

Contestation of Religious Authority in Study Groups: Between Religious Authority and Mass Authority in Aceh

Noviandy^{1*}, Muhammad Amin², Zubir³, Muhammed Sahrin Bin Haji Masri⁴

¹ Institut Agama Islam Negeri Langsa, Indonesia; email: noviandy@iainlangsa.ac.id

² Institut Agama Islam Negeri Langsa, Indonesia; email: muhammadamin@iainlangsa.ac.id

³ Institut Agama Islam Negeri Langsa, Indonesia; email: zubir@iainlangsa.ac.id

⁴ University Sultan Sharif Ali (UNISSA), Brunei Darussalam; email: sahrin.masri@unissa.edu.bn

* Correspondence

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Abstract: This article examines the religious authority contestation among study groups in Langsa City, Aceh. The existence of a diversity of study groups does not mean the people there accept the existing plurality. Apart from the growth of religious authority from the Traditional Islamic community, several things also influence it. So the diversity phenomena in religion often become a mass struggle. This research is included in field-library research with qualitative analysis. Data were collected through interviews, documentation, and observation in the study groups. The data were analyzed using a sociology approach and social theory. This article presents two significant findings, including scientific contestation developed by each study group and mass struggle as a confirmation of the authority holder. These two pieces of evidence show that the spread of religious authorities does not necessarily make people accept plurality in religion. Furthermore, Islamic law in Aceh tends to always be in religious contestation.

Keywords: Contestation of Religious Authority, Study group, and Authority Holder.

Abstrak: Artikel ini menelaah tentang kontestasi otoritas keagamaan yang terjadi antar kelompok pengajian di Langsa City-Aceh. Keberadaan keberagaman kelompok pengajian tidak menjadikan masyarakat di sana dapat menerima pluralitas yang ada. Selain karena mulai banyak tumbuhnya otoritas keagamaan yang bukan hanya berasal dari komunitas Traditional Islamic, juga dipengaruhi beberapa hal lainnya. Sehingga fenomena keberagaman dalam beragama tak jarang menjadi ajang tarung massa. Penelitian ini termasuk dalam field-library research dengan analisa kualitatif. Data dikumpulkan dalam penelitian ini dengan metode wawancara, dokumentasi dan observasi yang dilakukan langsung pada kelompok-kelompok pengajian. Data-data tersebut dianalisis dengan pendekatan sosiologi dan teori sosial. Artikel ini mengemukakan 2 (dua) temuan penting, diantaranya: Pertama, terjadinya pertarungan keilmuan yang dikembangkan dari setiap kelompok pengajian. Kedua, terjadinya perebutan massa sebagai pengukuhan sang pemegang otoritas. Kedua bukti ini meyakinkan keberadaan otoritas keagamaan yang tersebar tidak menjadikan masyarakat dapat menerima pluralitas dalam beragama. Hal yang lebih jauh keberadaan syariat Islam di Aceh cenderung selalu berada dalam perselisihan keagamaan.

Kata Kunci: Kontestasi Otoritas Keagamaan, Kelompok Pengajian, dan Pemegang Otoritas.

1. Introduction

As a country established as the executors of the Shari'a, the religious authority in Aceh is inseparable from the figure in control of this authority. The study groups spreading throughout Langsa City are not entirely developed by the authority figures, who have tended to be Islamic religious scholars up to this point. Of a large number of study groups in Langsa City, at least several maps of study groups had been conducted, such as *tasawuf* study group (Zubir, 2019), *tastafi* study group (Admin, 2019), *shalawah* study group (Zubir, 2018), Salafi-Wahabi study group (Admin, 2020), and the Middle East alums study group (Syahrial, 2022). The diversity of groups does not inherently encourage

the congregations of study groups to accept religious diversity. It indicates that there are multiple religious authorities in Langsa City.

Despite the increasing diversity of religious authorities in society, Langsa people exhibit a small number of religious phenomena. Among the study groups, the disbanding of the Salafi-Wahabi teaching (Admin, 2020), accusations of heresy against the Majelis Pengajian Tauhid Tasawuf-International (MPTT-I) (Admin, 2017; Syafrizal, 2022), and provocation occurred. As stated by a congregation of a study group, *'the preaching tendency of Teungku (the traditional Islamic religious leaders) of Dayah (Traditional Islamic educational institutions in Aceh) does not develop due to its too classic and hard, they do not take examples from the modern era.* Moreover, there is a negative reaction to preachers who are frequently not invited to specific mosques. Spreading various forms of hatred to convey their preference for specific study groups. Such mass expression does not grow by itself when it is not triggered by religious authorities in every study group undertaken. It means that there are religious authority conflict and other conflicts in religion.

Numerous scholars choose Aceh as a trend research location to examine the contestation of religious authority. For instance, David Kloos stated that the religious authority of the ancient clerics was optimally utilized against the Dutch colonizers (Kloos, 2014a). Although later, the use of religious authority shifted, particularly after the region was established as the only area that implemented Shari'a in Indonesia. Religious authorities are widespread amidst the euphoria of implementing Islamic law, as if everyone has the right to judge Shari'a violators (Kloos, 2014a, 2014b, 2018; Kloos & Künkler, 2016).

It differs from how Feer currently views the establishment of religious authority in Aceh. First, Feener discovered that the cleric was no longer the sole center of religious authority; academicians and scholars also played a more significant role (Feener, 2014). What Feener stated can be seen in Ichwan's writings; at the time, Governor Irwandi-Nazar rarely relied on the existence of the Ulema Consultative Assembly. The Irwandi-Nazar government issued Governor Regulation 25/2007 so that it would not recognize the ratification of the *qanun jinayah* in Aceh, demonstrating that ulema's existence was not considered (Ichwan, 2011). Although in his other writings, the Ulema Consultative Assembly has massive authority in determining the religious authority that should develop in Aceh. When engaging with the authority of the MPTT-I, however, the existence of the mainstream ulema in Aceh was paralyzed (Ichwan, 2016).

Noviandy, Febriandi, Sahlan, and several other scholars have also written about the contestation of religious authority in different studies. Noviandy, for instance, argues that religious authority is indeed contested, not because it defends ideology but because it seizes the public space of religion (Noviandy et al., 2022). Nurzalin and Febriandi said it is necessary to maintain the religious authority of the ulema by mobilizing people to prohibit the construction of the Muhammadiyah mosque in Samalanga (Nurzalin & Febriandi, 2022). Nevertheless, according to Idris and Sahlan, religious authority contestations are frequently the result of a superficial comprehension of one study group towards another, particularly Salafi-Wahabi groups (Idris & Sahlan, 2018). Therefore, the conditions and phenomena of religion in Aceh are frequently accompanied by the dread of not being as religious as the majority of society. It demonstrates that the religious phenomenon in Aceh is not flourishing.

This research article tries to expand upon the discourse of the previous study. Additionally, it investigates the extent to which study groups' existence in Langsa City affects religious phenomena. With a large number of study groups, the spiritual direction of Langsa City congregations should improve. In this regard, the researcher will attempt to address two questions in this article. First, who participates in and manages the Study group in Langsa City? Second, why is there religious authority contestation among study groups in Langsa City? This article analyzes the contention that religious authority feuds among religious authority holders in each study group do not result from ideological differences. In addition, the presence of many study groups in Langsa City does not guarantee the formation of diverse views of a study group for other study groups. Authorities frequently employ this tactic to expand the religious public space.

This study is included in qualitative research employing a sociological approach. This sociological approach falls within the sociology of religion and society, given that it examines the existence of Langsa City residents who participate in study groups. This article collects data through observation, documentation, and interviews. By observing at least ten study groups, the researchers made direct observations. Meanwhile, the researchers conducted in-depth interviews using the Snowball technique and an analytical technique based on Huberman and Miles's concept. The researchers began by recording and documenting the obtained data, including observation data, interviews, and FGDs. Second, the researchers organized and categorized data due to the research's data requirements. Thirdly, the researchers described the classified data used to address the research problem formulation. Fourth, the researchers analyzed the data after conducting theoretical studies, in this instance borrowing the study of power relations developed by Michel Foucault (1982, 2002), Habitus, initiated by Piere Bourdieu (2018), and the Authority by Max Weber (1947). Following the text, context, theoretical basis, scientific developments, and the opinions of experts, the researchers must rely heavily on improvisation when reading the obtained data.

2. Results and Discussion

Scientific Contestation in Study Groups

Scientific contestation is essential to scientific studies to obtain perspectives and considerations from every individual or group's ideas. People's perspective is undoubtedly influenced by the scientists from whom they learn so that their notions are similar to those disseminated to the public. Scientific contestation is not dangerous as long as the competition is not predicated on academic arrogance and brings each other down. Every scientific basis must include *naqli* arguments based on the Qur'an and hadith and *aqli* arguments based on parables and other scientific methods. The authority figure's source of knowledge will determine whether the group paradigm becomes an established fundamental perspective in Aceh. Graduates of the Traditional Islamic circle hold the majority of religious authority. Thus, the views of Traditional Islamic ulema tend to have a more significant influence on study groups. However, this does not rule out the possibility that many young Acehnese study religion in various countries and regions outside Aceh.

In each study group in Langsa City, the above factors also contribute to the diversity of views. Langsa City is home to residents of diverse ethnicities and origins. This city can be categorized as one where the social paradigm is predominantly modern. It is inseparable from the region's existence, which has two state universities and numerous private institutions. In addition, more than half of this city's students hold a high school or higher education and even study abroad. Their return from various regions and foreign countries contributes significantly to the contestation of religious authority there. This discussion's scientific contestation is beginning to demonstrate that the religious authorities in Langsa City are no longer centralized but rather diffused. At a minimum, the scientific contestation that happened in Langsa City consisted of the following three forms:

Authority of Mazhabiyah, Shafi'iyah, and Non-Shafi'iyah

Most people in Aceh and Southeast Asia adhere to the Syafi'i sect (Amin & Ananda, 2018; Husda, 2017). The teaching framework in various religious and educational institutions also teaches the Syafi'i sect (Zukhdi, 2017). Most of Southeast Asia's Muslim population adheres to the Syafi'i school of philosophy. Employing the Syafi'i school's literature demonstrates the dominance of Islamic teachings, particularly in Aceh. Therefore, it is not remarkable that the religious authority acceptable in Aceh society teaches worship following the Syafi'i faith. Even during the religious phenomenon in Banda Aceh a few years ago, the Aceh government only urged scholars and Islamic educational institutions to teach Syafi'i thought (Plt. Gubernur Aceh, 2019). Noviandy et al. viewed this instruction as a shifted paradigm in religious education, particularly *Fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) in Aceh (Noviandy et al., 2022).

The existence of study groups in Langsa City has grown substantially, from studies for fathers and mothers to studies for adolescents and *shalawah* (chanting prayer) groups. The study group fostered by the traditional Islamic scholars in Langsa City comprises at least sixty percent. It implies that forty percent of study groups are led by academics, intellectuals, and scholars without a traditional Islamic background (Syafieh et al., 2018). Sixty percent of the study groups present a paradigm on Shafi'i *Fiqh*. In comparison, the remaining forty percent teach *Fiqh*, which does not solely originate from the Shafi'i school of thought. In this article's subchapters, observing and investigating the phenomenon affecting forty percent of this study group's participants will be fascinating.

One of the Dayah alums, currently an academic in Langsa City, Maulizar, believes that Traditional Islamic scholars are authentic Acehnese who only studies the Shafi'i school of thought. In contrast, other scientific studies have significantly influenced other scholars (Maulizar, Personal Communication, June 2018). Furthermore, one congregation expressed its alignment with the Islamic religious scholars through the Shafi'i school of thought; *the 'Syafi'i sect is correct compared to other sects. Imam Syafi'i will accompany us in the afterlife until we enter heaven'* (Sulaiman, Personal Communication, June 2018). This expression from one of the congregation did not occur accidentally, and the Dayah scholars have persuasive power in communicating the truth of the teachings they convey to the congregation.

The construction of religious authority based on the comprehension of the Shafi'i school is one in which the people of Aceh strongly believe (Zukhdi, 2017). Islamic religious scholars are generally viewed as having greater control over the authority regarding the Shafi'i school of thought. It gives Islamic religious scholars the strength and truth necessary to develop the Shafi'i school of worship doctrine. In addition to Dayah scholars who deliver *Fiqh* studies, they are frequently considered not to belong to the Imam Shafi'i school of thought. The congregations believe that Islamic scholars can only comprehend the study of *Fiqh* from the Shafi'i school and not other schools. Suppose scholars, academics, and other intellectuals teach other thoughts except for Shafi'i. In that case, they are considered unqualified, even though they have various other religious abilities, memorizers of the Qur'an, proficiency in spoken and written Arabic, and mastery of books from schools other than Shafi'i.

Numerous study groups in Langsa City promote diversity education. The tendency of congregations to study other than the Shafi'i school of thought is also receptive to the establishment of various other study groups. Many study groups that do not exclusively teach the Shafi'i school of thought are cared for by academics and Middle Eastern alums; however, the tendency is for these groups to be cared for by those who are not Dayah alumni. They feel different than the preaching of the conventional Dayah scholars throughout Langsa City. Ms. Afriati, a congregation member, disclosed that studying with Middle Eastern alums broadens one's perspective; we do not only study the Syafi'i school of thought but also other schools of thought.

Similarly, it is about how the Shafi'i and other sects interpret the hadith (Dina Afriati, Personal Communication, July 2018). Mr. Ruslan, one of the congregations at the Hj Nurhafifah mosque at Dar Faqih Qurani Islamic Boarding School, also conveyed a similar message to the other congregation, the clerics who teach this are still youthful and intelligent; in addition to memorizing the Quran, they also memorize a large number of hadiths; despite being intelligent and devout, they are very friendly and close to the congregation (Ruslan, Personal communication, August 2018).

Alums Authority between Dayah Alums and Non-Dayah Alums

It is not easy to believe in the truth that comes from the teachings of Imam Shafi'i if those who teach them are not alums of the Dayah. Thus, the religious phenomena that have developed in Langsa City have also sparked tensions between clerics who come from Dayah schools and those who are not from Dayah schools. One of them is using books in various study groups in the community. Not only Islamic religious scholars can teach books originating from Syafi'iyah scholars, but there are also Middle Eastern alums, IAIN Langsa academics, and even people who are members of the Salafi-Wahabi congregation. For example, the study of the book of *Fiqh* 'Fathul Mu'in and the book of hadith Riyadhhus Shalihin which are books that are often taught by Islamic scholars in the community, both in scheduled

study groups with a standard curriculum, as well as monthly study groups at mosques or prayer rooms in Langsa City. The explanations of the scholars who came from the alums of the Dayah were considered the most correct and understood the intended purpose. One of the academics explained how the ability of the Dayah scholars to explain the meanings in the book he taught:

Among study groups, not only the teachings based on the Shafi'i sect are the subject of issue. The presence of a cleric who teaches indicates that the study group place is suitable for studying Islam. The ulema from Dayah alums is the cleric figure frequently used as a reference for Syafi'i *Fiqh* by study groups. Alums figures are frequently used as authoritative references for comprehending the Shafi'i school of thought's *Fiqh*. This belief has persisted for a long time, even though only one school of *Fiqh* is taught and studied by Dayah scholars in Aceh, namely the Shafi'i school. In Aceh, Dayah alums are considered representatives of the Shafi'i school of philosophy. Moreover, Dayah graduates are unlikely to comprehend the Shafi'i school of thought. Do not be astonished if the expression '*tajak beut bak Ulema Syafi'i ngon ahlussunnah waljamaah bak Dayah*' (we learn religion from Syafi'i scholars and believe ahlussunnah waljamaah of the Dayah are-ed).

The ability of Dayah scholars to construct scientific relationships and foster doctrines is comparable to what Michael Foucault expressed. In the form of metaphysical facts, the power of an agent is utilized to construct and shape the subconscious of the congregation. (Foucault, 2002; Haryatmoko, 2016; Mudhoffir, 2013). Truth in metaphysical form confirms numerous truths about knowledge-religion in actual space. The Dayah clerics' religious authority plays a vital role in this space. The played role can be expanded or reduced and even can eliminate and reject other religious discourses that develop and are deemed to compete with the authority they bear.

Therefore, it is not uncommon for various conflicts to occur on social media, such as memes directed at alums of Dayah scholars. For instance, Islamic religious scholars are considered to have the best understanding of the aims and objectives of the Imam Syafi'i school's *Fiqh*, based on one of the statuses of a Facebook account whose name is not permitted to be published; *if you want to understand about the Shafi'i school, come to Aceh, because the Syafi'i priest grew up and studied with Islamic scholars in Aceh until he founded the Shafi'i school*. Supporters of Islamic religious scholars did not simply grant this status; naturally, people reacted with emotion and anger. Not only on social media but also in general public spaces have contributed to the debate over whether Dayah or non-Dayah alums are more comprehending Shafi'i's thoughts. The sarcastic tone of alums frequently occurs, as in the expression '*nyan alumni-alumni Lc nyan koen lost control—sang-sangjih yang paleng muphom*' (For those alums with Lc degrees, the abbreviation for the title is lost control—as if they are the ones who understand Islamic law the most. Translation-Ed) (Syafieh et al., 2018).

This alums war usually happens in the religious public sphere, where study groups still exist. The contestation for the existence of Dayah and non-Dayah alums in society is crucial, particularly in an agrarian and semi-urban society like Langsa City. Ahmad Yani Street, the primary road in Langsa City, geographically divides the city. To the east of Ahmad Yani Street, most people belong to an agrarian society consisting of farmers, fishermen, merchants, and so on. On the other hand, on the western side, the community is more diverse, highly educated, and dominated by office workers and entrepreneurs, although there are also farmers. This society group responds differently to insinuations regarding which alums are the speakers or presenters during the study group. Suppose that the preachers have inserted themselves into the study group. Therefore, it is unsurprising that there are divisions and teasing among those who attend the study groups in society.

Religious Authority in Figure

Scientific contestation in Aceh develops the sects in understanding the Shafi'i school and the alums' authority and the scientific understanding of figures. Each study group also relies on their scientific understanding of figures considered charismatic. Figures represented or relied upon are not arbitrary; their character can guarantee the veracity of the presented material. Furthermore, figures can strengthen beliefs due to their authority in scientific traditions. In presenting metaphysical truth, which

does not require substantiation, figures play a significant role. When they have a figure to rely on or refer to, the authority of the Shafi'i sect and the stature of particular alums will be even more binding and strengthened.

The preachers who attend study groups at various locations in Langsa City have unquestionably strong references in their scientific sources. Not only discussing or teaching the Shafi'i school of thought, which is regarded as the most authoritative, but also discussing or teaching other schools of thought. In a society where authority was strengthened, reliance on those they studied and indirectly referred to became crucial. Towards the close of Ramadhan, when it is time to pay *zakah fitrah*, is a clear example of a situation that occurs frequently yearly. There is the argument of paying *zakah fitrah* in rice or what they consume. The Dayah scholars always rely on the opinions of charismatic Dayah scholars. They depend on the opinions of Abu Mudi Syeikh Hasanoel Basri HG (Leader of the Dayah Madrasah Ulumul Diniyah Islamiyah Mesjid Raya (MUDI MESRA) or Abu Paya Pasi Tgk. Muhammad Ali bin Tgk Abdul Muthalib (Leader of Bustanul Huda Islamic Boarding School Samalanga). This example makes those who do not pay it in rice or money an obvious target. Some clerics demonstrate that *zakah fitrah* can be paid in an amount equal to the price of rice ingested. Alum speeches from the Middle East or other academics explicitly presented this view.

In society, the views of different cleric members, as in the case above, can become an endless topic of discussion, and it is not uncommon for politicians to use them as a hot issue. For example, the view that it is permissible to pay it in money is the view of Hanafi scholars, known as Muhammadiyah's, in Aceh. The views of Imam Hanafi are not a problem in scientific studies and study groups. The problem is the people who carry out the views of the Imam Hanafi school in Aceh, one of which is considered *talfiq* or changing sects in worship. As stated in the previous explanation, worship using the Shafi'i's thought in Aceh is a necessity that cannot be denied and interpreted from other views. The group studies that believe may pay zakat with money, but only when there is a valid reason and cleric reference. Using money to pay *zakah fitrah* is more effective and efficient, and recipients of *zakah fitrah* in the form of rice also sell their rice to meet the Eid requirements. In addition, when zakat is received and distributed on the eve of Eid, the recipients must rapidly sell the rice they receive, even at a reduced price.

Typically, preachers with a Middle Eastern educational background, campus intellectuals, and references to the opinions of Middle Eastern scholars are the source of such ideas. The existence of Middle East alums is also divided into several parts. A pronounced division is the alums who rely on sunnah ideas affiliated with Salafi-Wahabi (Noviandy et al., 2022). The Acehnese Salafi-Wahabi symbol is a big problem in Aceh. The most ferocious and sporadic thing is labeling every different idea that the Islamic scholars consider part of the Salafi-Wahabi. However, many ideas from Middle Eastern alums or scholars dare to differ from the Dayah scholars and explain the views of *Fiqh* in a rigid scientific sequence. These efforts can foster a more open and grounded scientific understanding of society, although they have different views from Islamic religious scholars. Middle Eastern alums do not tend to lean their views on charismatic clerics in Aceh, even if there is one such as Abu Daud Beureueh. For the people of Aceh, this figure is not considered a cleric if there is another figure like Teungku Abdullah Ujung Rimba, Tgk. Abdul Rahman Meunasah Mekata, Abu Lam U, Abu Hasballah Indrapuri, Sayed Husain Syihab (Idi), Abu Hamid Samalanga, Abu Ahmad Hasballah Indrapuri, or Tuanku Raja Keumala—these modernist Acehnese scholars of the past have been accused of being carriers of teachings—Wahhabism to Aceh.

Mass Struggle as Agency Authority

Authority and the masses are two sides of a coin that are difficult to separate from one another. A leader cannot perpetuate his leadership when his existence is no longer supported by his masses. The authority of a cleric will begin to be questioned and doubted when the existence of the masses does not have full loyalty in any of his policies. Social religion in Acehnese society greatly depends on the religious authority owned by the clerics in their environment. Traditionally the presence of masses is the legality of religious authority in Aceh (Setiyani & Azizah, 2021).

On the island of Java itself, the development of Islam has not had a smooth history. The primary strategy of the Walisongo (agents) is to utilize culture and customs. In this way, as Geertz wrote, Islam is not only a religion for society but also a culture (Geertz, 2013), unlike other locations, such as Padang, Makassar, and Aceh (Azra, 2015; Laffan, 2015). There is still an adaptation of religion to culture, but there is also a purification process, leading to frequent conflicts in the history of the development of Islam there. The existence of people is an essential factor that agencies must prioritize when developing religion. The struggle for the masses as religious authority was prevalent when globalization began following the 1998 reform and the emergence of numerous new religious authorities with media broadcasting. Therefore, it is not shocking that religious authority has been constructed, fragmented, and pluralized (Afriansyah, 2021; Akmaliah, 2020).

On the other hand, the number of masses must also support the existence of traditional masses. Declaring an authority as genuine and deserving of loyalty to its policies comes at a steep cost: large numbers. According to the results of this study, the Ulema in Aceh does not inevitably become the community's reference authority; instead, the community tends to make religious and social references to many people. It has become a source of strength for those in roles of authority, countering differences and new religious currents in society. Alternatively, make mass power a force for economic movements and political power, and strengthen other forces.

In Aceh, religious authorities have also encountered construction, which is not only a monotonous location for study groups from the agency to the people. The power of discourse is also a group's strength in establishing its authority. The greater authority a cleric has, the more precise and exhaustive its study group's studies. On the other hand, the sharper, noisier, and more important the discourse, the weaker his existence, and the greater the number of congregations, the greater its religious authority. It is not easy to map such phenomena when religious authority continues to proliferate through study groups, particularly in Langsa City. The following evidence demonstrates that the existence of religious authority in Langsa City is not only under the authority of the people but also under the authority of the agency.

Traditionalist Masses as Legal Religious Authorities

A scholar's (agent's) religious authority does not develop independently. A scholar has a history, including inheritance, education, scientific tradition, the profundity of his discourse, the existence of a mass base, etc. An essential factor is a mass base; without a stable mass base, an authority will not be able to develop or will find it difficult to do so. The mass basis of his loyalty and commitment to the existence of the cleric and their authority remains strong—the strength of commitment and fealty to the ulemas with deep roots in the traditional populace's devotion. The willingness of the traditional community to commit is based not only on the figure of an agent who develops their authority but also on the social culture that develops in society. As a mass figure, they are faithful to the established religious authority. They play a significant role in preserving social culture, particularly if they are part of that religious authority.

It differs from Java and Sulawesi in that the acceptance of religion by local cultures is more tested in Java (Ali, 2011). Thus, Geertz concluded that the winning religion was Javanese (Geertz, 1960). The existence of the authority holder will play a crucial role in the development of religion, as evidenced by the numerous efforts to develop religion, which are frequently aimed at maintaining the status quo (Setiyani & Azizah, 2021). Mr. Junaidi, a member of one of the Dayah Ulema study groups, believed that the study presented by Abu, Abaty from Dayah had a very positive and Islamic impact. As he said:

The study group of Abu, Abaty, and the scholars from the Dayah was very soothing. They understand how the habits of the people (character-red). The Islamic teachings conveyed are Acehese values that have developed from ancient times. We should follow the existence of scholars like them because they will protect Islam and the people of Aceh, not only religiously but also our social culture (Tgk. Junaidi, Personal Communication, July 2018).

The expressions above are not only conveyed by Tgk Junaidi but also by several other congregations. They feel the existence of Islamic religious scholars can strengthen socio-cultural joints in today's society. As stated by Tgk. Ridwan, '*The figure of a Dayah scholar can understand how the modern cultures of globalization have damaged the socio-culture of the Acehese people*' (Tgk. Ridwan, Personal Communication, August 2018). Socio-culture that has developed so far is a reality that has always been used as material for study by the figure of a Dayah scholar. The concern of these Dayah scholars is significant when globalization hits today. Dayah scholars master the language of their people, where society is currently experiencing moral decadence caused by globalization. Movements of Islamic religious scholars like this are often only noticed by traditional communities, which tend to be absent from global developments.

The author refers to it as the traditionalist mass. In developing religious authority in society, the traditionalist mass is not a mass to be trifled with. The presence of a *Geuchik* (Village Head), *Tuha Peut* (Gampong Council), *Tuha Lapan*, intellectuals, and religious and community leaders opens the door for the instillation of religious authority. The strength of the community in Langsa City, which is located in the eastern part of the country, is the traditional mass, although it cannot be said that they do not consider modern. This traditional liturgy can become a claim for the legality of a religious authority supervised more by alums or clerics from the Dayah group. In addition to ulema or religious leaders, more community leaders have a traditional paradigm, as evidenced by the expansion and development of educational institutions based on Dayah.

The Number of Masses is the Truth of an Authority

Strengthening an agency's authority in Langsa City's community is not only dependent on the existence of traditional masses. The traditional masses will not acquire authority if they lack widespread support. The number of masses in numerous categories is considered an undeniable force worthy of societal authority and development. Even the broader meaning of the 'a large number of masses' can be interpreted as a political truth that policymakers should fight for and an authority that must be maintained by the masses within the agency circle. The large number of masses in the process of development will also be accessible for positioning an agency's authority, and vice versa for those who do not have a large number of masses.

The congregation's view of the mass's existence is also critical. In an interview that the researchers did with one of the congregations of study groups said;

Try to pay attention when you pay tribute to the place of a cleric who died. Why does the congregation flock to attend and participate in the *kanduri* (Acehnese tradition) for days? Likewise, study group members, for example, my friends and I attended the study group of the Sirul Muftadin Taklim Council. Each member who later died would pray with *samadiyah* (Muslim ritual in Aceh when a family member died) up to tens of times, with thousands of congregations throughout Aceh. For me, it is our hope that many people can pray not only when they die but the members of the Sirul Muftadin Taklim Assembly will also pray and read the letter al-Fatihah by its members throughout Aceh every day (Tgk. Junaidi, Personal Communication, July 2018).

The number of members of a large congregation cannot be separated from the authority of a cleric. The existence of the clerics with all their authority becomes important when many congregations support it. It is impossible for the truth that many people believe to be considered heretical or violate religious principles. A religious authority may have policies or fatwa decisions that are wrong or not entirely wrong—but the crowds can keep those mistakes from becoming disgraceful. It is often referred to as a privilege owned by the cleric. For the masses of a study group, the mistakes made by the cleric are not the same as those made by ordinary people. In addition, the roles of other agencies that support the existence of the scholars with the central authority.

A large number of masses can also carry out various group studies. As stated above, the study groups in Langsa City do not stand alone. The relationship between the cleric and the scientific 'sanad' of a scholar authority will always receive support from many parties – attention to the number of

masses is also a severe concern from various parties. For example, preaching delivered by a cleric from out of town and is a scientific reference so far for the ulema in Langsa City will be very easy to get support from various parties. Transportation, consumption, accommodation, honorarium, and all other needs will be effortless. This fact shows that the number of masses owned by a religious authority will make it easier to achieve the goals of the owner of the authority to carry out various activities that are not only religious.

The large number of masses at each study group or various events that are carried out is not only claimed as the truth that is believed and must be believed—it is also a blessing that the congregation will obtain. The masses will chant prayers that are believed to delay or stop Allah's punishment. Many masses will be able to build the congregation's mood as a source of prayer being accepted. Apart from that, the blessing is not only from the prayers that are raised by the congregation but the blessing of various activities that are always successfully carried out until the end. The large number of donations received was not only in the form of activity facilities but also brought more benefits to the continuity of educational institutions owned by authority-holding scholars.

The Modernity of Authority Discourse will Continue to Develop

On the other hand, the bargaining power of every religious authority holder consists of more than just mass and tradition. The study group is also concerned with the modernity of preaching. The modernity of discourse is not limited to the subject conveyed; it also includes trending or viral topics. According to the congregation, the figure of a cleric or preacher who has comprehensive insight, understands actual issues, is humble with the congregation, and can memorize the Koran and Hadith represents the modernity of discourse. Effective at conveying information or addressing the congregation's concerns. Preachers from campus academia or clerics who are Middle Eastern alums typically employ such figures.

It is difficult for the speakers to respond to the ongoing discussions, particularly to the presently popular issues. Indirectly, the congregation requires information or new discourses in all study group materials. The ability of the clerics is evaluated based on whether they can track information or trends that are developing in society on a local and global scale. Material presentation followed by a variety of information is essential for the congregation, but it is also a negotiating point for the existence of religious authority in society. Since few preachers do not keep up with current events, they tend to be emotional and justifiable in their responses to the congregation regarding various extant problems.

A preacher's ability will be the best for the study groups. As mentioned in the discussion above, the geographical map of Langsa City residents who live on the north side of Jalan Ahmad Yani Langsa City tends to be more modern and critical in social and religious terms. They tend to invite preachers who were alums of Middle Eastern or academics. They rarely invite Dayah alums unless the Dayah alums are literary figures. For example, the study group at the Rahmah mosque can be said always to make its studies an up-to-date space for information for the congregation. It can be seen due to the confessions of the congregation, ' *Sometimes much information that the congregation does not know is conveyed by the preachers. When we convey this to our children at home, the grandmother or parents comment on it slang*' (Dina Afriati, Personal Communication, July 2018). This Rahmah Mosque can be classified as part of the mosques full of congregations.

The ability of an agency holding religious authority will be tested by its expertise in religious knowledge. The ability of non-Dayah Middle Eastern academics or alums tends to have the ability to provide more comprehensive answers without black-and-white justification. The congregations often express it as conveyed by Ummi Azkiya:

Preachers alums of the Middle East are more pleasant for us to accept the answers given. Once we asked about paying for the *fidyah* fasting that we had missed because of menstruation, the answers were obvious. The clerics even explained other cases that were not in the habit of the Acehnese, for example, hot and cold weather and so on. We are sure every statement has evidence and views of the schools of thought. We all feel satisfied with the answers and insights that are broad but not inconsequential. It is different when we attend study groups from the Dayah. It seems that the

study group is stiff—it seems like there are many views on their own because they are not based on using the Koran and hadith or the views of the schools of thought (Umami Azkiya, Personal Communication, September 2018).

The material delivered by non-Dayah alums, both academics and Middle Eastern alums, tends to be of greater depth and master numerous schools of thought. Additionally, the congregation feels more at ease and receptive due to the mastery of the acquired general knowledge. It demonstrates that their knowledge is expansive, and their mastery of classical *turats* (relics of ancient Muslim scholars) is excellent. In addition, this broadened the congregation's comprehension of global discourse and facilitated the development of a tolerant attitude among schools of thought, which had not been so advanced among Islamic religious groups.

3. Conclusion

The contestation over religious authority currently occurring in study groups in Langsa City is a congregational expression of the existence in which authority agencies play a role. In addition to satire or mockery, the resulting expressions frequently disbanded or boycotted other study groups. This research investigates why there is a contestation over religious authority among study groups. It is because the population of Langsa City is not only ethnically but also socioreligiously very diverse. It is appropriate that the plurality level of Langsa's urban society will construct a high level of tolerance and understanding amidst this diversity.

Why is there a contestation over religious authority among study groups in Langsa City? This investigation uncovered at least two essential findings. First, there is a developed scientific contestation of each study group. It is evident in the authority holder's power to present the material with the most Syafi'iyah authority. In addition, it is assumed that the genuine Syafi'iyah authority transmitters are Dayah (Traditional Islamic educational institutions) alums from Aceh. In contrast, those not from Dayah are typically viewed as incapable of holding authority in the study groups. In addition, this structure is constructed with the assistance and endorsement of scientific traditions obtained from figures, particularly charismatic clerics in Aceh. Second, there exists the mass struggle for agency authority. Mass struggle is also waged by defending the veracity of a valid authority; this is accomplished by: 1) The claim that the traditional mass is a long-standing truth that deserves to be defended; 2) A large number of masses is a further claim to state the truth of a study group that Muslims should defend and follow. 3) The modernity of discourse asserts that Islam is a legitimate religion in the early days. Urbanites typically favor this final point with educational and modern scientific backgrounds.

The contestation among study groups in Langsa City theoretically proves that contesting religious authority is not entirely a clash of theological understanding construction or religious teachings. Instead, it attempts to seize public space for more complete access. In addition, the construction of religious authorities that are plural and spread across Langsa City has also not been able to foster tolerance in accepting religious diversity. The orientation towards the struggle for the masses tends to be stronger than the development of tolerance. This fact shows that there is a stronger relationship between knowledge and power in the study groups there.

The local government should respond promptly to things that begin to spread throughout this community. The Islamic Shari'a is not to be contested for its conceptual framework; it is to be utilized as a unifier for Muslims established 20 years ago. Syafi'iyah or non-Syafi'iyah, Dayah alums, or non-Dayah alums are not domains of division; they are scientific fields that should be developed in conjunction with one another. Many aspects still need to be investigated that have not been addressed in this research article. It will be advantageous to explore other research dimensions in future articles. One of the essential aspects is studying the spiritual development of urban communities in Aceh. Urban communities in Aceh have a beginning and a spirit of religious learning distinct from traditional communities. Urban communities are more susceptible to differences. Their diversity is frequently more significant than that of traditional communities.

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