

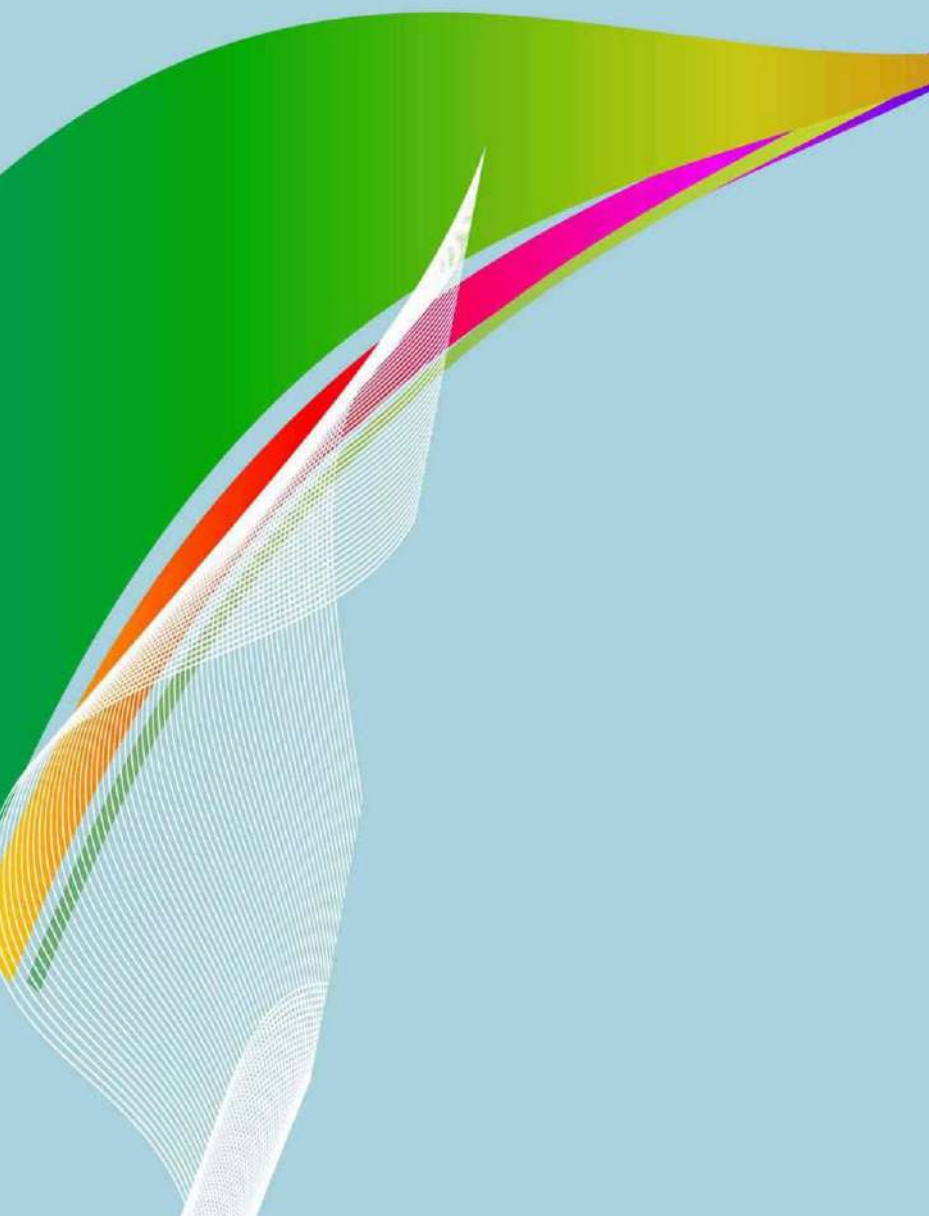
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**Islamic Plurality in the Perspectives of *Ulama Dayah* in Aceh**

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## ISLAMIC PLURALITY IN THE PERSPECTIVES OF ULAMA DAYAH IN ACEH

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### **Abstract**

*This study aimed to explain the views of Ulama Dayah on the plurality of Acehese society. The Acehese, especially the Ulama Dayah (Teungku) are community leaders for the people of Aceh. Ulama Dayah welcome the concept of plurality in the sense of tolerance which they consider sunnatullah. However, if plurality causes disturbance to religious practice in society, it will be rejected, especially if it is contrary to the Ahlussunnah wal Jamaah doctrine which is oriented to the Shafi'i school. This research used a qualitative method with a descriptive-analytic approach. The subjects of this research were the ulama who graduated from dayah represented 12 organizations that manage the dayah community. This study did not specify which areas would be studied, because the data were taken based on interviews with 3 Ulama Dayah representing the dayah community organization. The research procedure was carried out in four steps: observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. The data were analyzed using an inductive model. The results of the study were as follows; First, the impact of Ulama Dayah's thought on plurality in Islamic schools of thought was very important. Second, the role of Ulama Dayah as a reference has actually existed since the days of the Aceh Sultanate. Third, the influence of Ulama Dayah thoughts was also strongly influenced by the number of worshippers. Finally, institutionally, the existence of the Dayah Education Office in Aceh was a liaison between the dayahs and the government in equalizing public perceptions.*

**Keywords:** *Plurality, Ulama Dayah, Frictions Between Sub-Groups of Islam, Aceh.*



## A. Introduction

Plurality is something inevitable in life and by extension, religious practices, and hence it is expected of the religious community to embrace and welcome it as is. The acceptance of plurality will foster a healthy sense of mutual respect and understanding, capitalizing on each other's strengths and encouraging each other to create good in the communities, especially in this case, the Acehnese community (Madjid, 2007).

Aceh is also ethnically diverse, each having its own cultures and languages. Aceh has eight sub-ethnicities namely the ethnic groups of Aceh, Alas, Gayo, Aneuk Jamee, Kluet, Simeulu, Tamiang, and Singkil. The eight sub-ethnicities have distinct cultures from one another. For example, Gayo and Alas are two ethnic groups that occupy the highlands of Aceh namely Southeast and Central Aceh. With such diversities, Aceh has always been a tolerant region since its people, who are ethnically and culturally diverse, have long lived peacefully among one another. The problems, however, arouse when *khilafiyah* issues (issues on which different opinions are legitimately possible) emerged in Aceh, which was deemed as different from the Islamic belief of the majority. It is in these cases that tolerance hardly exists in Aceh and against which fierce opposition took place. To illustrate this point, there had been cases where an Islamic cleric giving khutbah on the stage was asked to stop and descend (this event took place at Masjid Agung Almakmur Banda Aceh), or the assertion of certain procedures regarding stick holding mechanism when giving khutbah at Jumah prayer, and also the take-over of management of a mosque in the Aceh regency of Bireun by the so-called *Ahlussunah wal-jamaah* because it was believed the management had been infiltrated by Wahhabis (Idris & Sahlan, 2018).

In essence, the Ulama Dayah in Aceh highly welcomes plurality. This is evident from the existence of the non-muslim population who co-exist and conduct their activities especially in cities across Aceh. The region of *Peunayong* in Banda Aceh, for example, is a region with a high population of Chinese Buddhist minority groups. There has not been any friction between Islam and Buddhist adherents in the city so far. If anything, members of both religious faiths regularly interact and engage in business transactions.

Likewise, there are also Christians in the heart of the city. There is a church located not far from the Grand Mosque of Baiturrahman. It is, however, when it comes to the implementation of worship practices among the Muslims that disputes or problems occurred. Most notably, the event that took place ahead of Aceh's 2017 gubernatorial election when almost all Ulama Dayah across Aceh took to the street outside the Grand Mosque to protest what they thought to be the intrusion of Wahhabis in the management team of the mosque, which they considered against the teachings of Islam.

Besides, the government which was expected to act as the intermediary between opposing parties turned out to the side with the majority. This is evident in the many decisions they made, for example, one made by the Bireuen ulama council in response to the incident of the burning of the foundation of a mosque in construction that belonged to the Muhammadiyah organization. Eventually, the council demanded that the organization discontinue the mosque construction. This is even though construction was self-funded and those who frequented the mosques did not cause any disturbance to the practices of worship of people who identified as *Ahlussunnah wal-jamaah* (Aswaja) group. This is therefore a serious issue, pointing to the irony that the self-professed religious tolerance did not extend to the tolerance towards other sub-groups of Islam.

That was not the only instance of bias in governmental policies towards the overwhelming majority. Another case in point is the decision reached by Aceh's Sharia Agency in October 2015. The decision was also made in favor of one group without considering the principles of *wasatiyah* (moderation). More specifically, in the decision, the government yielded to the demands made by the Aswaja group concerning the stick holding practice during Friday khutbah. Similarly, the decision of the acting Governor of Aceh declared that only the Aswaja group was allowed to organize Islamic gatherings and talks in Aceh. This phenomenon thus raises the question of whether tolerance exists in Aceh. This has prompted criticism by high-ranking officials at the Indonesian ulama Council.



## B. Method

This type of research is qualitative research, which is a study that is not carried out using statistical formulas and symbols. Qualitative methods can be used to reveal and understand something behind previously unknown phenomena. Thus, the qualitative method in this paper is attempted so that it can be used to describe and at the same time be able to analyze the "Ulama Dayah's View of the Plurality of Acehese Society". The research aims at explaining the findings as objectively as possible through various data collection media. Therefore, this study tends to emphasize the realm of data quality, not just the amount (quantity of data). The general characteristic of qualitative research is that it places more emphasis on quality naturally because it relates to the meaning, concept, values, and characteristics inherent in the object of research. This research is in the form of a phenomenological study that uses the sociology of religion approach and sociology of knowledge. Research in the view of phenomenology means understanding events about people in certain situations. This research is a descriptive-analytic qualitative study on the views of the Ulama Dayah on the plurality of Acehese society.

The descriptive method aims to describe the nature of a phenomenon which is still ongoing at the time this research is implemented and the researcher is still checking the background based on the symptoms caused by certain. This is a method that focuses on *verstehen* (understanding), which is to provide an interpretive definition of one's understanding, especially the Ulama Dayah's view of the plurality of Acehese society. Therefore this perspective focuses on the subjective context of the individual. This path is done so that the Ulama Dayah can provide an attitude and opinion to explore a problem or phenomenon that is being researched. The attitudes and arguments of each individual and group are then obtained through in-dept interviews, this is in order to complement the observation data.

In this case, the researcher tries to enter into the world of understanding of the subjects under study, so that they can understand and understand the dynamics of the Ulama Dayah's understanding of the plurality that has been happening in Acehese society. Furthermore, how do

the Dayah Ulama respond and interpret plurality as a *sunnatullah* in Aceh, so that the researcher gets a complete sketch of the problem points being studied? Data were collected in a word approach, not by numbers through a purposive sampling technique. This method is done by taking the subject not only based on strata, random, or certain areas but factorized on the existence of certain goals that are continuous with the demands and needs of the research.

The study of the Ulama Dayah's views on the plurality of Acehese society specifies informants only to ulama who graduated from the institution or organization that houses the data community they lead. So the informants that the researcher chose were 12 (twelve) scholars, each of whom represented 3 (three) scholars. In principle, what Ulama Dayah respond to, even understand, is usually the response and understanding of Ulama Dayah as a whole who are or join the organization, even their thoughts are at the same time a reference for the community, moreover, the Ulama Dayah are united in an organization that they have established. The Ulama Dayah organization in question is; (1) Ulama Consultative Council (MPU); (2) Nanggroe Aceh Ulama Council (MUNA); (3) The Aceh Ulama Dayah Association (HUDA); (4) Insafuddin Ulama Association.

In practice, research on the views of the Ulama Dayah on the plurality of Acehese society, researchers will first understand the meaning of events and their synchronization with ordinary people in certain situations, by trying to be involved in the conceptual world of the actors being studied so that it can be understood what and how understanding can be developed by them, especially events in everyday life. In this study, expressions which include words, actions, signs, and symbols are expressive of the research subject. It is through express media that researchers can understand the concepts of thought and axiology in the thoughts and views of the Ulama Dayah who lead an organization about the plurality of Acehese society and only through thinking and re-evaluating efforts, with empathy or in the form of imaginative insights, researchers dive into the thoughts and views of the Ulama Dayah.

In this research which area would be researched was not determined, because the data was taken based on interviews with Ulama Dayah under an



organization which was led by Ulama Dayah. The researcher's consideration did not specify the research location because the researchers considered the organization very representative to represent the views or perspectives of the Ulama Dayah or the Dayah community they lead in Aceh. In principle, the thought of the leader or administrator of an organization, in this case, the organization, the dayah community, is the overall view of the organization he leads. In collecting data and data needs, researchers must visit the place where the respondent is located or is domiciled.

## C. Result and Discussion

### 1. Result

#### a. The Concept of Plurality

Plurality is something that everyone has to face as a result of globalization, and religious plurality is no exception. Therefore, plurality has become a challenge that members of religious groups must face in addition to the challenge of modernity. M. Amin Abdullah equates plurality with diversity. Plurality is an objective condition in a society wherein exist several groups of sects who are different from each other in terms of socioeconomic status, ideology, religion, and also ethnicity. (Arifinsyah, 2015)

Royal Ka'ban states that essentially the terms pluralism, monism, and dualism did not derive from religion or Islamic history, but Islam recognizes terms that share similarities in meaning with a plurality. Monism can be compared to monotheism (*tawhid*), one creation, one religion from the beginning through the present, one fate of mankind and the universe. Dualism in Islam has the equivalent of the concept of evil and good or *ma'ruf and munkar*, world and after world, heaven and hell, reward and punishment, etc. Rifyal Ka'ban believes plurality in Islam, among others, can be seen in the diversity of Allah's creation, ethnicities, languages, religion, parties / sects, professions, resources, and law.

According to Nurcholish Madjid, the plurality cannot be understood by saying that Indonesian society is plural and diverse, comprising a wide variety of tribes, ethnicities, races, groups, and religions.



Such a statement will only paint the picture of fragmentation or differences. Plurality can neither be understood as mere *negative good*, which is only viewed as means to abolish fanaticism. Instead, plurality must be viewed as a *genuine engagement of diversities within the bounds of civility* (Madjid, 2000).

Subsequently, Muhammad Imarah explains that plurality is an attitude toward diversity built on the foundation of privilege and uniqueness with distinct qualities. The concept of plurality denotes something not singular, but (*plural*) which signals diversity, heterogeneity, and it cannot be uniformed. In line with the concept of plurality is the concept of pluralism which discusses diversity and plurality within its bounds (Imarah, 1999).

As for the plurality that the author means here is the religious plurality, that is the fact that Aceh is an ethnically diverse region and therefore people in its different sub-groups must have different opinions and beliefs about certain matters, so the Ulama Dayah must be able to understand those differences.

#### b. Ulama Dayah in Aceh

The term *ulama* derived from the Arabic '*ulama* which was then borrowed into Malay. The Arabic term is a derivative of '*alima-ya'lamu-ilman* which means '*arafa* or know. A knowledgeable person is therefore called '*ālimun*, and the plural form of the word '*alima* is '*ulama*. On a related note, a person with a huge amount of knowledge is called *al-'allamah* in Arabic. One may be called '*ālim* or '*alīm* if he/she possessed a lot of knowledge. On the other hand, the word *al'allamah* denotes the sense of superior knowledge, which was derived from the verb '*alima* which means know (Sufyan & Che Pa, 2013).

*Ulama* means people with knowledge or also known as scholars. According to Taufiq Abdullah, the term *ulama* used in Indonesia has shifted in meaning from the original Arabic term. In Indonesia, '*ālim* is understood as someone who is honest and does not speak much (Abdullah, et al, 1988) In a general sense, *ulama* means people who are smart, knowledgeable, prominent, and respectable especially about their



knowledge. Subsequently, the term is associated with Islam. This is understandable since the word *ulama* comes from Arabic which is then linked to Islam (Iskandar; et al, 2000).

In the Acehese community, *ulama* has respectable positions among the people. They are obeyed, esteemed, and they are regarded as models / exemplars. People would obey their fatwas (official statement or order) more than those of the government officials. *Ulama*, particularly those who run *Dayah* institutions, feel that they are placed with a bigger responsibility to strengthen the religious practices of their community members and beyond. Through their students, the *ulama* spread Islamic knowledge widely across the region. The visionary *ulama* deals with gaps in the religious practices of the people and takes these issues seriously and even thinks that it is their calling to resolve them. (Ismuha; et al, 1980) It is a must to acknowledge the social presence of *ulama* among the Islamic community, especially in Aceh where *ulama* have always been highly honoured and respected. The advice and morale spread by the *ulama* carry philosophical meanings which affect the souls of the community members. To the people, *ulama* is not merely teachers, but they have always been the ones who mobilize people to strive in the way of God and to lead wars against colonizers (Kurdi, 2009).

In general, M. Dawam Rahardjo outlines the characteristics of *ulama*, namely those responsible to maintain the religious tradition, who have advanced knowledge of Islamic jurisprudence (*Fiqh*), and those who organize the implementation of *Fiqh* law (Rahardjo, 1996). Therefore, the term *ulama* is not obtained through some formal process but public acknowledgment. This acknowledgment is obtained after a lengthy process where one's *ulama*-like qualities such as integrity, possession of superior knowledge, credibility, moral piety, and social responsibility have been publicly proven and indisputable. Those aforementioned characteristics are not manifested if they are not accompanied by the display of worthy qualities (Rahardjo, 1996).

These characteristics generally influence their charisma and figures in the view of their students / disciples. In Aceh, *Ulama Dayah*, otherwise called

'*Teungku*', are highly respected and esteemed and people would consult them concerning issues in their lives. *Tengku* has considerable influence not only on the community in general but also on their disciples (*dayah students*) who have studied or are studying under their guidance. Their students idealize and show great reverence for them. They hold them in higher regard than any other kind of social position in the Acehnese community. The following are the reasons why their students show great respect for them:

*First*, their popularity and possession of profound knowledge on Islam hold a special appeal for their students. Although some of them may live far away from where their *Teungku* lives, these students stay committed to studying with them for a long period. *Secondly*, most *Teungku* set up their Dayah far away from where the community lives. Sometimes they face a shortage of places of residence to accommodate their students. That is why they always set up chambers at their Dayah.

*Thirds*, there is a strong emotional connection between a *Teungku* and their students and it goes both ways. A *Teungku* would consider their students as their children and similarly to the students, *tengku* are like their own parents. *Fourth*, the availability of places of residence is beneficial for the students. This arrangement allows them to concentrate on their studies throughout the day. This even contributes to the shaping up of their personality about social manners and interactions with one another in their Dayah. The lessons they learned during their studies can be directly put into practice in their daily life in Dayah environment. So, not only do they *know* but also *live* the knowledge (Haedari, et. al, 2005). *Fifth*, living communally in Dayah fosters a sense of togetherness among junior and senior students. This is especially true in Dayah where senior students who have been trusted by *Tengku* to teach their classes (become *Teungku seumeubeuet*) can interact directly with their beginning-level juniors. This in turn creates a sense of togetherness and mutual respect.

*Teungku* is a key element and plays an important part in the establishment, growth, development, and management of a Dayah. In smaller Dayah, *Tengku* who established a Dayah is subsequently called Ulama Dayah, while the *Tengku* who teach classes are called Dayah *Tengku*. Therefore, in their capacity for Dayah



leadership, the success of Teungku in managing a Dayah will heavily depend on their expertise and the depth of their knowledge, their charisma and influence / authority, as well as a wide range of skills they have, but most importantly depends on how much they are trusted and regarded as exemplars in the broader community. Therefore, the personality of the head of Dayah is a determining factor since they are a central element in the institution (Hasbullah, 1999).

*Teungku* with their religious authority and popularity as well as their Dayah, therefore, become the places where the community pin their hopes for the improvement of their and their children's Islamic knowledge. *Teungku* becomes the go-to people from whom many Acehese youths pursue Islamic knowledge. For that very reason, the Ulama Dayah provided *bilék-bilé* (rooms/ chambers) in dormitories to accommodate students who study with them. Besides, *bilék* is also a special feature of traditional dayah in Aceh (Dhofier, 1982).

In the actual Acehese tradition, one can be called *Teungku*, *asulama* in Aceh are so-called, once they have studied in Dayah located outside of their villages. Dayah students are also encouraged to visit and circulate among many other dayah to build a social and intellectual network or as means to achieve 'maturity'. In addition, usually Ulama Dayah whom *aneuk dayah* (Dayah students) first sought knowledge from would recommend their students to continue their studies with other *Teungku* and this has been a common practice for the purpose of developing the students' knowledge (Darwis A. Soelaiman, 2008). Ulama Dayah have long existed in Aceh, dating as long back as the colonial period in Indonesia.

In the Acehese community, Dayah graduates are highly influential among members of the community and often serve as people the community relies on, especially to understand and consult about religious matters comprehensively. The community would listen to them and often think of them as people who could help them better connect with their Creator. All aforementioned contribution is basically how Ulama Dayah renders their services to the betterment of religion and the nation. This is intimately linked to the teaching of character incorporated in Dayah curriculum in the past, which aimed at developing striving and spirituality spirit.

## 2. Discussion

### a. The Plurality Features of Ulama Dayah in Aceh

Despite the reality that Acehnese is a society with culturally homogeneous and diverse, also with various ethnicities, cultures, languages, and religions, the Acehnese is remained to attach to one solid bond, namely Islam (Amiruddin, 2008). Therefore, Aceh is not solely belonging to one ethnicity, but all the ethnic groups who dwell there. Hence, all the policies which are implemented and decided by the Aceh Government must be built upon the spirit of plurality and heterogeneity, so that everyone has a sense of inclusion in the decisions and policies without feeling any exclusion (Fikri, 2015).

In Acehnese culture, Islam has become the view and way of life. Therefore, between the culture and Islam from a complete unity that inextricably links together. Even in the Acehnese proverb or *hadih maja* this idea is known as *hukôm ngon adat, lagèe zat ngon sipheuët* (religion and culture like a substance which cannot be separated from one another). In any circumstances, between *adat* (custom), *qanun* (law of the land), and *reusam* (protocol power) are cannot be separated and has become the law which is interpreted as Islamic teachings. The custom and Islam form a harmonization that is inextricably interwoven with Acehnese culture. Most of the Acehnese embrace Islam as their religion and implement *shari'a* as their law.

In assessing any phenomenon, including plurality issues, the MPU (The consultative Council of ulama) of Aceh possesses three authorities. First, issuing the *fatwa* (religious ruling), second, suggesting certain rules to the government, and third, a cadre of scholars. In regards to settling the plurality issues as not to spread over the unwanted way, one of the efforts taken by MPU of Aceh was providing the criteria of deviant sects that were developed in Aceh, so that, the plurality friction among society can be prevented. Furthermore, the MPU emphasized that all their *fatwas* are welcomed by the Acehnese people. Other *fatwas* would only be issued in an urgent circumstance, if it is un-urgent, then it was just for the persuasive purpose (Muhammad, et. al, 2006).



There are variations in religions that are embraced by humans are also part of the meaning of plurality. Therefore, in its development, there are what is known as *samawi* religion (a divine religion that culminates in monotheism) and *ardhi* religion (created by humans) which is more towards pantheism and pluralism. This is none but part of *sunnatullah*. However, the Moslem should not admit other religions as the right one, as this will damage the Moslem *aqeedah* (faith), the truth is only one, that is the religion of Islam that was conveyed by the prophet Muhammad, PBUH.

In fact, since pre-Islamic times there have been various thoughts or concepts about religious truth, even though limited to the religion that applies to a people or the prevailing religion at that time only, whether it is the religion of God or a religion that is worshiped by the people in a certain place or situation (Saleh, et. al, 2007). This concept is in line with the story of the Prophet Muhammad, where there is no tolerance in faith as in surah al-Kāfirūn: "*For you is your religion, and for me is my religion*".

Regarding the Ulama Dayah's view of plurality, the writer then tries to quote some of the opinions of the Ulama Dayah whom the author interviewed, including what Tu Bulqaini said,

*"We admit that there are various religions, but it is necessary to know that all the divine religions are the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad so that various divine ideologies must depart from the awareness of the divine religion, namely Islam. It is not allowed to assume all religions are true. So, plurality is the existence of various religions that we admit, but only one true religion, namely Islam brought by the Prophet Muhammad, PBUH"*.

Another Ulama Dayah, Tgk Sofyan who is an Ulama Dayah from the Nanggroë Aceh Ulama Council (MUNA), argues that,

*"Plurality is freedom of opinion, but there are still rules. Surah al-Kāfirūn, for example, is one of the surahs in the Koran which states and supports plurality, as well as the verse which describes humans living in various tribes and nationalities and getting to know each other"*.

Another view was delivered by Tgk. Muhibban M. Hajat, who is Ulama from the Aceh Ulama Dayah Association (HUDA), Tgk. Muhib explained,

*"Plurality is one of the legal sides of Islam in Indonesia and is pure and true. This would be possible if only the plurality itself is still in the proper*

*way then it certainly fair. Bear in mind that this is limited to the concept sunnatullah only, but when Islam came, this would be expired and only Islam was recognized as the only truth".*

Abu Daud Zamzami, who is a Ulama Dayah representing the Ulama Consultative Assembly (MPU), firmly forbids pluralism in reference to the MUI decision. However, regarding plurality, He said,

*"I can understand plurality, and plurality is God's decree in the form of sunnatullah. If Allah SWT has determined, then it is final, there is no need to make a big deal out of it".*

Based on the above statement, it can be seen that the Ulama Dayah in Aceh view plurality as a dynamic issue, a *sunnatullah* that should not be questioned anymore. However, this must remain on the right path, which means the meaning of it does not shift and is still based on the values in the Islamic teachings. Likewise, regarding the issue of *aqeedah* and differences in *mazhab* (school of thought) related to plurality, Ulama Dayah has the same opinion. They agree with the plurality in *aqeedah* and *mazhab*, but still within the scope of *ahlussunnah wal jama'ah* (a Sunni Islamic sect / the people of the sunnah and the majority) and submit to the school of thought that are *mu'tabar* (most considered).

#### b. Plurality and Frictions among Subgroups of Islam in Aceh

Ulama Dayah generally view plurality as *sunnatullah*. It is something inevitable but also must remain in line with the prominent schools of thought of Islam. Islamic legislation may change with time. For example, ulama Council and Sharia Agency of Aceh has banned branches of Islam such as Shia, Wahhabism and Salafism. According to the prominent officials in the Islamic organizations, the three said branches are considered heretical. This view is shared by Ulama Dayah who also contributes to Shafi'i school.

Supporting to a certain school of thought is a part that constitutes the diversity and plurality of a nation. This diversity in culture, religion, and differences in the outcome of the existence of a state (Muhammad, 2018). Essentially, Aceh had become a diverse region since its kingdom period. This is evident in the composition of the population comprising various



ethnicities and tribes. One can see the distribution of the population by its sub-regions. Members of certain groups also move somewhere else and thus fusion and even assimilation take place. The population in Aceh is growing and becoming increasingly diverse, people moving in and out of regions and they would usually form some kinds of native communities as a place to get together. However, this practice is considered normal by the locals given the fact that people in other regions also engage in that kind of practice (forming a community as a way to get together).

Concerning the development of mazhab in Aceh, Ulama Dayah thinks that it is still under control. They believe it is developing very well. This opinion is shared by all Ulama Dayah in Aceh. This is in line with the statement of Tgk. M. Daud Zamzami, Deputy Head of Aceh ulama Council. According to him,

*"Madhab issues are still under control in Aceh. We will continue to monitor issues emerging in the community".*

On the other occasion, on a similar yet stricter note, Tu Bulqaini declared the community mazhab is shaping up well and very much under control. He added,

*"Aceh will remain to be under the group of Ahlussunnah wal-jama'ah. This decision has been agreed upon by ulama for a long time" There is no room for any madhab other than ones that hold on to Ahlussunnah wal-jama'ah. That is why we have always said that the issue of madhab in Aceh is final. We will continue to monitor it. In case we find any practice that deviates from the creed of Ahlussunnah wal-jama'ah, we will have it corrected".*

On another occasion, Tgk. Muhammad Yusuf Abdul Wahab or otherwise known as Tu Sop regarded sectarian differences in Islam as normal as long as members of each group are not attacking each other. Tu Sop believes that differences are rahmat (mercy) and he encouraged people to support each other despite their differences. Tu Sop likened the Moslem community in Aceh to parts that make up a car. They are all different parts, but they support each other. He also added,

*"We want that in Aceh we are practicing Islam just as what the Prophet taught, no disputes involved. We want everyone to be on the straight path,*



*which someday will lead us to heaven instead of hell. For that reason, the Prophet taught us to always follow his path and that of his companions (mā ana 'alaihi wa ashābi) and this is what Ahlussunnah wal-jama'ah was built on".*

To the Moslem community, Islam is the most perfect religion, revealed to Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) to serve as a guide in life to achieve happiness in this world and the hereafter. This religion is viewed and believed to be the greatest and most perfect religion. Its perfection is seen and proven through its comprehensive and perfect Holy Book, and one that covers all issues. Such a view contributes to the great resistance against the critical stance taken on the text and its interpretation and innovation on Islamic teaching on which they believe neither modification nor update is possible (Harahap, 2015).

Regarding the frictions between subgroups of Islam in Aceh, he stated it is something inevitable considering the majority of laypeople believe that any following of legal school other than the Shafi'i school is considered 'haram. Likewise, is the statement of Lem Faisal, in which he said,

*"The way people at the grassroots level react to such differences is to be expected. People with higher levels of Islamic knowledge generally do not take issue with such differences. The frictions, however, often occur with people at the grassroots level. Such a phenomenon is regrettable since it can put Aceh at risk, as a result of which uninvited irresponsible parties may sneak in and target the 'vulnerable' Aceh. Eventually, it is those very people at the grassroots level that would fall prey to the intruders' will".*

Similarly, he believed that those differences (sub-groups of Islam in Aceh) just cannot be uninformed, but the social phenomena in response to such differences paint a different picture. For example, the issues of plurality in Aceh are a result of the looseness or gap between sub-groups of Islam in Aceh, such as the polemics between Ahlussunnah wal-jama'ah group and the group claimed to follow Wahhabism. Those kinds of issues have been around for a long time among the Acehnese community with predominantly Dayah backgrounds. These issues had grown in force under the government of Muzakkir Manaf (then Aceh Vice Governor) which was backed up to win the subsequent election for the gubernatorial position (Idris & Sahlan, 2018). A



huge protest took place at Baiturrahman Grand Mosque on September 11 of 2015 under religious pretense but it was meant to indicate the unity of two groups with political interests in Aceh at that time.

The meeting of the two groups had intensified at some point during that time. The Aswaja group was seeking religious authority and Mualem was out to win the 2017 gubernatorial election. Political motives aside, the dispute between Aswaja group and Wahhabism did not stop there. It was shown that although the election period had lasted, the two groups were still at odds with each other. The Moslem community in Aceh was split into two major groups: the Dayah community with the Aswaja backgrounds and the UIN Ar-Raniry group which was unilaterally claimed to be the home of the Wahhabis (Zulkarnain, 2015)

In October 2017, a foundation of a mosque under construction in the regency of Bireuen (Aceh) was burned by a group of people. That mosque belonged to the Muhammadiyah organization. It was constructed in the morning and it was burned in the evening of the same day. The perpetrators were still at large up to this moment. The reasons most commonly mentioned were that the burning was the result of the disputes between the Muhammadiyah and Dayah (Aswaja) groups. When two groups were embroiled in the dispute, the third neutral and wise party must be present to mediate between them. In Aceh, such a third party is the Aceh ulama Council. Bireuën ulama Council ruled that Muhammadiyah must discontinue the mosque construction (Zulkarnain, 2015).

The disputes between both groups did not stop there. In October 2015, the public was engaged with the dispute about the difference in worship procedures especially one that relates to Friday prayer. Many khatibs (sermon preachers) who deviated from the practices in line with that of the Aswaja group were demanded to descend the pulpit, even in the middle of the khutbah. Such differences in details (khilafiyah) were claimed to be coming from Wahhabism which must be eliminated. This phenomenon had prompted discussions among relevant authoritative agencies in Aceh such as the ulama Council and Sharia Agency and yet again the decision they came to was in favor of the Aswaja group.



Oddly, the claim about the Wahhabism being heretical was still at the level of definition. The group was labeled heretical unilaterally without any agreement to discuss about their differences harmoniously. Aceh requires the media to bridge the issues among those sub-groups so the dispute does not last forever (Zulkarnain, 2015) The Islamic legal authorities should have become just intermediaries between disputing parties. Yet so far, they had favored one group (Aswaja) since it is considered they are the group in the majority.

In Indonesia, debates about school issues often arise, even to the point of disputes. Given the various scientific disciplines of ulama, various schools of thought also have emerged in Islam. The revival of religion in several countries was also accompanied by the emergence of schools that were integrated with the strengthening of ethnic identity (ethnic religion). For those quarrelsome groups on the grounds of different beliefs, they are also accustomed to conflicts within their internal community on the grounds of different schools of thought. Even among Muslims themselves, some schools undoubtedly disbelieve others, even to the extent of justifying the blood of their brother or killing in the name of jihad. Without realizing it, in an increasingly diverse world, there is more and more chaos caused by mazhab conflicts and even religious conflicts.

Aceh is a strategic region in Indonesia to implement Islamic law. Therefore, Aceh should manage to dodge things that can ignite the conflicts like differences in religious understanding, the sensitivity of *khilafiyah*, and accusing others to be misled. The groups who ignite "the fire" and "play" at this issue are supposed to be aware that non-Muslim groups will fully understand that this situation could weaken Islam, let alone they were strengthened by group fanaticism within the community itself (Syah, 2016).

In Islamic life, especially Islam in Aceh, the problem of *mazhab* often occurs in disputes. All Ulama Dayah reject the existence of schools other than those that are *mu'tabar*, namely Hanafiyah, Malikiyah, Syafi'iyah, and Hambaliyah. However, of the four schools of thought, it was the Syafi'i school that was agreed upon to be implemented by the ulama in Aceh. This does not reject the existence of schools that are *mu'tabar* other than Syafi'i, but the scholars agreed that the Syafi'i mazhab should be chosen so that



the implementation of worship in Aceh does not overlap, there is uniformity in its implementation. According to Tu Bulqaini (Miswar, 2017):

*“No one to forbid the Acehnese from following these four schools of thought, but the ulamas have agreed (since Aceh became sovereign region) that Shafi'i school is the only one that must be followed. However, the ulama also did not deny the existence of other mu'tabar schools such as Hanafi, Maliki, and Hambali, but the practice should not be in public areas and has to be performed privately. This is because there is a concern that ordinary people will fail to understand, let alone if then they will think the practice is deviant. Those four schools are also ahlussunnah wal jama'ah and the differences that occur among them are only in terms of ijtihadiyah, especially in the issue of furu'iyah. Therefore, it is considered unwise if one mislead another”.*

#### **D. Conclusion**

The role of Dayah in thinking about the concept of plurality in Aceh is very important because the figure of Ulama Dayah becomes a reference for the community for various questions in addressing life problems. The existence of Ulama Dayah as a historical reference has existed since the days of the Aceh Sultanate. Ulama at that time was used as advisors to the Sultan to set the rules. At present, the influence of Ulama Dayah's thinking is also greatly influenced by the number of worshipers. This is of course in line with the increasing number of dayah in Aceh. In addition, Aceh is the only province in Indonesia that has a Dayah Education Agency that specifically manages and links of Dayah with the government institutionally. Thus, in terms of addressing the practice of plurality in Islam, the people of Aceh, in general, will regard the Ulama Dayah as a benchmark and reference without exception. Therefore, the role of Ulama Dayah should be a peacemaker and conciliator in solving various problems in society. Thus, the people of Aceh under the auspices of Ulama Dayah can become a peaceful society.

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