A CURRENT PORTRAIT OF
ISLAMIC EDUCATION IN ACEH

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ABSTRACT

There have been many studies on Islamic education in Aceh, especially among traditional institutions. However, the new coming of ustadh from Java has led to social dynamics in the province. This paper aims to examine the contemporary of Islamic authority in education in Aceh, Indonesia. It will focus with two social concepts and their role in society. It is based from fieldwork in Aceh in several areas. It is argued that there is a change of Islamic authority in the society in which the ustadh plays more important role in education than teungku. Meanwhile, the teungkuses are more interested in political arena.

Keywords: Aceh; Islamic education; Teungku; Ustadh; Terrorist

INTRODUCTION

This paper discusses the socio-cultural context of Islamic education in Aceh. It will focus on the changes in religious authority in the Acehnese community, that is, from the figure of the teungku to the ustadh. It has been widely argued that authority in Islamic education in Aceh is held by traditional Islamic religious leaders called teungku. They play important roles not only in the dayah (Islamic boarding school), or religious schools, in the reproduction of ‘ulamā’, but also as guardians of Acehnese society.

However, in the everyday life of Islam in Aceh, some teungku also play major roles in society and politics rather than just in Islamic education. Ustadh, on the other hand, means guru (teacher). They play important roles not only in Islamic boarding schools (pondok modern), but also as religious preachers (jurū dakwah). Both teungku and ustadh are commonly used terms in Aceh.

However, in the last two decades, the name ustadh became more accepted by the Acehnese people. It is said that “the modern dayah was first established in 1983, the Dayah of ‘Ullumul Qur’an – Bustanul ‘Ulum,’ in
Langsa, East Aceh.” The student who is graduated from this pesantren at the level of junior high school or Madrasah Tsanawiyah (junior high school) is called santri, while the santri in the dayah we preferred to call our teachers ustađh, not teungku. Many of them had graduated from pesantren in Java. In contrast, during the conflict in Aceh (1976-2005) the teungku who formerly concerned themselves exclusively with religious matters, were being used by members of GAM (Free Achenese Movement), especially at the district (Panglima Wilayah) and sub-district levels (Panglima Sagoe).

MATERIALS AND METHODS
This paper is basically a fieldwork study conducted in several pesantrens in different areas in Aceh. Therefore, the data used in this study are that of obtained from observation and interviews. In addition, to support those data, this study also benefit from library studies relevant to the issue under discussion. As for the method, this paper utilizes a socio-anthropological approach. That is to say that this paper does not merely portray Islamic educational system in theoretical manner. Rather, it also observes the socio-cultural background of situation leading to changing view of teacher in Muslim society. In other words, this study attempts at describing social perception of ustađh, teacher, which changes from one period to another.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION
A. The Local ‘Ulama’: Teungku
In Aceh, ‘ulamā have played a major role since the coming of Islam until its joining with the Republic of Indonesia at independence. During the period of the Islamic kingdom they were employed as special advisors to the Kings and Queens. In the era of the wars with the Dutch they were seen as heroes who employed the ideology of jihād against the Dutch. Historically,

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rebellion against Indonesian government after independence was run by the ‘ulamā, especially following the declaration of Darul Islām in the 1950s. All of these actions were not centralized from the palace of the Islamic Kingdom, but from the many dayahs in Aceh.⁵ According to Yusny Saby, “Those ‘ulamā” who stand out for their lasting contributions in shaping the religious and cultural values of the Acehnese society are [...] – the “‘ulamā” of Pasai; of Aceh Darussalam; of the Prang Sabil (Jihad Struggle); and the reformist “‘ulamā” of PUSA (All Aceh “‘ulamā” Association).”⁶

In Aceh, apart from the term teungku, the ‘ulamā is also referred to by the terms Abū and Abon. There is a hierarchy in this system. The highest ‘ulamā is called the Abū (father) and is associated with that village, for example, Abu Tanoh Mirah, Abu Awe Geutah, Abu Tanoh Abe, etc. In this context, the name is related to the land where they control the religious aspects of society.⁷ It can be added that the Acehnese also call Abu the Teungku Chik, who is normally the head of dayah. His job is “deciding the curriculum and methodology to be used in the establishment”⁸ of the dayah. Generally speaking, the education system of the dayah is the same as those Islamic schools known as pesantren in Java,⁹ Surau in Padang,¹⁰ and Pondok in Malaysia,¹¹ and Ponoh in Southern Thailand.¹² Thus, the role of the Teungku Chik is similar to the position of the Kiai in pesantren.¹³

The role of the Abu Chik or Teungku Chik is not restricted to the dayah, but he is also regarded as a spiritual leader for the society. For

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¹³ Dhoifler, Tradisi Pesantren; Ronald Lukens-Bull, A Peaceful Jihad: Negotiating Identity and Modernity in Muslim Java (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); Haroko HoriKoshi, Kyai Dan Perubahan Sosial (Jakarta: P3M, 1987); Rahardjo, “The Kyai, the Pesantren and the Village.”
example, he would frequently be invited to government ceremonies, or visited by new Military Commanders (Panglima) to get their blessing as part of the silaturrahmi. Some Abu Chik are also involved in the political arena, especially in the most recent local elections in 2009. They established a party called PDA (Partai Daulah Aceh). However, the position of the Teungku Chik is more similar to that of the spiritual leader in the Shi‘ite sect. During the conflict, they played a role as mediators between the Indonesian military and GAM. In addition, in one dayah in Aceh Besar one Abu guaranteed the safety of some GAM members who had surrendered to the government.

Some Abu Chik are also called Shaykh. In some dayahs, especially in South Aceh, suluk (spiritual Islamic mysticism) is held during Ramadhan. If there is no Shaykh or tarekat in such dayah some senior santris will perform a khalwad (retreat), a 45-day meditation near some great ‘ulama’s tomb or in very dark room near the dayah. There is another spiritual retreat in Aceh which is called Salek Buta, a form of spiritual meditation where “there is no teacher” during a “meeting” with Allāh. Some believe that this is a part of the teaching of waḥdat al-wujūd (mystical union) which originally came from Ibn ‘Arabi.

The teungku who works under the Abu Chik or Teungku Chik is known as the Teungku Bale. Academically, this group of teungku has a role that is similar to that of the ustādh in ‘dayah modern.’ This level is almost same as Senior High School. The santri study from Teungku Bale in the small-hall of the dayah. The Teungku Bale also represents the Abu Chik or Teungku Chik in some community ceremonies. They act as leaders of prayers in the dayah, giving the khutbah (preaching), and reciting du’a (prayer) in some kenduris or slametan. Some chosen Teungku Bale marry with the daughters of the Abu Chik. This is seen as a signal that this Teungku will become a leader of the dayah if the Teungku Chik passes away. Or, the Teungku Bale is asked to establish his own dayah or to stay at the dayah for the rest of his life. The networks of the Teungku Bale are a

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new generation of leadership in dayah. For example, there is an intellectual network of Dayah Mudi Mesra in Lamno (Aceh Jaya), Dayah Mesjid Raya in Samalanga (Aceh Jeumpa), and Dayah Awe Geutah (Aceh Jeumpa).

Next to the Teungku Bale is the Teungku Rangkang. The rangkang level is similar to the level of junior high school. The group of Teungku Rangkang is selected from the santris who act as “assistants” to the Teungku Bale. They will study Islam from the Teungku Rangkang or even the Teungku Chik once a week. In this category, the santri studies the Kitab Kuning (“Yellow Books”) written in the Jawi script. In fact, this group does not have any authority in dayah, except as “assistants” to the Tengku Bale. However, some Teungku Rangkang will achieve the position of Teungku Bale due to their progress and loyalty to the system.

Next is the teungku meunasah. His tasks are not in the dayah, but in the gampong (village). The meunasah is a place where children study Islam and which is also used as a place for prayers. At this level children “are taught how to read and write Arabic, to recite al-Quran, to perform ṣalāt (prayer), akhlaq (morals), Islamic history, pillars of faith and to sing religious songs every Thursday night.”20 However, the job of the teungku meunasah is not only in teaching Islam, but he also plays a major role as a shaykh for the villagers. It is a must for the teungku meunasah to make himself available for the people’s needs in religious affairs. He acts as a “problem solver” with the head of the village to solve problems in society, for example personal conflicts, religious festivals, wedding parties, and welcoming guests. The Teungku meunasah will work together with the geusyik (chief of village). It is argued that the teungku meunasah and geusyik are together the guardians of the village. However, the selection of the teungku meunasah is due to the quality of his Islamic knowledge and charisma. The head of the village is chosen through the system of elections.

Villages where there is not a single man who has studied at a dayah will face many internal problems. That is why some elders will agree to let their girls be married to men from a dayah, with the aim that he could stay at the gampong to become a teungku meunasah. This practice can no longer be found in the urban areas in Aceh. In some traditional gampongs, parents prefer to send their children to dayah. One parent informed me that he would not hesitate about the career of their children, since he believed that the problem was under the direction of Allāh.

Besides the three teungkus, there are also other teungkus who are well-known outside the dayah. For example, Acehnese who lives outside Aceh may be called Teungku Aceh. This nickname means the person can be a local shaykh. He might be offered to be an īmām (leader) during prayers, as it is believed that every Acehnese can recite the al-Quran. We have heard

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the term *teungku Aceh* used in Java. During the conflict, when some Acehnese moved out of Aceh and became part of a “ganja mafia,” some people referred to them as *Teungku Aceh*. The name *teungku* has also been used for members of GAM who had some prominent position in the movement. This group of *teungku*, however, owes their position not to Islamic religious knowledge, but to their ideology. For example, the grandfather of the leader of GAM, Hasan di Tiro, was called *Teungku Chik di Tiro* where his real name is Mohd. Saman. While the charismatic leader of DI/TII was formally known as Daud Beureueh, the common people referred to him as *Abu Beureueh*. The former head of GAM, Dr. Hasan di Tiro, was called *Dr. Teungku Hasan di Tiro*, not *Abu Di Tiro* or *Teungku Chik Hasan di Tiro*. Thus, some people believe that the name *teungku* signifies a more traditional title in Aceh, not a religious title. For example, the former *Panglimas* of GAM are called *teungku*, such as *Teungku Abdullah Syafi'i* (the former Chief Military of GAM) and *Teungku Muzakir Manaf*.

B. The Outsider ‘Ulama: Ustadh

This section refers to some of informal interviews and observations during the fieldwork in Aceh. In the field, we were able to conduct an “I witness” study of the *pesantren* system run by the *Jamā’ah Tabligh* (JT). Here, many of the *ustadhs* were from Java, final year *santri* at a *pesantren* in Central Java. They were sent by their *ki ai* to Aceh to teach Islamic Studies at the *pesantren* of the *JT*. Most of these *ustadhs* were only in their 20s. Originally, the *santris* were from Aceh. However, there were also some *santris* from outside Aceh, including from from Makassar.

The *ustadhs* shared with me their experiences when they arrived in Aceh. At the beginning, many of them were rejected as *santris* because they were Javanese. After one or two years, some *ustadhs* went back to Java to continue their studies in order to achieve the title of ‘ulamā’. They said that one of the requirements to achieve the title was to read the *Ṣāḥīḥ al-

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25 On Kyai see Rahardjo, “The Kyai, the Pesantren and the Village.”
Bukhārī and Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim in front of the kiai. However, some of them also married with local women or mastūrat (female karkun). In fact, this network and their education system has developed into a new religious identity in Aceh.

There is also another image of ustād in the pesantren. This ustād was an Achenese who had graduated from a pondok in Yala. He could speak Thai. He said that many Tablighists who had returned from Yala should stay in the markaz (headquarter) to teach santri how to memorize the al-Quran. This ustād married the daughter of the Teungku Imuem (the head of imām for daily prayers) of this mosque. He was given a land of paddy-field by his parents-in-law for his daily needs. Beside this, the ustād also visited some pesantren in Banda Aceh to teach students how to memorize the al-Quran.

Another picture of Javanese ustād is found in a pesantren in a mosque in North Aceh. The ustāds there were also very young. They had come to Aceh not through Tablighist connections. Many of them were sent from Java through the ‘Sunnah Connection’ after the Tsunami in Aceh in 2004. What we mean by the ‘Sunnah Connection’ is an Islamic community in North Aceh who declared themselves not to be affiliated with any Islamic mazhab (school of thought). This group tends to be the same as the Muhammadiyah movement. Nevertheless, the group is not part of the Muhammadiyah network at all. The ustāds came from Java in 2005 to teach memorizing the al-Quran. The ‘Sunnah Connection’ provided them with hospitality at the mosque. They are paid on a voluntary basis by the group. The group asked their children to study the al-Quran at the mosque. One of their dreams is to send their children to higher education that focuses on memorizing the al-Quran.

Besides their duties as teachers, many of ustāds also acted as imams for daily prayers. The members of the local community liked them very much due to their voices when they recited the al-Quran during the prayer. After the Tsunami in 2004, the teungku imuem in this mosque was an Acehnese. But recently, he preferred to transfer his authority as imām to ustād. In fact, before the Tsunami, there was a circle for Islamic studies in the community which was also given by an Acehnese ustād. They will invite a ustād from another village who is likely to be not affiliated with any mazhab. Thus, the ustāds are teachers at junior or senior high schools in North Aceh. They may not invite any of Teungku from the dayah. Every Saturday night, the community holds religious studies after the ‘Ishā’

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prayer. In this informal religious circle, the Javanese *ustād* will not give any lessons as they are very young. Indeed, their job is to be teachers for the children and *imām* during prayers.

This group of *ustādhs* is coordinated under some local ‘ulamā who have graduated from the Middle East. They have regular meetings in one district to evaluate their mission. In this “Sunnah Connection,” the role of the *Teungku* would not be found. It seems that this system is likely to be the system of caderization that developed in secular campuses during the Islamic revivalism of the 1970s and 1980s. At the top of this network, there is an *ustād* who acts as the ‘Grand *Ustād*. He visits this group regularly to give lectures, not only for the *ustādhs* but also for all the members of the group. The *Grand Ustād* said that he needed to focus on the theological problems (‘aqīdah) for the *santri* and the community in order not to be seen as being linked to Jihadist movements. During his visit, he will also evaluate the system of caderization. The *Grand Ustād* has very close connections with some charitable foundations in the Middle East.

However, a local Acehnese-*ustād* said that he was concerned whether the Javanese-*ustād* were giving lessons on *jihad* to the *santri*. This is because on February 2010 there was a sudden attack of a terrorist group in Aceh, near the mountain of Seulawah. One member of the caravan of *ustād* among the ‘Sunnah Connection’ was arrested by the police in this village. He was not an *ustād*, but very close to the group. Some *ustād* who have taught *jihad* to students have moved from this village.

There are some possibilities why the local community likes the caravan *ustād* from Java. Members of the community are keen to have their children able to memorize the al-Qur‘an. Some parents want to send their children to special schools in the Middle East or South Asia. There have been some of them were actually sent to the Middle East or South Asia to learn about the al-Qur‘an. The arrangements for this are made totally through the connections of the *ustād*, not the government. Thus, the parents could not understand how their children could make progress in their studies without asking the community of *ustād*. However, we have heard that not every *santri* was successful with their mission. One *santri* is in Malaysia as an illegal worker, even though at the beginning he had been sent to South Asia.

Next, the community claimed that they are followers of the Sunnah, not *madzhab*. They welcomed the caravan of *ustād* from Java. Besides

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their voices and during the prayers as *imam*, their performance appears Middle Eastern. Recently, many members wear beards and dress in the Pakistani style. Before their coming many members used *sarung* during prayer time, whereas now they are using the Pakistani style which, according to them, is the *sunnah nabi*. During the preparation of the *dayah* the board of the mosque gave them the hospitality in mosque. Thus, the activity of the mosque is like a real *pesantren*, even though the *ustādhs* are very young. The board asked for the community to donate their funds to support the needs of the *ustād*.

Furthermore, last year a *dayah* group in North Aceh intended to take over the administration of the mosque. They came to the mosque during the night prayer. One of them became the *imam*. After the prayer he wanted to conduct more *doa* in the *dayah* way. One Sunnah member stood up and asked him to stop because they had never done it that way before and they did not regard it as part of the Sunnah. Following this incident the conflict could not be stopped. It took place mainly because the group of *dayah* wanted to open the debate on theological problems within the community, whereas the Sunnah group said that the mosque was for everyone, but those traditions from the *dayah* could not be brought to this community.29 Recently, the local people who became involved in the mosque are referred to as *ustādhs*, even though they do not have any Islamic studies background.

Kuntowijoyo in his book explains that many Muslims in Indonesia, especially in the urban areas, are ‘Muslims without a mosque.’ 30 They learn Islâm from the TV, VCD, the radio, and internet, but are unlikely to do *shalāt* in a mosque. They invite *ustād* to teach their children in their own homes. Indeed, their daily life is controlled by a ‘revolution of the finger’ — meaning they utilize the benefits of ICT in their religious life. By contrast, the situation of the ‘Sunnah Community’ can be referred to as ‘Muslims with a mosque’, where religious problems are solved in the mosque. This system is similar the daily life of the Tablighists in the *markāz*.31 However, the system of Community is not similar to system of Darul Arqam in Southeast Asia.32

31 Bustamam-Ahmad, “From Islamic Revivalism to Islamic Radicalism in Southeast Asia,” Ch. II.
CONCLUSION
In this section we would like to highlight some important points. First, this study shows that in Aceh there have been two titles of religious identity in Islamic education. The title of teungku is more likely to be the heritage of traditional Islamic education. However, there is hierarchy of teungku which is related to their knowledge and influence in society. The highest position in the dayah is the teungku chik who owns and runs the system of the learning process. Next is the teungku bale who works under direction of Teungku Chik. Teungku rankang are the senior santri who act as assistants to the teungku bale. However, there is also a teungku meunasah in the village with the chief of the gampong, whose job is to give elementary Islamic teaching to children before their study at dayah or public school.

The title ustādh is more likely to be an “embedded religious title” in Islamic education in Aceh. It can be traced from the establishment of the pondok modern in Aceh 1980s. Many ustādh arrived in Aceh to work not only in Islamic education, but also in da’wah (Islamic missionary work). There has been a conflict between teungku and ustādh in some sub-districts in Aceh. Some Acehnese say that the coming of ustādh has challenged the authority and charisma of the teungkus. In the history of the Islamic movement in the Malay world this situation can be seen from the conflict between kaum muda and kaum tua.33

Second, this essay has found that these titles are used not only in Islamic education. The title of teungku is utilized by some respected GAM members even though they do not have any background in dayah. A GAM member said this title is not part of the identity of dayah people, but of the entire Aceh people.34 In addition, after the signing of the MOU between the GAM and Indonesian government, some dayah people have also become involved in the political arena by establishing a political party. They also have mobilized dayah people to ensure the implementation of Islamic law in Aceh.35 Thus, it can be argued that the teungku still play an important role in Aceh society.


As for the *ustādh* group there is a tendency that their arrival in Aceh is not only for the purposes of Islamic teaching but is also part of expanding the terrorist network in Indonesia. In this study we have examined one group of Islamic society in Aceh, where some Javanese-*ustādhs* contribute to religious life. It is also likely to have connections to terrorist networks in Indonesia. Some of it networks do have another mission in Aceh – to conduct *jihad* to establish an Islamic caliphate. In this context, Javanese-*ustādhs* have a very well-organized system in Aceh. They are not only teachers, but are also part of an Islamic hardline movement in Indonesia.36

Third, there is a serious problem in Acehnese society in terms of the sustainability of the Islamic traditional system of education. This is because many parents are eager to send their children to *pondok modern*, rather than to *dayah*. Then, they may continue their studies to university level, not only in Aceh, but also in the Middle East. In this situation the role of the *dayah* has decreased in terms of the development of Islamic studies in Aceh. There needs to be more studies to focus on the impact of the *pondok modern* in Acehnese society. This study has only focused on the role of teacher, not the influence of the institution in the society.

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