama, therefore, acts as the vanguard, possessing strong modalities in building positive narratives at the grassroots level. Summarily, Ulama has roles as (1) knowledge transmitters, (2) mediators, and (3) cultural agents actively involved in resolving disputes within society (Nurlaila & Zulihafnani, 2019; Sahlan et al., 2019).

Aceh's Ulama's interpretation of religious moderation becomes important at this juncture. This also reflects the current and future dynamics of the nation in Aceh. It is recognized that the existence of Ulama in Aceh has a central role in the long history of communal, national, and state life. This means that public discourse in Aceh seems inseparable from the role of Ulama, who have proven to be essential actors in shaping political, social, and cultural understanding in Acehnese society (Alkaf et al., 2022; Syafieh et al., 2022). Ultimately, the trend of how Ulama plays a significant role in shaping religious values in society somewhat refers to how Ulama's narrative of religious moderation will impact people in the future.

2. Literature Review

Becoming an ulama and obtaining religious authority in Aceh is not easy. Besides gaining legitimacy from the local community, it involves a lengthy process. Ulama, who are consistently engaged with Dayah (Islamic boarding schools), start as students (*Santri*) and then, after completing their education, switch roles to become teachers and leaders in Dayah. During their time in Dayah, they must master various fields of religious studies, including Quranic sciences, exegesis (*Tafsir*), Islamic jurisprudence (*Fiqh*), hadith, astronomy (*Falak*), Sufism, transactions (*Muamalah*), and more. They need to have a command of classical literature and Islamic insights and integrate local traditions within the Islamic Sharia framework while preserving Islam's local geopolitical heritage in Aceh. Beyond learning religion, they also develop charisma and dedicate themselves to the community for a considerable period. As a result, their role in Acehnese society, especially in rural areas, is highly respected. This aligns with research (Alfian, 1975; Nasution et al., 2020; Syamsuar et al., 2019), stating that becoming a respected and revered Acehnese ulama involves a lengthy process. Honorific titles such as "*Abu, Abi, Abon, Abiya, Abati, Waled, Teungku*" are earned through education in Dayah. According to Kaptein, they must access and master religious sources and texts to gain strong recognition in the community (Kaptein, 2004). This situation differs from religious authorities outside Dayah today, such as religious organization leaders, university ulama, government ulama, and new religious actors (Hew, 2018).

From a historical and cultural perspective, the presence of Dayah Ulama is indeed significant. Besides holding a high position, their existence spans Aceh's entire history. Various literature mentions that almost 70 years of Aceh's resistance against Dutch colonialism, including the Japanese era, were led by Dayah Ulama. Even during the conflict between GAM and the Indonesian government, dayah ulama institutionally acted as a catalyst for peace. At that time, dayah ulama and the people worked to promote unity in Aceh. It can be said that every significant event in Aceh's history showcases the undeniable role of Ulama. In addition to being holders of religious authority, Dayah Ulama also plays roles as (1) knowledge transmitters, (2) mediators, and (3) cultural agents actively involved in resolving disputes within society (Sahlan et al., 2019).

Currently, they are also active in various societal dynamics. The role of the Ulama in Aceh goes beyond religion, involving customary ceremonies such as inheritance issues, ancestral land disputes, marriages, the introduction of a baby to solid food (*Peusijuk*), the first time a baby touches the ground (*Peutroen Aneuk*), housewarming celebrations, and naming ceremonies for children (Ichwan, 2005; Nurlaila & Zulihafnani, 2019). It is not an exaggeration to say that the role of Dayah Ulama holds a crucial position in local Acehese society. Besides having a solid mass base at the grassroots level, their integrity, knowledge, and ulama charisma are attributes not possessed by everyone. Their socio-ethical closeness to the community makes them respected, honored, valued, and revered. There is even a local proverb ingrained in Acehese culture: "*Taek u gle tajak koh kayee, Tinggi peureudee teumpat luek meukuwaa, Mau ham tapateh amanat guree, Dudoe meuteumee apui nurakaa*" (Going up the hill to cut wood, Leaving the base for doves to sing, If not obedient to the teacher's instructions, in the afterlife, one will face the fires of hell). The essence of this proverb lies in the last two lines, emphasizing obedience to the teacher's instructions. Failure to comply may result in divine punishment in the afterlife. The teacher, broadly understood as an ulama, is the inheritor of the prophet's teachings, bringing the message of religion and guidance to life. Thus, they deserve respect and adherence to the Ulama's instructions. As stated in the research (Ichwan, 2005, 2011; Muntasir & Aminullah, 2020; Smith & Woodward, 2013), their significant influence in the community positions them not only as religious leaders, educators, and traditional leaders but also as political elites, symbols of peace, and contributors to social movements, both in rural and urban areas.

3. Research Methodology

This research employs a mixed-methods approach with a case study design. This methodological approach aims to conduct an in-depth exploration of programs, events, processes, activities, or one or more individuals to understand the social construction, meaning, and identity emerging from a phenomenon. Since this research requires methods, data sources, and other elements, it adopts the triangulation principle (Denzin & Lincoln, 2009; Rich et al., 2018). The purpose is to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the perceptions and attitudes of Ulama, including comparing them with the opinions gathered from the respondents through a survey (mixed method) on issues related to this research. The combination of these two data collection types is intended to present percentage trends for comparative purposes and complement in-depth qualitative data analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Data collection techniques involve using a structured questionnaire through a structural interview, which is highly efficient for a sufficiently large number of respondents (Bradburn et al., 2004; Rich et al., 2018). Interviews are conducted using the in-depth interview method with twenty ulama respondents. The informants are selected using a purposive sampling technique. Although the informants are not proportionally selected, this technique is implemented by

choosing informants to represent the characteristics of the research object and facilitates the comparative analysis of trends in views, behaviors, and attitudes toward the general issues raised in this research. Ulama is categorized based on mainstream backgrounds, such as Dayah Ulama, Ulama affiliated with the Association of Aceh Dayah Ulama (Himpunan Ulama Dayah Aceh or HUDA), Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), and the Consultative Council of Ulama (Majelis Permusyawaratan Ulama or MPU).

Furthermore, literature and documentation studies are conducted in three stages: data reduction, display, and conclusion drawing (Denzin & Lincoln, 2009; Rich et al., 2018). The research location focuses on Aceh's east coast, including Banda Aceh, Aceh Besar, Pidie, Bireuen, and North Aceh. The choice of these locations is based on the fact that they have a significant number of Ulama (Dayah) compared to other areas in Aceh.

4. Results and Discussion

This research traces the practice of religious moderation by Dayah Ulama and divides it into three dimensions of approach: the practice of tolerance in social life. The dimension of tolerance, in this case, emphasizes the context of religious tolerance and non-violence. It is interpreted as a person's attitude in accepting religious differences and beliefs within one family and different religions (Woolf & Hulsizer, 2003). Meanwhile, tolerance of the anti-violence dimension is interpreted as an attitude that pays attention to accepting the right to live without pressure or manipulation (Dietrich et al., 1996). Second, there is cooperation in social community interaction. Cooperation is understood as mutual help (*Ta'awun*) among humans regarding goodness. Third, there is equality for every religious believer in the public sphere. This is understood as a form of attitude to interact in society. At least equality includes equal rights (not discriminatory). Therefore, this study uses these three dimensions as a comprehensive analytical tool for understanding the practice of religious moderation by Dayah Ulama in Aceh.

4.1. Rejecting Heterodoxy and Preserving Orthodox Beliefs

In general, the concept of tolerance, as outlined by Michael Walzer in his book "On Toleration," refers to several aspects (Walzer, 1997). Walzer explains that religious tolerance is necessary for individual and public spaces to build peaceful coexistence among diverse groups with different beliefs, historical backgrounds, cultures, languages, and identities. Walzer provides three conditions for the meaning of tolerance. First, there is something disliked about others, including attitudes, behaviors, religious practices, trade, and so on. Second, tolerance arises from the power to dominate and oppress. Those without power do not enter the discourse of tolerance because they automatically respect those in power. Third, those with dominant power refrain from oppression, discrimination, marginalization, etc. This illustration implies a willingness of those in power to restrain themselves, understand, respect, and appreciate the differences of others, and allow their principles without coercion (Walzer, 1997).

However, there is a clear concept in the context of religious tolerance in Islam. Islamic faith is an absolute foundation for a Muslim without distinction. Sharia is the legal framework regulating the relationship between humans and God (worship), human relations (transactions), and humans with the environment. This law became an agreement among the Ulama, serving as a guide for the life of Muslims and leaving no room for disagreement or controversy among the Ulama.

Dayah Ulama has outlined several provisions regarding tolerance, emphasizing that some differences are intolerable while others are permissible. Intolerable differences are those that

damage the Islamic creed or fundamental teachings. In such cases, a firm and corrective stance is required. However, permissible differences exist that do not violate religious principles. In other words, tolerance must be accompanied by respect. Diversity is inevitable, but uniformity leads to destruction. For Dayah Ulama, this is the ethical foundation of tolerance in a society marked by many differences. Every individual or religious community has its ideals, opinions, understanding, and movements, which should be appreciated and respected as contributions to Islam. In this sense, tolerance must align with established Islamic principles, ensuring it does not compromise belief principles (*Aqidah*).

This view is also in line with the survey data obtained; quantitatively, the Dayah Ulama accepts and respects every different religious citizenship in Aceh, but on the other hand, rejects the existence of heterodox Muslims who are considered “deviant” from the understanding of the majority of Muslims in Aceh, such as the teachings of Shia, Ahmadiyah, Gafatar, and others. Their existence will be protected if they do not spread their teachings openly. From the data obtained, the majority of Dayah Ulama agree that the existence of Muslims who are considered “deviant” can divide Muslims in Aceh. A total of 26 respondents (86.7%) strongly agreed, and four (13.3%) agreed, none of whom rejected the statement. Then, the majority of 30 respondents (100%) of Dayah Ulama actively rejected the existence of Islamic sect groups that were considered “heretical,” and none accepted. However, most of the Dayah Ulama agreed, rejecting the use of hate speech against cults and other religions as an effort to fortify the ummah from misguidance, namely 28 respondents or 93.3%. There are very few of those who are neutral, with two respondents (6.7%). In addition, Dayah Ulama’s legal awareness is very large. A total of 24 respondents (80%) actively accepted the statement that committing acts of violence against the handling of differences in religious sects (heresy) is against the law. The remaining six respondents (20%) were passive in committing acts of violence against the handling of differences in sects. Of those who accepted it, 75% strongly agreed, and 5% agreed. In addition, the statement of rejecting cults and differences in beliefs is not by violence and must be done by the legal apparatus. The majority of Dayah Ulama agree and accept, namely 93.3% (28 respondents) and 6.7% (2 respondents) are passive or neutral. Of those who accepted, 80% strongly agreed, and 13.3% agreed. The rest were passive. From the description of the data, it should be noted that, in general, the Dayah Ulama strongly rejects the use of violence for any reason, including addressing the existence of cults in Aceh. The following are the results of the interviews with respondents:

“Our stance on the issue of cults is very firm in rejecting them because there is legal certainty. Nevertheless, we as fellow human beings should not commit acts of violence or harm in the handling of cults arbitrarily and leave it to the legal apparatus to act. There have indeed been cases of violence against groups of teachings that are considered sinful 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 considered to be spreading heresy in Bireuen. But for us, violence in Islam is haram and an injustice” (Interview with Teungku H. M. Yusuf A. Wahab, July 6, 2022).

Based on the data above, Dayah Ulama actively rejects the presence of Islamic sects considered “deviant,” and none accept it. However, most Dayah Ulama agree to reject the use of violence for any reason except in the context of Sharia punishment. Despite ongoing ethical debates between those who reject and those who justify the permissibility of violence in certain situations, Dayah Ulama emphasizes that justification for violence is limited to specific sharia

punishments (*hudud*) and should be enforced by the state's coercive power, not civilian communities. It's crucial to highlight that the maximum punishment (*Uqubat*) for committing offenses under Aceh's Jinayat Law is flogging. This differs from other Islamic regions that may allow *Qishash-Diyat* penalties for crimes like murder and assault or cutting off the hands of thieves.

On the other hand, Dayah Ulama's rejection of deviant sects must also be based on the decisions of the Shariah Islam Agency and the MPU Aceh, which holds religious authority in issuing fatwas on deviant beliefs in Aceh. The list of prohibited sects includes teachings such as Milata Abraham (Bireuen), Fajar Nusantara Movement (Gafatar), Darul Arqam (Banda Aceh), Kebatinan Abidin (Sabang), Shia, Muhammad Ilyas bin M Yusuf's Teachings (Aceh), Haji Ibrahim Bonjol Sufi Order (Central Aceh), Jamaah Qur'an Hadith Group (North Aceh), Ahmadiyya Qadiyan Teachings (Aceh), Abdul Majid Abdullah's Study Group (East Aceh), Ilman Lubis's Teachings (Suak Lamatan, Teupah Sel Sub-District, Simeulue), Mufarridiyah Sufi Order (Aceh), Ahmad Arifin's Teachings (Southeast Aceh), Makrifatullah Teachings (Banda Aceh).

This reality justifies that Dayah Ulama is indeed tolerant of citizenship and accepts religious differences but does not accept the presence of "deviant" teaching communities. This communal tolerance is rooted in historical path dependencies that shape and direct it, making it likely to persist (Menchik, 2016). In short, unlimited tolerance is an illusion.

4.2. United in Aqeedah, Tolerant in *Furu'iyah*

In the context of tolerance towards diversity and differences in interpretation/tafsir within Islam, the Dayah Ulama appears to adopt a cautious and moderate approach, choosing the middle path (*Wasatiyah*) and refraining from blaming other madhhabs. Quantitatively, the majority of Dayah Ulama, 100% to be precise, agree that they accept and respect the differences among madhhabs in Islam. None of them reject or blame, with 80% agreeing and 20% strongly agreeing. Additionally, 90% of Dayah Ulama acknowledge that narrow-minded madhhab fanaticism leads to division and conflicts within the community. While 10% remain neutral, they lean towards acceptance, assuming that fanaticism towards one madhhab is permissible as long as it does not claim absolute correctness or blame others. Of those who accept, 76.7% strongly agree, and 13.3% agree.

Furthermore, the majority of Dayah Ulama, 93.3% of them, reject the use of hate speech or violent actions against differences in madhhabs, while only 6.7% remain neutral. Among those who accept the rejection, 86.7% reject hate speech and violent actions against differences in madhhabs, with 6.6% strongly agreeing. The Dayah Ulama's acceptance of differences in interpretation within the realm of religion is considered a characteristic of the moderate Ulama. The following are the results of interviews with respondents;

"Different styles of interpreting religious teachings are a necessity that cannot be rejected. Each human group cannot be condemned as wrong if it has the correct evidence base, namely the Quran, Hadith, Ijma, and qiyas. Any attempt to homogenize the style of interpretation is futile because it is not following the basic character of Allah's decree, which created His creatures differently for the benefit of all, let alone forcing them to be uniform" (Interview with Teungku Abi Zahrul, July 10, 2022).

A key point from the interviews emphasizes that diversity in interpreting religious teachings is inevitable and should not lead to condemning others. The differences in interpretation are not grounds for labeling others as wrong, but rather, the focus should be on reconciling radical and extreme thoughts in preaching. The Dayah Ulama also provides insights on approaching tolerance for differences in madhhabs. According to one interviewee:

"There are generally two challenges in tolerating differing understandings of religion in Aceh. Firstly, there are groups whose preachings disturb acceptable differences. They can freely preach, but they should not blame those with different views (madhhabs), especially accusing them of apostasy or heresy, which are still in the realm of Khilafiyah and should be tolerated. Preaching should understand the Islamic traditions of the majority in that region. Secondly, other groups allow differences that should not be left unchecked. The first group can trigger horizontal conflicts leading to divisions, while the second, besides causing conflicts, can also uproot the faith and historical roots of Islam in Aceh. One thing to understand is that tolerance should not sacrifice the principles of religious beliefs, just as religious beliefs should not be sacrificed for the sake of tolerance." (Interview with Teungku H. Muniruddin Kiran, July 11, 2022).

Especially in Aceh, the differences in understanding these teachings are often represented in the preaching movements or differences in the origin of educational institutions, such as traditional or modern Dayahs, from within or outside Aceh. Organizational differences can also play a role. The issue here is that differences in beliefs and values held by each Dayah or organization come to the surface and have the potential to create tension and conflict. For the Dayah Ulama, it is not a rejection of the existence of the Salafi Wahhabi preaching movement. The problem arises when the religious practices upheld by the Ulama are disrupted by this "group of preachers" under the guise of purifying the creed. According to one interviewee:

"This group seeks to promote a preaching agenda claiming to save the community from the 'storm of deviation,' such as fighting against jealousy, blind imitation of madhhabs, idol worship, the cult of graves, tahlilan/samadiyah, feasts, and cleansing Islam from superstitions, innovations, and fallacies, among others. For this group, these issues seem unsolvable. This group also claims to be the sole successor of the teachings of the righteous predecessors. This group has misunderstood its application; the call to return to Islamic teachings is sometimes paradoxical with the Islamic values they uphold. They are unwilling to engage in dialogue with us to find common ground in Islamic practices. That's the issue." (Interview with Teungku Bulqaini Tanjongan, July 19, 2022).

The explanations above give an impression of the sharp sensitivity of differences in the context of fellow Muslims. This is reality. It has happened. Maybe a little, quantitatively. But qualitatively, it is real. And it causes problems. For Dayah Ulama, differences are commonplace and must be respected as long as they do not damage the *Aqidah* and depart from Islamic law. However, due to the dry narrative of *Wasathiyah* Islam by the Salafi Wahabi group, they failed to capture the messages of Islam, which are *Rahmatan Lil'alamin*, so they are trapped in narrow and stunted thinking. This situation eventually led to a wave of disbelief, idolatry, and accusations of heresy among fellow Muslims. Because of the accusations due to Khilafiyah it has the potential to ignite the anger of fellow Muslims in Aceh, the majority of whom follow the

Imam Syafi'i school of thought. This is because religion, with its teachings, worship rituals, and symbols, is a sensitive text for Aceh.

To maintain tradition, harmony, and comfort in worship, Aceh has a regulation (Qanun) number 8 of 2014 concerning the Principles of Islamic Sharia. Article 14 of the Qanun explains that (1) the organization of worship in Aceh must be carried out following sharia guidance. (2) The implementation of worship, as in paragraph (1), is practiced by prioritizing the procedures for practicing worship according to the Shafi'i school of thought. (3) The implementation of worship that does not refer to the procedures of the Shafi'i school of thought is permissible as long as it is within the framework of the Hanafi, Maliki, and Hambali schools of thought by always prioritizing harmony, *Ukhwah Islamiyah*, and tranquility among Muslims. (4) If groups of Acehnese people already practice the Hanafi, Maliki, or Hambali madhhab, they cannot be forced to practice the Syafi'i madhhab. (5) If there are groups of people who practice worship following the understanding of religious organizations that are following the Quran and Hadith and are legally recognized by the state, they are still justified/protected.

Referring to the meaning of the Qanun, it is not necessary and inappropriate to negatively stigmatize (let alone blame) groups that differ in madhhab. As mentioned in the Qanun, the Dayah Ulama have laid down the values they have applied to themselves, namely morals and ethics, in differing opinions. These values can be summarized as not imposing opinions, not denying the opinions (ijtihad) of others, and not being ashamed to accept the truth that emerges from others. The following is the result of the researcher's interview with the respondent.

"It can be said that differences are not dangerous if our hearts are still embedded in Ukhwah. We should understand Islam broadly beyond the narrow boundaries and barriers. Aren't they Muslims, and so are we? Don't they want Islamic law to be upheld, and do we want it to be upheld? Aren't they commanded to love and pray for each other, just like us? Therefore, morals and ethics are important in differing opinions, such as not imposing opinions or views that are chosen to maintain Ukhwah, so we should avoid issues that invite chaos among the ummah. And it should be underlined, the Salafi Wahabi movement is not a school or school of fiqh, nor is it a school of Aqidah, but only a slightly different da'wah movement" (Interview with Teungku Bulqaini Tanjongan, July 19, 2022).

From the interview, it can be interpreted that there is firmness in questioning Salafi Wahabi. Dayah Ulama argues that Salafi Wahabi is not a school of fiqh, not a school of *Aqidah*, nor a school of Sufism, but only a da'wah movement that is slightly different and tends to be harsh. Nevertheless, Dayah Ulama is very tolerant and soft when explaining the various schools in Islam, including to their students. Moreover, the Dayah tradition sometimes teaches several different books as comparative material and other sources of knowledge. Comparison of madhabs is common among Ulama. For them, all mazhabs that are muktabar are correct, and all come from the same source, the Quran and Hadith. However, this does not mean that they practice all madhabs. Because Aceh has been familiar with the Imam Shafi'i school of thought for a long time, teaching other schools of thought with different variations would be difficult. It can be confusing and even cause chaos among ordinary people. Following and practicing the Syafi'i madhhab is the right choice to maintain Aceh's tradition and conduciveness.

In Aceh's religious history, the Imam Syafi'i school of thought has long been embedded throughout Aceh's civilization. So it isn't easy to accept other madhabs easily. In addition to being taught for a long time, the Shafi'i school of thought has become the main reference for

Ulama, the community, and even the government in making rules (Qanun). There are several reasons why the Syafi'i madhab continues to survive and become the main study content for Dayah Ulama to convey to students and the general public. Among them are because there is an orderly, neat, detailed, and genealogical nature to the narrations and books that are trusted and uninterrupted until now. This is the reality, so inherent is the teaching of the Imam Syafi'i school of thought to the network of Ulama and the entire Acehese community. The people of Aceh have made the Syafi'i school of thought the mainstay of Islam. When they rely on it, the religious tradition system influences how they interpret Islam. Thus, maintaining traditions and beliefs is a common thing to do. This means that when the people of Aceh have made the Shafi'i school of thought their *Aqidah*, *Fiqh*, and *Sharia*, any flow or understanding that will enter will automatically be rejected. There must be a big soul to make self-corrections and accept the current reality of Aceh. Fanaticism will lead to arrogance. This is the problem. If narrowed down more simply, the Dayah Ulama says, "The people should be united in *Aqidah* and tolerant in *Furu'iyah*."

4.3. Sufficient for You is Your Religion, and for Me is My Religion

One of the study results in communicating religious differences is that the Dayah Ulama still adheres to their views. But it does not deny the existence of other different religions. Dayah Ulama are accustomed to differences of opinion, even with their teachers, but they remain respectful and subdue their egos. In other words, the intensity of the difference is not linearly proportional to the level of hatred and hostility. This also illustrates no gap between social and religious attitudes if they are still within the syarized corridor.

As for the dynamics of tolerance regarding religious differences in Aceh, all respondents (Dayah Ulama) are highly tolerant towards religious diversity in Aceh. This is evidenced by the survey results, showing that all respondents share the same interpretation regarding the issue of religious differences. Quantitatively, most Dayah Ulama accept the statement acknowledging and respecting religious differences in Aceh. About 83.3% of Islamic Ulama agree with this statement, with 70% classified as agreeing and 13.3% strongly agreeing. None reject this statement, but some remain neutral (16.7%). However, this neutral stance is accepted if it complies with the provisions of Islamic law.

Moreover, none of them harbor hatred or reject the existence of religious differences. Among those who accept, 73.3% agree, and 26.7% strongly agree. Additionally, the majority of Dayah Ulama (90%) accept that people of other religions (non-Muslims) have the right to practice their worship freely and openly. The remaining 10% remain neutral but lean towards acceptance with the assumption of allowing it in its appropriate place. Among those who accept, 83.3% strongly agree, and 6.7% agree. This expression simultaneously justifies that accepting people of other religions to live and coexist in Aceh is widely supported (96.7%), with a breakdown of 86.7% stating agreement and 10% strongly agreeing. There is no rejection, and those who remain neutral constitute 3.3%.

Most Dayah Ulama do not have an issue with religious differences. They agree and strongly agree that the existence of these differences is a necessity. Twenty-seven respondents (90%) strongly agree, and 3 (10%) agree. However, concerning decision-making, especially leadership-related matters, most Ulama (100%) believe that leaders must be Muslim, with 83.3% agreeing and 16.7% strongly agreeing. There is no rejection or neutrality. Two references related to this matter are: first, Aceh is a majority Muslim population and applies Islamic law. Second, leadership is not only seen in administration and budget management. There are religious matters, especially Islamic law, that they may not understand.

The interview results show that although all Dayah Ulama are highly tolerant and do not feel disturbed by the presence of other religions, this tolerance only applies to worldly affairs, not matters of faith and worship. This dual perception and attitude are based on the fact that there are inevitable “points of convergence” and “points of contention” in interfaith relations. Socio-religious factors themselves shape this perception. Moreover, a religious tradition dominated by one belief (Islam) must be accepted as it is by other communities because it is a social reality in the life of Acehese society. The following are the interview results with the respondent:

“Islam has taught us the meaning of tolerance. Tolerance in Islam applies only to worldly matters (interpersonal relations in worldly affairs), including freedom of religion and practicing religion, not in matters of faith and worship. We are prohibited from insulting or mocking the religious practices of others. This is the form of tolerance taught in the Quran in Surah Al-Kafirun. ‘Your religion is for you, and mine is for me’ (Interview with Teungku Waled Sirajuddin Bin Hanafi, July 24, 2022).

Not only does the Dayah Ulama accept the presence of non-Muslims in Aceh, but they also believe that their existence should be protected and that they should not face intimidation, let alone be compelled towards Islamization activities. From the data, the Dayah Ulama agrees on clauses defining tolerance towards religious diversity. However, they maintain this perspective within the framework of internal Islamic law in Aceh, not based on Western tolerance perspectives. A similar sentiment is expressed by Islamic Ulama Teungku M Yusuf Abdul Wahab in an interview. He explains that all residents living in Aceh must comply with and submit to the applicable Islamic law, and there should be no discrimination, including against non-Muslims. Here are the interview results with the respondent:

“Regarding tolerance towards non-Muslims, there is nothing that makes them uncomfortable due to the implementation of Islamic law. They are protected by Islamic law. Non-Muslims need to respect and appreciate the implementation of Islamic law in Aceh. In practice, for example, if there are cases of violating Islamic law committed by them, they are still given the option to follow civil law or Sharia law. However, most who make mistakes choose to be punished according to Islamic law. There is no pressure in any way, only a request to all residents, including non-Muslims, to respect the enforcement of Islamic law in Aceh. This is a shared consensus” (Interview with Teungku H. M. Yusuf A. Wahab, July 6, 2022).

The data and responses of the respondents above generally show that the Dayah Ulama has no issues with interfaith relations. They do not desire confrontation, let alone violence. However, tension between Islam and Christianity did arise and experienced a slight “shake” in 2015. This was particularly evident in the case of the burning of a church and the closure of several other churches in Singkil. Also, the closure of a church (specifically, a shop converted into a church) in Banda Aceh and Langsa, suspected of lacking permission to establish a place of worship. However, this tension did not immediately ignite religious conflict between Islam and Christianity.

In such cases, Dayah Ulama has different views regarding establishing places of worship. The majority of them agree that non-Muslim religions should preferably establish places of worship in designated areas. About 83.3% of Dayah Ulama agree with this statement, with 70%

agreeing and 13.3% strongly agreeing. None reject this statement, but 16.7% choose to remain neutral. Considering that the neutral stance is low, it is likely to approve establishing places of worship in appropriate locations.

Additionally, the Dayah Ulama accepts that other religious groups should obtain permission before establishing places of worship. Quantitatively, 100% agree with this statement. Another statement they accept is that there should be no intimidation or violence in the construction of places of worship once the permit has been issued. About 86.7% of Islamic Ulama from Dayah agree with this statement (80% agree and 6.7% strongly agree). The remaining 13.3% take a neutral stance but tend to agree with the regulations. The researcher describes the stance of the Dayah Ulama on this issue as moderate-exclusive. Here are the interview results with the respondent:

"What happened in Aceh Singkil in the past is not a matter of intolerance but a matter of miscommunication and the local government's delay in handling and regulating the existence of unlicensed (illegal) places of worship. This is the real root of the problem, triggering horizontal conflicts. The Muslim community has never prohibited the worship of the Christian community, let alone harbored animosity towards them as a religious community. The community only requests the local government to regulate the establishment of churches or places of worship without permits. Moreover, there are indications of apostasy activities causing unrest among Muslim residents there. This also needs to be reviewed to determine whether it occurred or not. We do not want that to happen. We must respect residents who have embraced a religion without forcing them to convert" (Interview with Teungku Bulqaini Tanjongan, July 19, 2022).

From the above interview results, it is understood that Dayah Ulama has a clear concept of tolerance. It is stated, "There is no compulsion in religion, for you, your religion, and for us, our religion. Every religious community is free to practice their worship without intimidation and discrimination. However, a firm point needs to be understood regarding establishing places of worship. Based on the survey data above, most Ulama do not question the origin as long as it is in the right place and has obtained clear permission. It is essential to emphasize that some incidents of intolerance towards places of worship it is alleged to be due to distrust between religious communities. Social relations still harbor suspicions of proselytization or persuasion for religious conversion (apostasy) in society. This suspicion is evident in several incidents – for example, proselytization behind post-conflict or post-earthquake and tsunami aid in 2004. There are indications of Christianization behind that disaster relief. It is not just through social aid; there are also indications of the apostasy process carried out by missionaries and NGOs (Antara News, 2006). For the Muslim residents of Aceh, this is not just about earthquakes and tsunamis but also a creedal tsunami. Thus, this suspicion escalates and accumulates, leading to conflicts.

These concerns are not new in Aceh; they have existed for a long time. Suspicion of minority communities seems to be a driver of tension in Aceh. There is even a commonly heard expression: if the Acehnese do not disturb Islam, everything is fine. However, if they do, it will become a problem. There is no negotiation, especially concerning the dignity of the Muslim community in Aceh. Acehnese expresses this sentiment in Hadih Maja (advice): *meunyo kreuh beu butoi kreuh, beulagee kayee jeut keu tameh rumoh. Meunyo leumoh beu butoi leumoh, beulagee taloe peuikat bubong rumoh* (if you're tough, you have to be very tough, like the wood that becomes

the foundation of a house). If you're gentle, then be very gentle, like the rope that ties the roof of a house. This is the form of tolerance in Aceh.

The values of tolerance for Dayah Ulama are well-known and not foreign or strange concepts. According to them, tolerance is an integral part of Islamic teachings. In more detail, the principle of tolerance towards religious differences can be outlined as follows: first, do not insult any religion, including its God and teachings, and do not disturb its worship rituals. Second, do not demean religious leaders and their followers. Third, do not damage places of worship of any religion. Fourth, do not intimidate, force, or trap followers of another religion to convert to Islam or vice versa. Fifth, assist any religion affected by calamities or oppression. Sixth, engage in transactions, including trade, with followers of any religion in a good and lawful manner for the benefit and progress. Seventh, the rights of any religion should be given without deduction. This is the tolerance towards religious differences for Dayah Ulama. This tolerance is not merely lip service; as Arnold T.W. expressed in his book "The Preaching of Islam" (Arnold, 2002), the Islamic government has set an example of tolerance of beliefs previously unknown in mainland Europe. These facts are revealed by Thomas W.A., an honest orientalist who believes that tolerance has been ingrained in Islam for a long time.

In conclusion, religious tolerance is fundamental to respecting basic human rights. Tolerance is not just a statement but must be translated into societal actions. Tolerance must be built on a shared agreement in the public space. Borrowing the words of Buya Hamka, tolerance is analogized as a foldable garment that can be worn anywhere. Meanwhile, belief is analogized to an unfoldable wardrobe that cannot be carried anywhere indiscriminately. The meaning is that tolerance does not mix one religion with another. Instead, every religious community is allowed to worship according to their beliefs and places of worship. This is the meaning and principle of tolerance towards religious differences for Dayah Ulama.

5. Conclusion

As for the significance of the findings of this research, especially from the qualitative data obtained through interviews, it is evident that, on the one hand, this study confirms some research findings related to the interpretation of Dayah Ulama regarding religious moderation, particularly in terms of tolerance and religious diversity. However, the results of this study contradict previous research findings regarding the growing intolerance in Aceh. Several conclusions can be drawn from the overall interpretation of Dayah Ulama on the narrative of religious moderation. Firstly, the interpretation of Dayah Ulama on the narrative of religious moderation appears dynamic and varied. On one side, most Islamic Ulama quantitatively does not question the narrative of religious moderation, including accepting its derivative concepts such as national values, tolerance, anti-violence, religious freedom, and others. On the other side, it indicates a form of fragmentation in accepting the narrative of religious moderation. They accept certain dimensions while rejecting other aspects of the existing dimensions. They only accept these derivative concepts with an acceptance that leads to the certainty of enforcing Aceh's Islamic law. Secondly, most Dayah Ulama accepts some derivatives of the narrative of religious moderation with prerequisites. The demonstrated attitude must be based on existing regulations. In other words, the fulfillment of minority rights must be regulated based on the perspective of Islamic law and Acehnese customs. Thirdly, conservative and exclusive attitudes seem negotiable, meaning that these attitudes can diminish if the interests of religious beliefs are not disturbed.

6. Acknowledgment

The authors would like to thank Universitas Malikussaleh for moral and material support through the Research Scheme: Non-Tax State Revenue Funds in the University Malikussaleh Budget Implementation List for fiscal year 2022. The authors would also like to thank all informants who have provided information and data during this research.

7. Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors have declared no potential conflicts of interest concerning this article's research, authorship, and/or publication.

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