Contestation of Religious Authority: Institutional vs Cultural Islamic Power Struggles in Aceh's *Dike Situek* Ritual Sovereignty Conflict

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes religious-political contestation dynamics fueling social conflict in Aceh, Indonesia, through qualitative analysis of interactions between orthodox Dayah institutions and minority *Dike Situek* practitioners. Employing conflict theory with empirical data from interviews (n=32), participant observation, and document analysis, three critical mechanisms emerge: 1) Majority religious actors strategically stigmatize minority groups to consolidate political power; 2) State-endorsed fatwas institutionalize marginalization, transforming religious authority into socioeconomic capital; 3) Effective conflict resolution necessitates cultural mediation frameworks reconciling orthodox and cultural Islamic perspectives. The findings advance socio-religious conflict theory by demonstrating how state-religion alliances escalate majority-minority tensions, while proposing policy interventions for institutional accommodation of minority practices. Limitations include insufficient historical documentation of *Dike Situek* origins, highlighting the urgency of oral history preservation. Contributing to global discourse on post-conflict religious pluralism, the research advocates localized cultural approaches to mitigate politicized religious tensions in transitional societies.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The *Dike Situek* ritual, a syncretic cultural-religious practice in Aceh, Indonesia, originated in 1931 through the teachings of a Sufi scholar. Combining recitations from the *Barzanji* text with choreographed movements using areca palm fronds, this ritual embodies the intersection of Islamic spirituality and local tradition. In 2019, its suspension by prominent religious authority Abu Dayah—on grounds of theological non-compliance—ignited a conflict emblematic of broader tensions between institutional orthodoxy and cultural Islam. This incident underscores Aceh's ongoing struggle to reconcile formal religious authority with vernacular expressions of piety in a post-Sharia governance framework.

Contestations of religious authority are not isolated to Islamic contexts but represent a global phenomenon. In Catholicism, U.S.-based nuns have challenged hierarchical doctrines through grassroots activism (Murphy, 2022), while generational divides over state-religion relations persist in secular democracies (Wong, 2021). Indonesia's COVID-19 pandemic similarly revealed fractures, as factions resisted state-aligned fatwas (Hilmy & Niam, 2021). Such dynamics reflect enduring ideological rifts—between Islamist and secularist visions of governance (Lukito, 2018), progressive-traditionalist Qur'anic hermeneutics (Howe, 2016), and modernist-revivalist interpretations of religious modernity (Poljarevic, 2015). These contestations often arise at the intersection of theology, identity, and power, amplified in post-conflict regions like Aceh, where religious authority serves as both moral compass and political currency.

This study addresses a gap in existing scholarship concerning religious contestation between religious authorities in Aceh - particularly the *Abu Dayah* (Islamic scholars) - and the *Dike Situek* cultural-religious community. This contestation has generated societal conflict due to the substantial followings of both groups. While *Dike Situek* attracts public engagement through its unique blend of spirituality and entertainment, the Abu Dayah maintain significant influence over religious discourse in Aceh's public sphere.

This study investigates religious contestation in Aceh's *dike situek* ritual through three lenses: (1) manifestations of conflict between religious authority and cultural practices, (2) theological, political, and sociocultural drivers, and (3) systemic impacts of the ritual's prohibition on Acehnese society. Central arguments posit that these tensions reflect struggles over religious-cultural authority, extend beyond theology into political realms, and necessitate religious democratization to counter politicization-fueled horizontal conflicts.

Contestation, defined as processes of debate intrinsically tied to political-social systems (Farrell, (2020), manifests as political resistance to evolving societal values (Deitelhoff, 2020). This phenomenon spans domestic politics (Palo et al., 2019), economic policies (Weinhardt & ten Brink, 2020), and religious domains (Nesbitt, 2020), particularly in identity formation. Religious groups often engage in such contestation through exclusive doctrinal interpretations (Mundiri & Tohet, 2018), visible in both physical interactions and digital spaces like social media. Sociologically, it represents symbolic struggles between groups advocating distinct ideological, cultural, or religious positions. In Indonesia, such contestation predominantly emerges from Islamic communities where religious legitimacy serves as both moral and political foundations for state engagement (Triantoro & Ardiansyah, 2018).

Regional variations in religious contestation reveal distinct patterns. In Belitung, it manifests as competition over wisdom, power, and ideology (Rozi, 2020), while Bugis-Makassar exhibits tensions between indigenous beliefs and Islam, categorized as mild (doctrinal-traditional

friction), open (practical disparities), or intense (imposition attempts) (Pabbajah et al., 2021). These dynamics are shaped by sociocultural contexts, including political climates, economic conditions, and technological progress (Weinhardt & ten Brink, 2020).

Religious authority operates through social coordination within groups, maintaining cohesion and identity (McBride, 2016), While some interpret it as regulatory power vested in texts, prophets, or leaders (Alatas, 2021), its sources vary by tradition, encompassing both doctrinal teachings and communal experiences (Frederick et al., 2016). Two forms exist: visible (formal/institutionalized) and hidden (informal/subtle) authority. In Indonesia, visible authority appears in state policies like Aceh's qanun laws based on religious edicts (Yucel & Albayrak, 2021; Mawardi, 2018). while hidden authority emerges through organizational decision-making and community traditions (Eriksson et al., 2021).
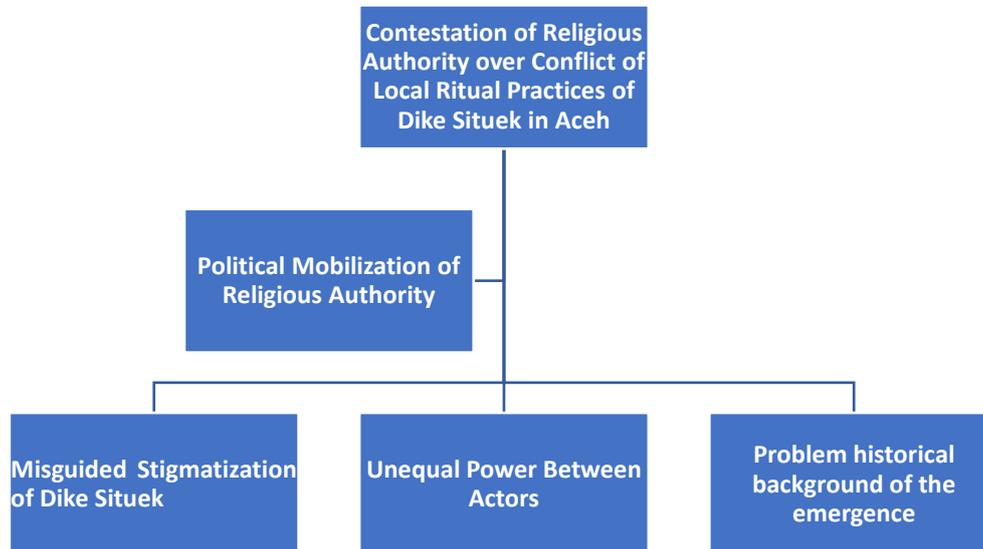
Tradition serves as a foundational pillar of identity construction, anchoring itself in historical narratives to validate cultural continuity (Zamora & Romero, 2019), Its expressions materialize through ritual practices, epic storytelling, and symbolic imagery, often blending rational and non-rational elements. These manifestations operate through syncretism—the fusion of disparate beliefs—and synergism, where combined elements amplify cultural influence, profoundly shaping collective thought and imagination (Kryvoruchko, 2019). Rooted in principles of faith and divine revelation, religious traditions in particular derive their potency from this interplay of tangible practices and transcendental meaning.

In Japan, the discourse on human rights within Buddhist traditions like *Jodo Shinshu, Jodoshi*, and *Sotoshu* illustrates how this Western concept has been harmonized with religious frameworks, facilitating the reconfiguration of local religious identities (Dessì, 2012). Meanwhile, in Colombo's Pettah market (Sri Lanka), religious rituals permeate daily commercial activities, coexisting with practices imbued with personal significance and social symbolism. These hybrid rituals function as sales strategies, blurring the sacred-profane dichotomy (McKinley, 2016). In contrast, Islamic tradition derives its foundation from canonical sources—primarily the Qur'an, supplemented by hadiths and other doctrinal teachings that form the core of its religious authority (Bone, 2022).

Indonesian Islamic traditions initially mirrored Middle Eastern practices, reflecting their geographic origins, while Christian traditions in the region similarly traced their roots to transnational religious hubs (Lücking, 2021). This linguistic legacy persists today, with Arabic retaining its status as the liturgical language. However, localized adaptations emerged as Islamic practices interacted with indigenous cultures. A notable example is Javanese Islam, which exhibits two distinct religiosity modes: normative piety and Sufi mysticism (Salim, 2013). Religious rituals, far from being mere superstitions, foster holistic development across four dimensions: physiological, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual growth (Maranise, 2013). Consequently, Indonesia's Islamic traditions have evolved into heterogeneous expressions shaped by regional sociocultural contexts.

This study employs a conflict theory framework through an Islamic sociological lens to analyze religious contestation in Aceh, focusing on tensions between Abu Dayah religious authorities and practitioners of the *dike situek* ritual—a practice blending spiritual devotion with communal entertainment. The research pursues three objectives: (1) to map conflict manifestations in this ritual context, (2) to identify theological, cultural, and socioeconomic drivers of contestation, and (3) to assess the social-systemic impacts of the ritual's prohibition.

Central arguments posit that: (1) the conflict epitomizes struggles over religious-cultural authority, (2) multifactorial dynamics underpin the contestation, and (3) the ban has precipitated religion's politicization as a tool for authority consolidation.

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2.   METHODS

This study adopts a qualitative case study approach to examine socioreligious dynamics in East Aceh Regency, Indonesia—a region selected for its significant social transformations following religious authorities' prohibition of longstanding cultural practices. Primary data were collected through semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders (n=10) representing both proponents and opponents of the *Dike Situek* ritual, selected via purposive sampling based on their expertise in religious institutions and cultural traditions. Initial outreach targeted 12 participants, achieving an 83% response rate (two declinations cited privacy concerns). Secondary data were drawn from archival records, policy documents, and scholarly literature documenting regional sociocultural changes.

Fieldwork occurred in two phases: (1) Observational participation during the *Maulid* celebration preceding the ritual's prohibition, and (2) Post interdiction analysis of emerging community responses. The research protocol followed a systematic sequence: problem identification → preliminary field survey → data collection (August 2022-March 2023) → iterative analysis through data triangulation.

The analytical methodology unfolded through a tripartite process designed to balance empirical rigor with theoretical engagement. Commencing with data organization, raw qualitative materials—including interview transcripts, ethnographic field notes, and archival documents—were systematically coded into thematic matrices, enabling structured comparative analysis across datasets. This foundation facilitated the pattern identification phase, where NVivo 12 software was deployed to algorithmically detect recurring narratives of socioreligious contestation, revealing latent discursive structures through iterative coding cycles. The process culminated in contextual interpretation, wherein emergent themes were critically examined against established frameworks in religious conflict studies, ensuring scholarly fidelity while

accounting for localized sociohistorical particularities. By interweaving inductive data exploration with deductive theoretical validation, this layered approach bridged micro-level empirical insights and macro-level conceptual paradigms, producing a robust hermeneutic synthesis.

Ethical compliance was ensured through informed consent protocols and anonymization of participant identities (coded as DS-01 to DS-10). The methodology prioritizes ecological validity by maintaining the natural context of cultural-religious interactions while addressing potential observer bias through reflexive journaling.

3.   RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The framing employed by religious authorities is not merely a matter of religious doctrine but reflects a Tariqa-political agenda. This agenda can be demonstrated through three key aspects:

3.1.   Misguided Stigmatization of Dike Situek: Sectarian Rivalry and Power Dynamics in Aceh

Empirical interview data reveal that perceived deviations within Sufi *ṭarīqah* traditions have systematically marginalized the *Dike Situek* community. As articulated by Tgk. Abu Ismail of Simpang Ulim: "While *Dike Situek* practitioners adhere to the *Syāṭṭariyah Ṭarīqah*, the majority of Dayah scholars propagate the *Naqshbandiyah* tradition. The *Syāṭṭariyah* lineage, associated with Abu Peulekung, is stigmatized by Acehnese society as emblematic of *Salik Buta*—blind spiritual seekers lacking doctrinal rigor" (Interview, July 20, 2018). This sectarian dichotomy has not only invalidated *Dike Situek's* rituals within religious discourse but has strategically reframed theological dissent into a politicized narrative of deviance, amplifying inter-traditional tensions.

The testimonies collectively underscore a profound ideological rivalry between *ṭarīqah* affiliations. Tgk. Abdul Wahab, corroborating this schism, noted: "A foundational figure within *Dike Situek* trained under Abu Peulekung, cementing the group's perceived allegiance to his teachings" (Interview, April 16, 2018). This assertion highlights the clash between *Dayah's* clerical establishment and Abu Peulekung's legacy, framed as a struggle for doctrinal supremacy. Reinforcing this, Tgk. Zulkifli contended: "The Abu Dayah's prohibition of *Dike Situek*, ostensibly on moral grounds (*maksiat*), masks a deeper grievance: the ritual's association with Abu Peulekung's disciples" (Interview, March 12, 2018). Such narratives crystallize a *ṭarīqah*-centric power struggle, wherein Dayah authorities seek to delegitimize rival spiritual networks to consolidate institutional hegemony.

Critically, the censure of *Dike Situek* transcends superficial moral arguments, exposing a structural conflict between the *Naqshbandiyah* tradition—entrenched in Dayah's religious apparatus—and the marginalized *Syāṭṭariyah* lineage linked to Abu Peulekung. This rivalry exemplifies the interplay of religious authority and identity politics in Aceh, where sectarian allegiances are weaponized to demarcate orthodoxy and heterodoxy. The contestation underscores how spiritual legitimacy is inextricably tied to socio-religious control, with dominant groups leveraging doctrinal narratives to suppress dissenting voices.

This phenomenon aligns with broader frameworks of social conflict within Islamic sociology. Majority groups, entrenched in institutional power, systematically stigmatize minority practices as deviant to reinforce their dominance. By framing minority beliefs as threats to doctrinal purity, hegemonic factions construct exclusionary moral boundaries that rationalize

marginalization (Triantoro & Ardiansyah, 2018). Such dynamics reveal religion's dual role: a unifying force for communal cohesion and a divisive instrument for socio-theological control. When divergent interpretations of sacred truth emerge, they become battlegrounds for power, perpetuating cycles of exclusion and reinforcing hierarchical structures. The *Dike Situek* case thus epitomizes how sectarian rivalry and ideological gatekeeping intersect to sustain asymmetries of influence within Aceh's religious landscape (Wahyudi et al., 2024).

3.2. *Power Asymmetry and Institutional Hegemony in Aceh's Socio-Religious Dynamics*

The conflict between *Dayah* authorities and *Dike Situek* practitioners arises from profoundly asymmetrical power relations, wherein prohibitive actors wield disproportionate socio-religious capital compared to the marginalized ritual practitioners. The *Dike Situek* community, lacking formal organizational or political affiliations, operates on the periphery of institutionalized religious discourse. In contrast, *Abu Dayah's* authority derives from his recognized expertise in Islamic scholarship (*ʿilm*) and the perceived possession of *karamah*—spiritual charisma imbued with miraculous potency. This *karamah* is deeply embedded in local epistemologies, where communities attribute material and existential blessings—such as abundant fisheries or safe childbirth—to his intercessory power. Ethnographic observations, for instance, document devotees delivering entire fish harvests to *Abu Dayah* as fulfillment of vows (*nazar*), while expectant mothers ritualistically entrust their pregnancies to his sanctified guidance, culminating in rites such as neonatal naming ceremonies and honey-fed initiations supervised by him. Such practices cement his role as a spiritual intermediary, intertwining sacred authority with quotidian survival.

Abu Dayah's dominance is further consolidated through expansive networks encompassing thousands of *santri* (students), political elites, and a sprawling alumni base. As of 2021, his disciples have established over 157 accredited Islamic boarding schools, a stark contrast to the *Dike Situek* community's unclassified religious institution. The A+ accreditation of Dayah-affiliated schools underscores their institutional legitimacy, while *Dike Situek's* lack of formal recognition exacerbates its marginalization. Dayah leaders also monopolize symbolic capital through rituals like *peusijuk* (blessing ceremonies), which they perform for high-ranking officials—from provincial governors to police chiefs—thereby embedding themselves within state-civil society nexuses. This ceremonial prominence, coupled with strategic alliances with political actors, amplifies their socio-religious hegemony, enabling the institutionalization of their doctrinal positions as normative.

The systemic dominance of *Dayah* actors extends beyond religious spheres into political and bureaucratic arenas. Alumni occupy pivotal roles in legislative bodies (e.g., DPRK, DPRA), political party leadership, and the Ulama Consultative Assembly (MPU), while also permeating sectors such as civil service, commerce, and entrepreneurship. This pervasive institutional penetration fosters public trust in *Dayah* networks, which are further reinforced by their access to economic resources and policymaking channels. The resultant symbiosis between religious, political, and economic elites creates a self-perpetuating cycle of influence, entrenching *Dayah's* supremacy while sidelining nonconformist groups like *Dike Situek*.

From an Islamic sociological lens, this reflects a classic majority-minority conflict dynamic, wherein hegemonic groups weaponize institutional and symbolic capital to perpetuate dominance (Putri et al., 2022). The majority—here, *Dayah* actors—strategically aligns with state

apparatuses to codify norms and policies that marginalize dissenting voices, often under the guise of moral or doctrinal purity. Such collusion manifests in public endorsements, legislative frameworks, and cultural narratives that legitimize the majority's authority while pathologizing minority practices as deviant. This process exemplifies how religious hierarchies intersect with political economies to reproduce structural inequities, transforming spiritual legitimacy into a tool for socio-political control. Ultimately, the *Dike Situek* case illuminates the mechanisms through which institutionalized power structures in Aceh negotiate, suppress, and exclude alternative religiosities, thereby sustaining a monolithic socio-religious order.

3.3. Historical Context and Socio-Religious Tensions Surrounding Dike Situek

The *Dike Situek* ritual, practiced in Aceh, exists outside the normative frameworks of the *dayah* tradition, a disjuncture that has fueled enduring friction with *dayah*-aligned performance traditions. This tension, conceptualized here as institutional contestation, manifests through implicit critiques advanced by *dayah* authorities. Common objections include alleged breaches of *tajwid* (Qur'anic recitation rules), nonconformist attire among participants, and rhythmic patterns likened to the militarized cadence of "Pharaoh's army"—a metaphor deployed in religious forums such as *pengajian* (study circles), sermons, and Friday *khutbah* to delegitimize the ritual. These discursive strategies aim to dissuade communal participation by framing *Dike Situek* as extraneous to *dayah*-sanctioned Islamic praxis. Notably, however, *Dike Situek* practitioners have consistently avoided direct confrontation with *dayah*-affiliated *dike* groups, instead adopting a deferential approach: *dayah* performers occupy morning slots (pre-Dhuhr prayer), while *Dike Situek* reserves its activities for post-Dhuhr periods, preceding Asr prayer.

The ritual's performers are lay practitioners without formal *dayah* education, reflecting its grassroots, non-institutional origins. Their participation in *Maulid* (Prophet Muhammad's birthday) celebrations stems from intergenerational cultural transmission, marked by communal enthusiasm. Preparations begin a month in advance, with nightly rehearsals balancing daytime labor commitments, ensuring precision and collective synergy during performances. The post-Dhuhr timing, a gesture of respect toward *dayah* affiliates, coincides with peak public engagement, drawing large crowds captivated by the ritual's dynamic choreography and communal vitality.

Textually, *Dike Situek* diverges from the *Barzanji*—a canonical text central to *dayah*-aligned *dike*—instead incorporating vernacular verses blending moral exhortations with colloquial humor to foster celebratory ambience. The ritual's organizational structure further emphasizes communal reciprocity: hosting villages typically invite two neighboring communities to perform sequentially, with "victory" determined informally by audience consensus, symbolized through the order of communal feasting.

The core conflict arises from *Dike Situek's* historical detachment from *dayah*, Aceh's cornerstone of Islamic authority and education. As a bastion of social cohesion and traditional orthodoxy, the *dayah* system reinforces collective identity through standardized religious pedagogy (Ridhwan et al., 2018). *Dike Situek's* non-institutional origins disrupt this hegemony, positioning it as a perceived deviation from codified norms. Sociologically, this dissonance underscores tensions between institutionalized religious authority and organic cultural practices, where legitimacy is contingent on alignment with entrenched educational and doctrinal systems. The ritual's marginalization thus epitomizes broader struggles over authenticity, autonomy, and

the boundaries of acceptable religiosity in Aceh's evolving socio-spiritual landscape.

3.4. Political Mobilization of Religious Authority: Hegemonic Contestations in Aceh's Socio-Religious Landscape

The interplay between religious and cultural authorities in Aceh reveals a profound contestation over the interpretation and practice of *ṭarīqah* traditions, manifesting in three interrelated dimensions. Firstly, religious elites strategically frame the *Dike Situek* ritual through the stigmatizing lens of *salik buta* ("blind spiritual seekers"), positioning it as a doctrinal aberration from established Sufi norms. This rhetoric not only delegitimizes the ritual but also reinforces the institutional hegemony of *dayah* clerics, who leverage their monopoly over formal religious education to marginalize non-conforming practices. Secondly, this epistemic asymmetry—rooted in the unequal distribution of religious capital—enables the *dayah* establishment to cast cultural authorities as intellectually deficient, further entrenching hierarchical power dynamics. Thirdly, a dualism of legitimacy emerges, with both factions asserting exclusive claims to spiritual truth: the *dayah* through textual orthodoxy and hierarchical pedagogy, and *Dike Situek* practitioners through embodied, community-driven expressions of faith. These tensions reflect a broader societal rupture, where religious institutions, driven by hegemonic ambitions, clash with grassroots cultural actors resisting homogenization. Mirroring global patterns of religious conflict—such as the structure-agency dialectics in American churches (Murphy, 2022)—this contestation underscores the universal struggle between institutional control and organic spiritual agency.

The *dayah*'s rejection of *Dike Situek* stems from its perceived threat to their socio-religious dominance, exemplifying a structural conflict between conservators of the status quo and proponents of pluralistic religious expression (Hilmy & Niam, 2021). Within the sociology of religion, such clashes often arise from the friction between institutionalized dogma, which prioritizes doctrinal uniformity, and lived religiosity, which embraces adaptive, culturally embedded practices. Without mechanisms for inclusive dialogue or tolerance, this polarization risks fracturing social cohesion, exacerbating divisions between orthodox and heterodox groups (Hamdani et al., 2023). The *Dike Situek* case thus transcends local dispute, serving as a microcosm of global challenges in balancing religious authority with cultural diversity, where the suppression of minority practices underscores the politicization of spirituality as a tool for maintaining power.

Dike Situek embodies a dynamic synthesis of Acehnese Islamic tradition, functioning as both a ritual practice and a mechanism of socio-cultural identity formation. As Zamora and Romero (2019) elucidate, this tradition anchors communal memory by intertwining religious symbolism with historical narratives, thereby preserving collective consciousness of pivotal past events. The ritual's tripartite structure—comprising *dzikir* (devotional chants), choreographed kinetic storytelling, and the resonant acoustics of the *Situek* instrument—transcends mere performance to generate what Kryvoruchko (2019) terms "embodied transcendence." This fusion of auditory, somatic, and spiritual elements induces heightened states of communal catharsis, fostering a participatory epistemology where corporeal engagement bridges individual and collective piety. Such synesthetic experiences not only reinforce communal bonds but also reify Aceh's distinct Islamic identity amid globalizing homogenization.

Paradoxically, the ritual's cultural resonance has intensified its marginalization by institutional religious authorities. The *dayah* establishment, epitomized by Abu Dayah's agency,

systematically pathologizes *Dike Situek* as *bid'ah* (heretical innovation), framing its somatic and musical dimensions as deviations from scriptural purity (Farrell, 2020). This stigmatization operates through discursive strategies analyzed by Deitelhoff (2020)—public denunciations in sermons, fatwas, and media narratives—that conflate doctrinal nonconformity with moral threat. Such rhetoric weaponizes religious legitimacy to alienate *Dike Situek* practitioners, recasting cultural dissent as existential peril to Aceh's Islamic orthodoxy.

The conflict's escalation from theological dispute to socio-political battleground underscores its embeddedness in structural power asymmetries. As Mundiri and Tohet (2018) argue, Abu Dayah's suppression of *Dike Situek* reflects a broader project of monopolizing religious authority, wherein dissident groups are framed as competitors to institutional hegemony. This endeavor aligns with Triantoro and Ardiansyah's (2018) analysis of "moral governance"— the strategic deployment of religious doctrine to legitimize control over public morality and social order. By positioning *Dike Situek* as a destabilizing force, *dayah* elites consolidate their role as arbiters of both spiritual and civic life.

Critically, the contestation transcends sectarian boundaries, intersecting with material and political economies. Nesbitt (2020) identifies how *dayah*'s gatekeeping of Islamic authenticity safeguards its economic patronage networks, including state-funded educational institutions and pilgrimage endowments. *Dike Situek's* grassroots popularity, operating outside these channels, threatens not just ideological dominance but also the financial and political capital underpinning *dayah*'s influence. Thus, the ritual's suppression emerges as a tactical maneuver to preserve institutional monopolies over religious, economic, and symbolic resources.

In this context, *Dike Situek* becomes a microcosm of Aceh's struggle to negotiate pluralism within an increasingly homogenized Islamic public sphere. Its endurance despite institutional hostility exemplifies what Appadurai (1996) theorizes as the "resistance of the local" against hegemonizing narratives. The ritual's practitioners, though marginalized, sustain a counter-narrative of Islamic identity that privileges embodied piety and cultural hybridity over textual rigidity—a testament to religion's enduring fluidity as both a lived experience and a site of contestation.

The discursive strategies employed by dominant religious actors in Aceh—epitomized by Abu Dayah's agency—serve to perpetuate an entrenched religious ideology that has historically maintained hegemonic control over Acehnese socio-religious life (Rozi, 2020). This phenomenon mirrors dynamics observed in the Bugis and Makassar regions, where tensions between Islamic orthodoxy and indigenous traditions have generated protracted ideological contestations. In such contexts, Islam transcends its role as a spiritual framework, morphing into an ideological apparatus that seeks to regulate, homogenize, and occasionally suppress localized cultural practices (Pabbajah et al., 2021). These interactions exemplify what Gramsci termed "cultural hegemony," wherein dominant groups naturalize their authority by aligning religious norms with societal structures, thereby reshaping local identities through institutionalized power (Weinhardt & ten-Brink, 2020). The Acehnese case, however, reveals an added layer of complexity: religious contestation is not merely a theological or cultural struggle but a deliberate political project to monopolize influence over specific constituencies, often through strategic alliances with state and communal institutions.

Abu Dayah's agency exemplifies this synthesis of spiritual and political authority. By collaborating with community leaders and governmental bodies, he institutionalizes structural

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prohibitions against *Dike Situek*, leveraging his dual role as a religious scholar and socio-political broker (McBride, 2016). This coordination manifests in policies that conflate doctrinal compliance with civic order, effectively weaponizing religious legitimacy to marginalize dissident practices. For instance, fatwas (religious edicts) issued by Abu Dayah are often codified into local ordinances, transforming theological objections into enforceable legal norms. Such maneuvers align with Alatas (2021) concept of "sacred bureaucracy," where religious authority becomes enmeshed with administrative governance to enforce ideological conformity. By dominating the religious pedagogy accessible to *Dike Situek* practitioners—many of whom lack formal *dayah* education—Abu Dayah's agency perpetuates epistemic hierarchies that privilege institutionalized knowledge over vernacular spirituality (Frederick et al., 2016).

This politicization operates through a dual mechanism of doctrinal indoctrination and structural coercion. Doctrine is mobilized not merely as a spiritual guide but as a tool of social control, with Abu Dayah's teachings framing *Dike Situek* as a destabilizing force against "moral order." Simultaneously, his alliances with political elites ensure that dissenting voices are excluded from decision-making forums, thereby naturalizing the hegemony of *dayah*-aligned interpretations. This strategy mirrors patterns observed in authoritarian theocracies, where religious and state apparatuses merge to suppress cultural pluralism under the guise of unity (Pabbajah et al., 2021). The result is a self-reinforcing cycle: religious authority legitimizes political power, while political backing amplifies religious dominance, creating an asymmetrical power matrix that entrenches the status quo.

The collaboration between Abu Dayah's agency and governmental structures underscores the instrumentalization of religion as a vehicle for socio-political control. By embedding religious norms into public policy—such as bans on *Dike Situek* performances—the *dayah* establishment extends its influence beyond the spiritual domain into the civic sphere. This alignment reflects a broader trend in Southeast Asia, where religious institutions often function as para-state actors, mediating between communities and formal governance systems (Alatas, 2021). For example, Abu Dayah's role in blessing (*peusijuk*) newly appointed officials not only sanctifies their authority but also positions him as a gatekeeper of political legitimacy, intertwining sacred and secular power.

Such symbiosis between religious and political elites enables the systematic marginalization of groups like *Dike Situek* practitioners, who operate outside institutionalized networks. The *dayah*'s A+ accreditation status—contrasted with the unclassified standing of *Dike Situek's* informal schools—further institutionalizes this disparity, relegating non-conformist practices to the periphery of societal acceptance. Frederick et al. (2016) identify this as a form of "symbolic violence," where dominant groups impose classificatory systems that naturalize their superiority. By controlling the metrics of legitimacy (e.g., educational accreditation, doctrinal adherence), Abu Dayah's agency dictates which traditions are deemed "authentically" Islamic, effectively erasing alternative expressions from public discourse.

Ultimately, the Acehnese case illuminates how religious hegemony is sustained through both ideological persuasion and structural enforcement. The suppression of *Dike Situek* is not an isolated act of doctrinal policing but a calculated effort to preserve a monopolistic religious-political order. This dynamic resonates globally, from the regulation of Sufi practices in Egypt to the stigmatization of Ahmadiyyah communities in Indonesia, revealing religion's enduring role as both a scaffold for identity and a weapon of exclusion.

The contestation of religious authority, as observed in Aceh's *Dike Situek* case, operates through a dual framework of politicization: explicit (overt) and implicit (covert) modalities (Frederick et al., 2016). These intertwined strategies reflect systemic efforts to consolidate power, blending doctrinal governance with socio-political maneuvering.

The explicit dimension materializes through formalized socio-religious policies, most notably the legislative prohibition of the *Dike Situek* ritual (Mawardi, 2018). Such legal codification represents a strategic alignment between religious and state apparatuses, wherein theological objections are transmuted into enforceable public ordinances. For instance, the criminalization of *Dike Situek* under the pretext of "moral disorder" exemplifies how religious elites instrumentalize state mechanisms to suppress cultural practices deemed ideologically divergent. This legislative approach mirrors broader trends in authoritarian theocracies, where religious norms are enshrined in law to institutionalize homogeneity, as seen in Iran's regulation of public morality or Saudi Arabia's suppression of Sufi practices. By framing bans as safeguards for communal piety, authorities like Abu Dayah conflate doctrinal compliance with civic duty, thereby legitimizing exclusionary policies under the veneer of social cohesion.

In contrast, implicit politicization operates through subtler, yet equally potent, mechanisms of social control. Abu Dayah's agency exemplifies this through unilateral decision-making within religious councils, closed-door negotiations with village heads, and the strategic co-optation of community leaders (Eriksson et al., 2021). These behind-the-scenes maneuvers reinforce theological norms not through law but through symbolic violence—a Bourdieusian concept wherein dominant groups impose cultural hierarchies that naturalize their authority. For example, the exclusion of *Dike Situek* practitioners from *peusijuk* (blessing ceremonies) for public officials subtly delegitimizes their social standing, while privileging *dayah*-aligned groups. Such tactics embed religious orthodoxy into the social fabric, ensuring compliance through informal networks of shame, honor, and patronage. This covert enforcement mirrors Foucault's "disciplinary power," where norms are internalized through diffuse social pressures rather than overt coercion.

The *Dike Situek* case underscores religion's dual role as both a spiritual framework and a contested terrain for socio-political dominance. Abu Dayah's agency epitomizes this duality: while ostensibly advocating theological purity, his actions reveal a calculated project to monopolize ideological influence. By leveraging legislative bans (explicit) and social stigmatization (implicit), he constructs a hegemonic bloc—a Gramscian fusion of religious, political, and communal power—that marginalizes rivals and dictates the boundaries of acceptable religiosity (Farrell, 2020). This bloc operates as a self-reinforcing system: religious authority legitimizes political decisions, while political backing amplifies religious dominance, creating a feedback loop that entrenches institutional power.

The Acehnese context illuminates a global pattern wherein religious institutions weaponize doctrine to suppress cultural pluralism. Similar dynamics are evident in India's regulation of Hindu nationalist rhetoric against minority practices, or in Nigeria's sectarian conflicts between Salafist groups and indigenous Sufi orders. These cases reveal how politicized religion functions as a tool for identity engineering, where dominant groups redefine communal belonging through exclusionary norms. For *Dike Situek* practitioners, resistance persists through grassroots cultural preservation—a form of everyday resistance (Scott, 1985)—that challenges hegemonic narratives by sustaining alternative Islamic identities.

Ultimately, the *Dike Situek* conflict exposes the paradox of religious authority: while it can

unify communities through shared belief, it also fractures societies through ideological gatekeeping. The Acehnese case demonstrates that religious contestation is never solely about theology but is inherently entangled with struggles over social capital, political legitimacy, and collective memory. As global debates on religious freedom intensify, understanding these dual modalities of control—explicit and implicit—offers critical insights into how power is negotiated, resisted, and reified in pluralistic societies.

CONCLUSION

This study makes a seminal contribution to Islamic sociology by advancing theoretical frameworks for analyzing the intersection of religious conflict and political power. It elucidates the strategic instrumentalization of religious identity and discourse as tools for socio-political ascendance, wherein dominant actors within majority groups exploit their institutional leverage to align state economic agendas with communal interests—often bypassing local dissent through claims of representational authority. Crucially, the research uncovers how radicalized fatwas are weaponized to synergize religious orthodoxy with hegemonic state objectives, thereby exacerbating structural marginalization of minority factions.

By foregrounding these dynamics, the findings underscore the imperative of adopting culturally embedded analytical frameworks to holistically address intra-religious strife. Such frameworks must prioritize the identification of epistemic barriers and the development of syncretic reconciliation strategies that acknowledge societal pluralism. A critical limitation, however, lies in the study's nascent exploration of the *Dike Situek* tradition's historical genesis, particularly the socio-religious trajectories of its foundational figures. Future research addressing this lacuna could deepen insights into the interplay between historical memory and contemporary contestations, offering pathways for transformative conflict resolution in pluralistic Islamic societies.

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