Islamic revival and cultural diversity: pesantren’s configuration in contemporary Aceh, Indonesia

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DOI:10.18326/ijims.v12i1.201-229

Abstract
This study aims at investigating the extent to which pesantren (Islamic boarding schools) in Aceh, Indonesia have flourished in encountering multicultural situations in the wake of a massive tsunami and post-separatist military conflict through the lens of Islamic revivalism. Almost two decades after the gigantic natural disaster in 2004 and the protracted bloody conflict, Aceh underwent various changes in social, economic, political, educational, and religious areas. In the educational and religious sectors, a pivotal metamorphose took place in pesantren as a means of Islamic revival, where this Islamic boarding school has transformed into multicultural institutions. Using a qualitative design, this study observed several pesantren in Aceh, interviewed their key stakeholders, and analyzed pesantren documents. The findings show that pesantren cultures in contemporary Aceh differ from previous monolithic traditional Islamic schools in curriculum, characteristics, typology, and affiliation. This change is a unique mark of an Islamic revival following the influx of the plural Indonesian and of the world communities to Aceh after the catastrophe and violence with their heterogeneous aids and cultural settings. In addition, the implementation of sharia (Islamic) law in this special province after both tragedies confirmed the work
of the Islamic revival, though many nationalists sharply criticize this sectarian and exclusive rule within multicultural countries like Indonesia. However, in this situation, pesantren in Aceh expressed a positive commitment to celebrating cultural diversity through ethnicity respect, religious tolerance, and Indonesian unity rather than endorsing the idea of an Islamic state.


Keywords: Islamic revival; Cultural diversity; Indonesian pesantren; Aceh, Sharia law
Introduction
Aceh attracted the world on 26 December 2004 when a huge tsunami, after the 9.1 magnitude earthquake, hit this westernmost special province of Indonesia. The natural monster wreaked havoc on the infrastructure and caused massive casualties. Traditional and modern markets, government buildings, and schools were heavily damaged. More than 228,000 people lost their lives. The disaster left an additional blow to the previously protracted brutal conflict in the region between the separatist GAM (Gerakan Aceh Merdeka or Aceh Independence Movement) and the Indonesian military.

Following the calamity, massive and diverse aids from all over Indonesia and beyond flooded into Aceh to help in the recovery and development of entire sectors e.g. social, economic, and educational sectors. Alongside with this relief, the helpers’ various and different cultures, such as religion and beliefs, ethnicities, habits, visions, and behaviors were exposed directly to the Acehnese and challenged their existing cultures. As a result, Aceh, which had once adhered to traditional and monocultural Islam, has become more inclusive. Besides the deep misery caused by the tsunami, this catastrophe, on the other hand, brought about a peace agreement between GAM and the Indonesian government through the Helsinki peace accord on 15 August 2005. Therefore, the post-disaster and post-conflict development could possibly provide the Acehnese the possibility to re-arrange their new social, educational, and religious life with novel insights and horizons.

In this regard, following the massive reconstruction, the Islamic revival precisely took a pivotal role in Aceh with its particular characteristic that was the implementation of the *sharia* law. The official enactment of this law by the government placed Aceh as the one and only province in Indonesia, out of 34 provinces, which practiced a sectarian and exclusive regulation. It is, to some extent, anti-cultural diversity in Aceh and Indonesia. Another sign of this revival was the appearance of several *pesantren* in Aceh with different learning models compared to the pre-disaster and pre-conflict period. A plethora of national and international Muslim organizations with diverse Islamic organization backgrounds involved in transferring aids and funds have influenced the flourishing of existing and mainstream traditional *pesantren* in Aceh⁴.

A large number of studies on social and educational development in post-disaster and post-conflict Aceh have been conducted. For example, Feener conducted research on the social engineering of Acehnese through *sharia* law implementation⁵. He analyzed that this implementation is a hotbed for the social transformation that allows Acehnese to obtain a bright future through a modern-Islamic vision, instead of the orthodox and traditional one. The problematic contestation between international development and protracted conflict in Aceh is studied by Baron, Karspinka, and Nugroho⁶. Shah and Cardoso studied education and social change of the Acehnese. They critically noted some educational and social development on the redistribution of educational access, (mis) representation of local governance, recognition of cultural diversity, and

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long-term effort for peaceful building amidst short-term aid\textsuperscript{7}. However, there is a scarcity of research on the current configuration of pesantren in Aceh as a result of the influx of national and international philanthropists following two decades of the tragedies through the lens of Islamic revival.

In this context, Islamic revival is understood as a fundamental belief system to serve cultural defense, Islamic identity, and poverty alleviation\textsuperscript{8}. Education is frequently a factor in revival movements, as educated people demand better change\textsuperscript{9}. Murray states that the Islamic revolution in Iran in 1979 laid the groundwork for the twentieth-century revival of Islam\textsuperscript{10}. In Indonesia, Muslim women are also the case to revive Islam including in the political field like women of Partai Keadilan Sejahtera (PKS or Justice and Prosperous Party)\textsuperscript{11}. In the social field, women of Muhammadiyah, Aisyiah, and women of NU, Muslimat, the two largest Muslim organizations in the country, create the development of civil society\textsuperscript{12}. This study proposes a new tenet that disaster and conflict could be the cause of Islamic revival and multicultural flourishment in pesantren, in addition to many other causes of Islamic revival around the world. The purpose of this research is to look into the multicultural status of today’s pesantren in Aceh. In doing so, this article will be guided by the question of how and why the configuration


\textsuperscript{8}Hakeem Onapajo, “Islamic Revivalism and Social Change in Muslim societies: A Rethink of Marxist Historical Materialism”, \textit{World Journal of Islamic History and Civilization}, Volume 2, Number 4 (2012), 196-205.


\textsuperscript{10}R. Murray Thomas, “The Islamic Revival and Indonesian Education”, \textit{Asian Survey}, Volume 28, Number 29 (1988), 897-915.


of pesantren in Aceh in the post-disaster and post-conflict period served as a means of Islamic revival. In this light, this study will examine various pesantren learning models and the extent to which they are committed to the country’s and the world’s cultural diversity within the context of sharia law implementation, particularly in ethnicities respect, religious tolerance, and the Islamic state establishment doctrine.

Islam in Aceh and Indonesian cultural diversity

A brief history

Islam arrived in Aceh with Arab Muslim traders from Gujarat, India, and directly from Arabs in the early 7th or 8th centuries\(^\text{13}\), while orientalist scholars such as Hurgronje, Marco Polo, and Ibn Batutah proposed in the 13th century\(^\text{14}\). A number of the traders and preachers married local women and established a Muslim village. They were also able to convince the ruler to convert into Islam and established an influential Islamic Sultanate in the international level in Malacca Strait, Samudra Pasai, in 1267 with Malik as-Saleh as the first Sultan\(^\text{15}\).

In 1521, Samudra Pasai was conquered by Portugal, and marked the beginning of the West’s colonialism in Asia. However, another Islamic kingdom in this region emerged in 1524, Aceh Darussalaam\(^\text{16}\). During 1607-1636, Iskandar Muda as the Sultan of Aceh Darussalaam controlled a strong navy and army, authorized large territory, and led to enjoyed wealthy people. It was also a hub for Islamic education and pedagogy.


\(^{15}\) M. Zainuddin, Tarich Atjeh dan Nusantara, Medan: Pustaka Iskandar Muda,1961.

\(^{16}\) Ahmad Hasjmy, Sejarah Kebudayaan Islam di Indonesia, Jakarta: Bulan Bintang, 1990.
with the doctrine of monolithic Islamic Sufism as the mainstream Islamic teaching and implementation\(^{17}\).

Aceh Darussalam started to decline in 1873 when the Dutch began colonializing the Sultanate. Eventually Aceh affiliated with Indonesia, when this country was officially founded and declared its independence in 1945 as a democratic and multicultural state.

**Aceh, military conflict, and sharia law**

In 1950, Aceh was structured under the North Sumatera province, which disappointed Teungku Daud Beureueh, Aceh’s influential spiritual leader, who preferred to design Aceh as a specific Islamic province. Therefore, he merged with an insurgent group in West Java, which had a similar idea to establishing Islamic territory, DI/TII (Darul Islam/Tentara Islam Indonesia or Islamic Territory/Indonesian Islamic Soldier).\(^{18}\)

To cease this rebellion, in 1959, the central government in Jakarta granted a Special Province status to Aceh, containing three distinct independent governance rights, Islamic life, customary law, and the education system\(^ {19}\). However, due to social-economic inequity, a group of Acehnese established a separatist movement namely GAM declared by Hasan Tiro\(^ {20}\) on 4 December 1976\(^ {21}\), and started to attack a foreign company project and other central government’s interests in Aceh.\(^ {22}\)

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To put down the uprising, President Soeharto designated Aceh as a DOM (Daerah Operasi Militer or Military Operation Zone) from 1989 to 1998. Thousands of soldiers were dispatched to Aceh. In 1999, the people of Aceh requested a referendum to secede from Indonesia via SIRA (Sentral Informasi Referendum Aceh or Central Information of Aceh referendum)\(^{23}\). Following a peace agreement such as the CoHA (Cessation of Hostilities Agreement) in Geneva, President Megawati responded to this movement by declaring Aceh a Military Emergency Zone in 2003\(^{24}\). This status was maintained under President Yudhoyono’s regime until 26 December 2004, when a mega tsunami, estimated to be 30 meters high, devastated Aceh.

Immediately after the devastating disaster, thousands of people and volunteers from around the country and the world descended on Aceh to aid in the recovery and reconstruction.\(^{25}\) The BRR (Badan Rehabilitasi dan Rekonstruksi or Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Agency)\(^{26}\) for Aceh and Nias noted that the rescue and recovery mission involved at least 653 funding agencies and 564 implementing partners from 56 countries, making it one of the largest humanitarian programs in history.\(^{27}\) This situation provided the Acehnese to interact and be exposed to a massive multicultural atmosphere and ambience, which


\(^{26}\)A state level agency formed by the government of Indonesia in April 2005.

made them more accepting of differences.\textsuperscript{28} In addition, GAM and the Indonesian government paved the way for peace in Helsinki on 15 August 2005.\textsuperscript{29}

During this condition, the province has still maintained a desire to formalize Islam in the constitution despite Indonesia’s vast cultural diversity. As a result, the central government enacted regulation 11 in 2006, authorizing the Aceh government to implement \textit{sharia} law\textsuperscript{30}. While \textit{sharia} law is viewed as sectarian and exclusive, former Aceh Governor, Zaini Abdullah asserted that it is specifically for Acehnese Muslims. Additionally, he reaffirmed Acehnese’s commitment to always respecting and appreciating other religions and cultures. Indeed, there is concern that this situation will lead to the establishment of an Islamic state in Aceh\textsuperscript{31}, a sensitive issue in democratic-plural Indonesia, which officially recognizes six religions: Islam, Catholicism, Protestantism, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Confucianism, all of which are practiced in Aceh (See Table 1). \textit{Sharia} law implementation also had an effect on \textit{pesantren}.


\textsuperscript{29}Michael Morfit, “The Road to Helsinki, The Aceh Agreement and Indonesia’s Democratic Development”, \textit{International Negotiation}, Volume 12, Number 1 (2007), 111-143.


Table 1. Aceh Demography

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Number of Pesantren’s institution</th>
<th>Number of JHS+SHS’s institution</th>
<th>Religions</th>
<th>Ethnicities and local languages</th>
<th>Local Cultures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5,090,412</td>
<td>879</td>
<td>94,537</td>
<td>1,531</td>
<td>333,035</td>
<td>13 indigenous ethnics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Islam (98.4%), Christian (1.2%), Catholicism (0.1%), Hinduism (0.08%), Buddhism (0.22%)</td>
<td>(Aceh, Tamiang, Gayo, Lues, Haloban, Nias, etc)</td>
<td>Saman dance, Bungong Jeumpa song, etc</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: The Ministry of Religious Affairs (MoRA) and National Statistical Bureau (2019)

**Pesantren in Indonesia and Aceh**

Pesantren is an Islamic boarding school that is widely available in Indonesia. It is the country’s oldest and most indigenous Islamic educational institution, having been established in the 17th century as a primary location for teaching and proselytizing Islam. Similar institutions known as pesantren, or pondok, exist throughout Southeast Asia, including Malaysia, Brunei Darussalam, and the southern provinces of Thailand. Dhofier identified five characteristics of pesantren: Kyai as the supreme leader, mosque as the focal point of learning and worship, kitab kuning as the traditional Islamic sources of knowledge, santri as the students, and dormitory as the santri’s residence. Currently, the archipelago has over

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28,000 pesantren with an estimated 3.5 million students, the majority of which are privately owned\textsuperscript{35}.

Pesantren is officially recognized as part of the national education system by the Indonesian government through the National Education Act of 2003 and is administered by the MoRA\textsuperscript{36}. As a result, in addition to teaching a large number of religious subjects, pesantren introduces national lessons such as Pendidikan Kewarganegaraan (PKN or Civic Education), sociology, and national history\textsuperscript{37}. PKn educates students about their rights and responsibilities as citizens in a multicultural country like Indonesia, sociology familiarizes students with numerous Indonesian cultures, and national history discusses the country’s existence as a result of the efforts of Indonesia’s diverse people regardless of their ethnicities, tribes, religions, or social groups backgrounds.

The MoRA classifies pesantren into three broad typologies: Ashry, or modern, Salafy, or traditional, and Campuran, or mixed. Modern pesantren uses government-mandated curricula with a minimum of national subjects. Traditional pesantren complies only with the pesantren curriculum, which is purely Islamic studies without reference to the national curriculum, whereas mixed pesantren follows both modern and traditional curricula, with over 70% of subjects drawn from the national curriculum\textsuperscript{38}.

Pesantren is referred to as dayah or meunasah in Aceh. Prior to the massive tsunami, pesantren in this region predominantly practiced orthodox and traditional Islam as a consequence of Aceh’s long Islamic tradition legacy.


\textsuperscript{38}Raihani, Creating Multicultural Citizens...
There are currently 879 pesantren in Aceh with over 116,000 students. They are organized under two government boards: Bidang Pendidikan Diniyah dan Pondok Pesantren (Education Board of Diniyah and Pondok Pesantren), coordinated by the MoRA Aceh, and Dinas Pendidikan Dayah (Dayah Education Council), which is responsible for the Aceh special province government. This dualistic management is a product of the implementation of sharia law. Pesantren in Aceh have resurrected and flourished in the post-disaster and post-conflict eras by overcoming cultural differences through their curriculum, characteristics, typologies, and affiliation.

**Pesantren configuration in contemporary Aceh**

This study observed nine pesantren in Aceh: Daarul Qur’an Aceh (DQA), Asaasunnajah, Ulee Titi, Sulaimaniyah, Baitul Arqam, al-Aziziyah, Tgk. Chiek Oemar Diyan (TCOD), Inshafuddin, and Madrasah Ulumul Qur’an (MUQ). These pesantren were carefully chosen as samples that matched the study objective. Apart from observing all pesantren and conducting interviews with prominent figures, students, and other stakeholders, the researcher also studied pertinent pesantren documents.

The result of the field research found that each pesantren has its own specific curriculum, characteristics, typology, and affiliation. It means that pesantren in Aceh have flourished and configured in a variety of patterns.

DQA and Asaasunnajah have similarities in terms of curriculum and affiliation. They are closely related to salafi-Islamist ideology and use pesantren and national curriculum. DQA was established in 2016 as a continuation of the previous pesantren of Darul Hijrah, which was destroyed by the tsunami. It is located in Tumbo Baro village, Kuta

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Malaka, Aceh Besar regency on an area of seven hectares. Focusing on Tahfidz (memorizing) Qur’an, DQA operates Junior High School (JHS). Currently, DQA nurtures 66 male students, and mandates them to use Arabic in daily communication. DQA participates in the Jaringan Sekolah Islam Terpadu (JSIT or Integrated Islamic School Network), a new emerging school network affiliated with PKS. PKS is a militant and pivotal Islamic party in Indonesia, rooted in the 1980s as a young Muslim revivalist movement, which has indirect connection with Ikhwan al-Muslimin, an influential international Islamic movement from Egypt.40

Asaasunnajah is situated in Ateuk Lueng Ie village, Ingin Jaya, Aceh Besar. After the tsunami destroyed the previous pesantren’s site in Lhok Nga village, Asaasunnajah accepted several donations. Pesantren buildings, such as schools, dormitories, and offices, are constructed by renowned international companies and states like Samsung and the Chinese and Turkish governments, whose names are emblazoned on each structure. Asaasunnajah has around 300 male and female JHS and Senior High School (SHS) students within a three hectares area. In addition to the national curriculum used in daily schooling, the pesantren emphasizes Islamic spiritual studies and practices such as Dzikir (Remembering God, Allah) and Sholawatan (Praising the Prophet). Dzikir and Sholawatan are typically pesantren culture. It is unsurprisingly given that the supervisor of this pesantren is the late M. Arifin Ilham, a former popular national Dzikir leader who also managed a nationwide pesantren, ad-Dzikra, in Jakarta. Ilham is linked to the Indonesian salafy-Islamist group.41

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In terms of learning practice and affiliation, Ulee Titi and Sulaimaniyah are Salafy-Traditional pesantren. The name Ulee Titi was derived from the village where the pesantren is currently located in the district of Blang Bintang, Aceh Besar regency. Ulee Titi is a traditional pesantren and was one of the main genuine pesantren in Aceh prior to the tragedies. Ulee Titi, which was founded in the 19th century during the colonial era, merely teaches students the Islamic knowledge. The students are not grouped by age like the common public school, but by the level of study. Ulee Titi currently has approximately 1,750 students, with 750 males and 1,000 females.

Sulaimaniyah is an overseas pesantren—a Turkish educational model operated in Aceh. The focus of the study is to memorize Qur’an and to learn Islamic knowledge for SHS students’ age. The long-term trajectory of its graduates is to continue their studies at the diploma level in Turkey under the scholarship of the Turkish society. However, to some extent, Sulaimaniyah acknowledges the national curriculum in the selected subjects like PKn. Sulaimaniyah has more than 30 pesantren in several provinces in Indonesia.

TCOD and Inshafuddin are independent pesantren. TCOD is located on ten hectares campus in Krueng Lamkareung village, Indrapuri, Aceh Besar regency. This pesantren was founded in 1990 on the initiative of HMI42, PII43, and DDII44 activists, and has grown significantly in size in the years since the tragedies. The curriculum implemented in this pesantren is a synthesis of the curriculums of the MoRA madrasah and the renowned

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42Himpunan Mahasiswa Islam, an influential Islamic university student organization established in 1947.
43Pelajar Islam Indonesia, a prominent Indonesian Muslim student organization founded in 1947.
44Dewan Dakwah Islamiyah Indonesia, a national da’wa (calling for Islam) council built in 1967.
Islamic revival and cultural diversity: pesantren’s configuration...(Bambang Arif Rahman)

**pesantren Gontor** in Ponorogo, East Java. TCOD currently educates 874 male and female students.

**Dayah Terpadu Inshafuddin** is the official name of Inshafuddin in Lambaro Skep village, Kuta Alam, Banda Aceh regency. This pesantren began as a private Islamic school in 1974 and expanded into a pesantren in 1998. Since then, the curriculum of this pesantren has been a fusion of salafy pesantren and national curriculum, resulting in a Campuran pesantren. In addition, several extra-curricular activities are offered, such as scouting, sports club, local dance, Arabic and English, martial arts, and Kitab Kuning studies. Inshafuddin also nurtures some students from Thailand. Located in an area of more than 0.5 hectares, Inshafuddin manages 316 male and female students. After the catastrophes, Inshafuddin extended its slogan to a more multicultural sense as wadah pemersatu umat (a place to unify Muslims), which attempts to accommodate all Muslim groups.

**MUQ** was established in 1989 as an official model of government pesantren in Aceh, and it is the first pesantren that promotes 30 chapters of Qur’anic memorization instruction. Situated in Pagar Air village, Ingin Jaya, Aceh Besar regency, after the conflict and tsunami, MUQ postulated its mission to be more open to fostering creative, plural, and responsible generation. MUQ runs public schools during the day and a pesantren system during the afternoon and evening. MUQ is managed by the Dinas Pendidikan Dayah Aceh special province. Therefore, this pesantren adheres to the national and pesantren curricula.

**Baitul Arqam**, founded in 2012, is a pesantren affiliated with Muhammadiyah. Located in Tampok Blang village, Sukamakmur, Sibreh, Aceh Besar regency, Baitul Arqam currently supervises 64 students, consisting of 39 male and 25 female pupils, who live on a five-hectare complex. The students’ intake utilizes Muhammadiyah network. They are sent from regencies in Aceh through the recommendation of the local
Muhammadiyah council. During the post-conflict and tsunami recovery period, this pesantren received assistance from the Australian Embassy in Indonesia to build pesantren’s offices, in addition to benefits from national donors.

Al-Aziziyah was a salafy pesantren when it was founded in 2011 as the 181st branch of the pesantren MUDI Samalanga mosque network. However, in 2014, the surrounding community asked this pesantren to open a formal school that followed the national curriculum, and it was categorized as Campuran pesantren. Al-Aziziyah has about 215 students, with 50 of them staying in the pesantren as mukim (students who live in the pesantren dormitory) and the rest commuting. This pesantren is situated on 2.5 hectares land in Lampeuneurut, Ujung Blang village, Darul Imarah, Aceh Besar regency. The educational system follows the national school model during the day and conforms to salafy pesantren during the afternoon and evening. As in the NU pesantren, Sorogan (personal visit to the Kyai) and Bandongan (group visit to the Kyai) are used as instruction methods in delivering Kitab Kuning to students and neighboring communities, similar to Dalail Khoirot for Islamic mysticism ritual. Unsurprisingly, a large number of pesantren teachers are NU activists.

According to the preceding presentation, post-conflict and post-disaster pesantren in Aceh have evolved and configured from monocultural and traditional pesantren into some patterns, most notably in curriculum, characteristic, typology, and affiliation (See table 2).

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A popular Islamic organization network in Aceh which controls more than hundreds pesantren. For instance, see https://www.nu.or.id/post/read/117437/dayah-mudi-samalangabuka-pendaftaran-santri-baru-lebih-awal, retrieved on 10 March 2021.
Table 2. Pesantren Configuration in Contemporary Aceh

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Pesantren</th>
<th>Curriculum</th>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>The MoRA typology</th>
<th>Affiliation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Darul Qur’an Aceh</td>
<td>National and Pesantren</td>
<td>Tahfidz Qur’an, School</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>Salafy-Islamist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Asaasennajah</td>
<td>National and Pesantren</td>
<td>Islamic Knowledge, School</td>
<td></td>
<td>Salafy-Islamist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Ulee Titi</td>
<td>Pesantren</td>
<td>Islamic Knowledge</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>Salafy-Traditional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Sulaimaniyah</td>
<td>Pesantren</td>
<td>Tahfidz Qur’an</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>Salafy-Traditional, Trans-national (Turkey)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Baitul Arqam</td>
<td>National and Pesantren</td>
<td>Islamic Knowledge, School</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>Muhammadiyah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Al-Aziziyah</td>
<td>National and Pesantren</td>
<td>Islamic knowledge, School</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>Nahdhatul Ulama (NU)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Tgk. Chiek Oemar Diyan</td>
<td>National and Pesantren</td>
<td>Islamic Knowledge, School</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>Independent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Inshafuddin</td>
<td>National and Pesantren</td>
<td>Pesantren, School</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>Independent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Madrasah Ulumul Qur’an</td>
<td>National and Pesantren</td>
<td>Tahfidz Qur’an, School</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>Government</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author’s compilation based on field research, interview and documents review.

Pesantren configuration reasons in Aceh

To gain a better understanding of this recent cultural flourishing, the researcher interviewed pesantren’s key stakeholders, including Kyai, teachers, and the MoRA local officer. The research revealed three rationales. They are organizational influence, trans-national spirit, and Islamic renewal.

Organizational influence

The formation of pesantren in Aceh is influenced in part by the national Islamic organization. Baitul Arqam, for example, clearly belongs to
Muhammadiyah, which also runs a thousand schools, pesantren, and universities across the country. A Muhammadiyah activist and administrator in Aceh uttered as follows:

Pesantren Baitul Arqam is established by Muhammadiyah Aceh branch. Australian embassy involved in the building of pesantren office as part of the tsunami aid. We utilize Muhammadiyah network to develop this pesantren.

In fact, Muhammadiyah Boarding School (MBS) is a new emerging pesantren model that is currently developed by Muhammadiyah in Indonesia. NU has the similar pattern with pesantren al-Aziziya as the model. DQA is yet another organizational influence figure on Aceh’s pesantren configuration. The leader stated:

DQA has close ties to the JSIT and has joined it. Thus, we follow some activities in JSIT programs.

**Trans-national spirit**

Sulaimaniyah in Aceh is an appealing example of how pesantren have diversified in an international sense. There are currently three Sulaimaniyah pesantren in Aceh. Suharto states that trans-national Islam has been increasing within the last two decades. It is characterized by the sense of Muslim brotherhood throughout the globe, like Hizb Tahrir, ISIS, Jama’ah Islamiyah, etc., which attract and implicate numerous Muslims across the world. Regarding the reason for the establishment of Sulaimaniyah in Aceh, its manager expressed:

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46 Online interview with Hasan, 46 years old, 18 August 2020.
48 Interview with Ali, 38 years old, 10 September 2019.
We had to take action after the tsunami hit Aceh. We also see that, following the long conflict, Aceh is conducive to the spread of our educational system, which upholds and maintains traditional Islamic teachings based on the Ha-fidz Qur’an. And the Aceh atmosphere supports us with its vast, traditional Islamic practice\textsuperscript{51}.

Nowadays, in Indonesia there are several Turkish school models, such as Bunga Bangsa in Aceh, Semesta in Semarang, Central Java, and Kesatuan Bangsa in Yogyakarta. These schools come with a boarding system and emphasize science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) advancement\textsuperscript{52}. Sulaimaniyyah system is an addition to these existing Turkish schools which offers religious studies excellent.

\textit{Islamic renewal}

Numerous Muslims in Aceh have made efforts to modernize and renew the quality of the existing traditional pesantren like Ulee Titi. In this case, long before the tsunami - during the conflict era - the Aceh government established MUQ, an unusual policy for the government to have a pesantren because it is typically privately run. Following this example, Inshafuddin expanded its education system independently by adhering to the national curriculum, and Asaasunnajah constructed the Islamic sufism practice as an Islamic spiritual supplement for students to broaden its educational method. One of the Kyai in these pesantren reported:

\textit{We have to renew Islamic teachings and methods, including in pesantren. Thus, it will not be outdated. It is permissible to use new technology and systems from the modern world to educate our children}\textsuperscript{53}.

\textsuperscript{51}Interview with Gulen, 41 years old, 11 September 2019.
\textsuperscript{52}These institutions belong to Passiad foundation of Turki network with dozens of schools in Indonesia.
\textsuperscript{53}Interview with Husein, 57 years old, 15 September 2019.
Islamic renewal is not an alien to Islamic history. Lapidus demonstrates numerous events that influenced the renewal of Islamic practice, one of which was the Islamic movement for modernity in response to the Islamic empire’s collapse in the 18th and 19th centuries in the Middle East. In the educational field, what Muhammadiyah did in the early nineteenth century to modernize its educational system by emulating Western models was a radical departure from the established traditional Islamic learning of the era and was unmistakably an example of Islamic renewal.

According to a MoRA Aceh official, the phenomenon of Islamic revival in post-conflict and post-disaster situations is unsurprising, as Muslims in Aceh have inherited a long Islamic tradition and will be able to effectively address several challenges. He said:

We are used to the joys and sorrows of facing various challenges. Since the Sultanate era and colonial era in the past to the current time. Islam will always be in the Acehnese heart.

The implementation of sharia law is one of the most contentious issues in contemporary Aceh. There is a widespread concern at the national and international level that this law will jeopardize the country’s cultural diversity. To address this issue, this study elicited responses from participants in pesantren regarding multicultural issues, specifically their attitudes toward ethnicities respect, religious tolerance, and the Islamic state establishment.

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56Interview with Hakim, 45 years old, 15 September 2019.
Pesantren multicultural attitude under the sharia law

Ethnicities respect

This study questioned the students, teachers and the pesantren leaders about their tenets on appreciating other ethnicities. The respondents stated that Aceh has been accustomed to cultural differences, and ethnic differences are no exception. A pesantren’s Kyai expressed his opinion that:

Aceh used to multicultural environment since a long time ago. Thus, there will be no conflict between different ethnicities under sharia law\(^{57}\).

Confirming this finding, the Indonesian harmony index indicated that Aceh has among the highest score in comparison to other parts of the country\(^{58}\). There were rarely social and ethnic conflict cases over the last decade.

Religious tolerance

As the majority, Muslims in Aceh are also aware of the minority religions entity. Depicting sharia law enactment and religious tolerance in Aceh, the participants claimed that non-Muslims have no difficulty residing in the province. In addition, they revealed their willingness to interact with them in the social life. A teacher explained his notion as follows:

Qur’an said clearly; lakum diinukum wa liya diin, for you your religion and for me my religion. We have to follow this rule. As long as non-Muslims don’t bother us, we can live together here\(^{59}\).

The MoRA classified Aceh’s tolerance index as low in 2019\(^{60}\), which

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\(^{57}\) Interview with Ubaidillah, 60 years old, 15 September 2019.


\(^{59}\) Interview with Said, 41 years old, 15 September 2019.

\(^{60}\) MoRA, Executive Summary, Survey Indeks Kerukunan Umat Beragama Tahun 2019, https://simlitbangdiklat.kemenag.go.id/simlitbang/spdata/upload/dokumen-
was then rejected by Acehnese religious leaders due to their peaceful and harmonious coexistence reality. However, accidents involving Muslim and non-Muslim interaction do occur on occasion. A case was an incident on the church establishment in Aceh Singkil in 2015. The chief of Pusat Kerukunan Umat Beragama (PKUB or Center for Religious Harmony) of the MoRA in Jakarta then clarified that it was a small misunderstanding on administration to build a prayer premise. Once the Christians provide complete documents, they are allowed to build a church.

The Islamic state establishment

Indonesia was founded as a democracy and a multicultural nation rather than an Islamic state even though Muslims are dominant. The Nationalists were concerned that sharia law could pave the way for the establishment of an Islamic state. However, pesantren stakeholders assured that sharia law is merely to provide a conducive premise for Muslims to practice their religious beliefs. They will continue to support Indonesia’s democracy and unity. The MoRA Aceh officer depicted:

In Aceh, we like to practice Islamic teachings in an Islamic environment through sharia law. However, it doesn’t mean that we will establish an Islamic state. We only regulate our local education and religious practice; the rest is regulated by central government.

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64 Interview with Hakim, 45 years old, 15 September 2019.
A female student in the XII grade emphasized the preceding argument by saying:

We love Indonesia, but we love Aceh too as an Islamic province\textsuperscript{65}.

Mahmud, a teacher, described his argument on this issue:

I think, after a long conflict and stopped by the tsunami, Acehnese agree to life in harmony under Indonesian government. This is what I deliver to the students; live in Aceh under the sharia law but within Indonesian unity\textsuperscript{66}.

In fact, over the last 1.5 decades, the issue of separatism and the GAM movement has dwindled significantly. Aceh has been developing as a religious region within the authority of Indonesia. However, there was occasional friction between ex-GAM supporters and the central government, such as in 2020 when the GAM flag was raised alongside the Indonesian flag on the 15\textsuperscript{th} anniversary of the peace agreement\textsuperscript{67}.

**Conclusion**

This study shows how pesantren in Aceh currently have evolved and changed into a variety of configuration in terms of curriculum, characteristics, typology, and affiliation towards national and international multicultural communities in the post-conflict and post-tsunami eras. External and internal factors such as Islamic organizational influence, transnational spirit, and Islamic renewal all contributed to this configuration. The configuration altered the landscape of pesantren, which had previously been dominated by monoculture and traditional Islamic style.

The transformation of pesantren in Aceh continued a long tradition of Islamic revival in this region dating all the way back to the 13\textsuperscript{th} century, when

\textsuperscript{65}Interview with Hanum, 16 years old, 10 September 2019.

\textsuperscript{66}Interview with Mahmud, 36 years old, 10 September 2019.

Islam made its first appearance. Along with the pesantren configuration, Aceh’s Islamic revival is characterized by the implementation of sharia law, which is viewed as sectarian and exclusive toward Indonesia’s vast multicultural population by the nationalists. However, this study demonstrated that pesantren in Aceh continue to value and celebrate cultural diversity, most notably by respecting different ethnic groups, tolerating other religions, and advocating for a democratic Indonesia rather than an Islamic state establishment.

This research opens up new possibilities for decision makers in Aceh and Indonesia when it comes to pesantren policy making. Furthermore, because this study only looked at nine pesantren, further research with a broader and more comprehensive sample of respondents on the related topic is recommended.

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