

THE ANTI-SALAFI CAMPAIGN IN ACEH

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I. INTRODUCTION

A major ideological struggle is underway in Aceh as traditionalist Muslim leaders, based in religious boarding schools called *dayah*, try to increase their political influence over public policy and wrest critical appointments and resources from Muslim modernist groups, including Salafis. The struggle has taken on a new dimension as deputy governor and former rebel commander Muzakir Manaf, now a candidate in the 2017 election for governor, channels support to the traditionalists in an effort to shore up his political base. One possible implication is a stricter definition of Sunni orthodoxy by the local government that would make the Shafi'i legal tradition, which is preferred by traditionalist Sunnis, the official school of thought (*mazhab*) in Aceh. The traditionalists claim to be campaigning against the intolerance of "Wahhabis", but the campaign itself risks becoming intolerant.

The struggle also could increase the potential for violence in the 2017 local elections.

The rise of the anti-Salafi campaign in Aceh has been triggered by traditionalists' anxiety about the apparent growth of Salafi influence following the 2004 tsunami. They are particularly offended by some Salafi preachers who have branded traditionalist practices such as celebrating the Prophet's birthday (Maulid) and praying at graves (*ziarah kubur*) as heretical innovations (*bid'ah*) and therefore forbidden under Islamic law.

While differences between traditionalists and modernists are not new in Aceh, the anti-Salafi campaign is prompted as much by political and economic grievances as by doctrinal differences. Traditional scholars (*ulama*) who have a large mass base in rural Aceh, feel underrepresented in the government and religious bureaucracies, which have been historically dominated by the more educated modernist Muslims. Since the late 1990s, they have been trying to use post-Soeharto democratic space to expand their influence – and largely succeeding. The main battleground has been mosques, particularly the "grand" Baiturrahman Mosque in Banda Aceh. The traditionalists, calling themselves Ahlussunah wal Jama'ah (Aswaja), have sought to change the imams and practices at all mosques to ensure adherence to the Shafi'i *mazhab*.

The Aswaja movement makes no distinction between Salafis and Muhammadiyah as both condemn some traditionalist practices as idolatrous. Aswaja members have retaliated by occupying modernist mosques and attacking Salafi schools. The concern now is that candidates for the 2017 election may exploit anti-Salafi sentiment or even support discriminatory acts against the Salafi/modernist minority in order to win traditionalist votes. Further, a split within Partai Aceh, the political party founded by former rebels in June 2007, means that all of its candidates will be looking for support beyond their core constituency. Religious teachers (*ulama*) in rural schools with their vast alumni networks and strong clout in rural areas, could make appealing political allies.

This report looks at the origin of the anti-Salafi campaign, how it is likely to affect the upcoming regional election, and its implications for religious intolerance and violence in Aceh. It is based on extensive interviews in Aceh with members of all the contending groups.

II. BACKGROUND

The effort of *dayah ulama* to assert their influence is the latest chapter of a power struggle between traditionalists and modernists/Salafis in Aceh that goes back more than 100 years. That struggle has taken place across Indonesia, reflected in the competition on Java between Muhammadiyah and the traditionalist organisation Nadhlatul Ulama, but has had its own particular dynamic in Aceh. The current rivalry dates back to the 1920s when Acehnese who studied at modernist/Salafi schools in Padang, Sumatra and the Middle East came back and challenged traditionalist dominance in Islamic education and politics. In the 1950s, traditionalists helped

the Indonesian government crush the modernist-led Darul Islam rebellion only to be marginalised during President Soeharto's "New Order" (1966-1998). Traditionalist groups made a comeback in the late 1990s after Soeharto resigned and his successor lifted the military emergency in Aceh that had been in place since 1990 as a response to the pro-independence rebellion of the Free Aceh Movement (Gerakan Aceh Merdeka, GAM). The traditionalists began by joining a movement in 1999 for a referendum on independence, then moved to take over strategic positions in the ulama council, define Sunni orthodoxy through *shari'ah*-influenced regulations, and more recently align with Partai Aceh to assert traditionalist Sunni orthodoxy as the indigenous – and only acceptable – form of Islam in Aceh. Although the conflict is mostly political, it is also underpinned by fundamental doctrinal differences among the three Sunni groups.

A. *Salafism, Modernism and Traditionalism*

Salafism, often referred to by its enemies as Wahhabism, and modernist Islam are different despite some superficial similarities in terms of their stance on the need to return to the Qur'an and traditions of the Prophet (*hadith*) as the main sources of law and to rid Islam of superstition and religious innovations.¹ Salafism is broadly defined as a movement to return to what the adherents believe was the purest form of Islam as practised by the Prophet and two generations after him (*tabi'in* and *tabi' al-tabi'in*).² Modernist Islam – which in Indonesia is largely represented by Muhammadiyah, founded in 1912 – is inspired by the nineteenth century revivalist movement of the Egyptian reformer, Muhammad Abduh. While Salafis romanticise the "pristine" Islam of the seventh century, modernists seek to make Islam compatible with the current age. To modernists, both the return to Qur'an and *hadith* and the adoption of modern science are necessary to cleanse the Muslim world of "un-Islamic" traditions and social ills that caused Muslim backwardness.

Indonesian traditionalism refers to the practice or knowledge of Islam as derived from specific Islamic scholars and jurists, especially the great mediaeval law schools, as opposed to a literal reading of the scriptures, as promoted by Salafis, or independent reasoning, (*ijtihad*), as encouraged by modernists.³ Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), founded in 1926, is the largest Muslim traditionalist organisation in Indonesia.⁴

Theologically, the dispute between traditionalists and modernists revolves mainly around their interpretations of three Islamic concepts: the oneness of God (*tauhid*), unwarranted religious innovation (*bid'ah*), and imitation of ulama (*taqlid*). The three Sunni groups believe that *tauhid* is the crux of the Islamic creed, but they differ in terms of theological schools and what constitutes *bid'ah* and idolatry (*shirk*). Most Salafis and Muhammadiyah teach that *tauhid* consists of three components: God is the sole creator of the universe (*tauhid rububiyah*); God is supreme and the only one to be worshipped (*tauhid uluhiyah*), and God has entirely unique names and attributes (*tauhid asma wa al-sifat*).⁵ This is known as the "tauhid three" school.

1 Wahhabism is the form of Salafism practised in Saudi Arabia, but in Indonesia, it has come to have a pejorative connotation, suggesting extremism and intolerance.

2 Jonathan Brown, *Salafism*, (Oxford, 2014), p. 3.

3 In terms of jurisprudence, traditionalists follow four schools of thought (*madzhab*) namely Shafi'i, Hanbali, Hanafi, and Maliki, although most NU members, like their counterparts throughout Southeast Asia, follow only the first. In terms of creed, the Shafi'i school adheres to the teachings of Abu Hasan al-Ash'ari (Ash'ariyah) and Abu Mansur al-Maturidi (Maturidiyah), and in terms of Sufism and ethics, it follows Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali and Al-Juwaini Al-Baghdadi.

4 Historically, the establishment of NU itself was a reaction to the modernist rise in Indonesia. For more on how the dispute with modernists has affected NU's politics over the years, see Robin Bush, *Nahdlatul Ulama and the Struggle for Power within Islam and Politics in Indonesia*, (Singapore, 2009), pp. 29-36.

5 Quintan Wiktorowicz, "Anatomy of the Salafi Movement", *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, Vol. 29:3 (2006), pp. 208-210.

Traditionalists follow the “*tauhid fifty*” school of Abu Hasan Al-Ash’ari and Abu Mansur Al-Maturidy whose doctrines emphasise the attributes of God and the Prophet. Salafis apply their understanding of *tauhid* very rigidly: anything that remotely differs from their interpretation is considered to be an unwarranted innovation, including many practices, like celebrating Maulid, that grew up after the Prophet’s death. In terms of jurisprudence, particularly related to daily rituals, Indonesian traditionalists adhere solely to the Shafi’i school while acknowledging three other schools (Hanbali, Hanafi, and Maliki). Salafis and Muhammadiyah largely view this adherence as “blind imitation” (*taqlid*).⁶ They do, however, allow “informed imitation” (*ittiba*) of ulama from any *mazhab* as long as it is based on rational judgment, for Muhammadiyah, or scriptural arguments, for Salafis.⁷

While Salafis were present in Aceh before the 2004 tsunami, many more came to Aceh afterwards. The Yemeni-oriented Salafi school that became the main target of attacks was pioneered by a Javanese teacher who first came to Aceh in 2001 but only opened his school in 2008. A Makassar-based Salafi organisation, Wahdah Islamiyah, sent volunteers in the aftermath of the tsunami and eventually established a branch there. Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia, a pro-caliphate group that because of its pro-*shari’a* advocacy is often wrongly associated with Salafism, also entered Aceh in 2004.⁸ The increase in the post-tsunami presence of Salafi and like-minded groups has generated a widespread fear of a “Wahhabi invasion” among traditionalists.

B. 1950s-1990s: The Beginning

Aswaja members claim that they have been the majority in Aceh since before Indonesian independence and that Salafism and modernism were introduced by outsiders. The latter claim is debatable, especially since the founder of Aceh’s first modernist organisation, the All-Aceh Association of Ulama (Persatuan Ulama-Ulama Seluruh Aceh, PUSA), was himself an Acehnese.⁹ The rivalries between traditional and modernist ulama resemble the conflict between conservative ulama (*kaum tua*), who in early twentieth century Sumatra defended traditional rituals and education, and younger ones (*kaum muda*) who promoted modern madrasahs. What makes Aceh different is the emergence of an armed separatist group that started with Islamist elements but later turned into a more secular ethno-nationalist movement that made the rivalry bloodier and more complex.

PUSA, founded by Daud Beureueh, became the dominant Islamic organisation in the 1940s. Graduates of PUSA schools also dominated the local administrative apparatus.¹⁰ In 1953, Daud Beureueh began a rebellion against the central government after then-President Sukarno failed to deliver on his promise to make Aceh a special region where *shari’a* would be implemented, instead incorporating it into North Sumatra province. In the ensuing conflict, traditionalist ulama

6 Muhammadiyah’s emphasis on independent reasoning (*ijtihad*) is aimed to free Muslims from the constraints of *mazhab*.

7 “Taqlid, Doa Iftitah, dan Sholawat”, fatwatarjih.com, May 2011; Arif Fathul Ulum, “Antara Taqlid dan Ittiba”, almanhaj.or.id, 2 August 2007.

8 Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) is a non-violent pro-caliphate advocacy group affiliated to the global Hizb ut-Tahrir (literally Party of Liberation) organisation. Founded by the Palestinian Taqiuddin al-Nabhani in early 1950s, Hizb ut-Tahrir expanded to Indonesia in the early 1980s through Abdullah bin Nuh, an Indonesian cleric who became influenced by the Australian Abdurrahman al-Baghdadi, a former member of the organisation in Lebanon who later taught at Nuh’s school in West Java. Since 2014, HTI has been one of the fiercest opponents of the self-declared caliphate of the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq (ISIS), arguing that the kind of caliphate it envisaged would not be established through violence. For more on HTI, see Ken Ward, “Non-violent Extremists? Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia,” *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 63:2 (2009), pp. 149-164.

9 Muhammadiyah, on the other hand, was brought in to Aceh in 1927 by local collaborators of the Dutch (*uleebalang*) in an attempt to crush traditionalists who fought the Dutch. Despite initial convergence of interests between modernists and the *uleebalang*, the former developed an anti-colonialist movement and turned against the *uleebalang* who came to be wiped out as a result of the 1946 social revolution. Michael Feener, *Shari’a and Social Engineering: The Implementation of Islamic Law in Contemporary Aceh, Indonesia*, (Oxford, 2013), p. 29.

10 Feener, op. cit., p. 32-33.

set up militias that helped the central government defeat Beureueh's Darul Islam movement. They also issued *fatwa* stating that the rebellion was unlawful.¹¹ In 1962, the Indonesian army defeated Darul Islam, and the state then tried to co-opt both traditional and modernist ulama.

Another opportunity emerged in December 1965 as the central government, in the first throes of the backlash against an attempted coup blamed on the Indonesian Communist Party (Partai Komunis Indonesia, PKI), established a provincial ulama council (Majelis Permusyawaratan Ulama, MPU) in an attempt to use Islam as a counterweight to Communism. The first MPU head, Tgk H Abdullah Ujong Rimba, came from a *dayah* background – although he was also a former member of PUSA and a government official.¹² While the MPU included some *dayah ulama*, its membership remained dominated by urban scholars, notably civil servants from the Ar-Raniry State Islamic Institute, the primary tertiary institution in the province for budding Islamic scholars.¹³ The MPU's creation further deepened the gap between urban government-appointed ulama and rural clerics. Not only did the latter lose formal religious authority to modernists, but *dayah* graduates also could not compete with middle class elites – including the children of PUSA and Darul Islam leaders – for government jobs after Soeharto's New Order government came to power.¹⁴ Many traditionalists developed an antipathy toward Soeharto and mostly voted for the Islamic opposition. Traditionalist support was an important factor in the victories of the United Development Party (Partai Persatuan Pembangunan, PPP) in Aceh in the 1977 and 1982 elections.¹⁵

By the mid-1980s, most ulama had been successfully co-opted by the government, thanks to Ibrahim Hasan, Aceh governor from 1983 to 1993. A university professor and descendant of respected clerics, Ibrahim tried to win over the *dayah ulama* through frequent visits as well as providing massive funding and free pilgrimages to Mecca.¹⁶ Under his leadership, *ulama* went from being rebels and critics to government mouthpieces. Modernists were given positions in universities, public mosques and the *ulama* council. The main function of the latter, which in 1975 had changed its name from MPU to Majelis Ulama Indonesia (MUI), was to endorse government policies.¹⁷ Traditionalists received financial assistance to build schools and little more. It was a way of limiting their influence to their own villages.¹⁸

As conflict with GAM escalated in the early 1990s, the Indonesian military co-opted many *dayah ulama* into counter-insurgency efforts.¹⁹ All this meant greater humiliation for traditionalists: not only had they been bypassed for control of the *ulama* council and the Baiturrahman Mosque, but they also were now being exploited by the army, an institution that many Acehnese viewed with loathing.

11 Other traditionalist ulama even declared Darul Islam as *bughat*, illegal rebellion against the legitimate ruler that is punishable by death. *Ibid.*, p. 35.

12 Majelis Permusyawaratan Ulama (MPU) Aceh, established in 1965, was the model for the nationwide Majelis Ulama Indonesia (MUI) that was only established in 1975.

13 The government favoured modernists because among other things, they suspected that the Islamic Education Association (Persatuan Tarbiyah Islam, PERTI), the traditional ulama party, was collaborating with the Indonesian Communist party (Partai Komunis Indonesia, PKI). Yusny Sabi, *Islam and Social Change*, (Shah Alam, 2005), pp. 125-126.

14 Tim Kell, *The Roots of Acehnese Rebellion, 1989-1992*, Cornell Modern Indonesia Project, (Ithaca, 1995), p. 48.

15 Dwight King and Ryaas Rasjid, "The Golkar Landslide in the 1987 Elections: The Case of Aceh," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 28:9, (1988), p. 918. Islamic parties had won in Aceh since Indonesia's first election in 1955. In the 1971 election, however, Golkar won by 0.8 per cent over a coalition of Islamic parties, consisting of Partai Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), Partai Serikat Islam Indonesia (PSII), Persatuan Tarbiyah Islamiyah (PERTI) and Persaudaraan Muslimin Indonesia (Parmusi). In 1973, President Soeharto forced the four parties to merge into one party, PPP.

16 Edward Aspinall, *Islam and Nation: Separatist Rebellion in Aceh, Indonesia*, (Stanford, 2009), p. 87.

17 The name was changed from MPU to MUI because in 1975, Soeharto set up a national MUI, so MPU Aceh became MUI's Aceh branch.

18 Anthony Reid, *Verandah of Violence: The Background to the Aceh Problem*, (Singapore, 2006), p. 329.

19 Aspinall, *op. cit.*, p. 206.

C. Late 1990s and 2000s: Fighting for Sunni Orthodoxy in Shari'a Legislation

Traditional *ulama* and their students (*santri*) saw a new opportunity in the downfall of Soeharto and the lifting of the military emergency in 1998. In 1999, support for GAM increased while civil society and student organisations sprang up to demand the same kind of referendum on independence as East Timor had been promised. While MUI and local political elites supported “special autonomy” for Aceh as proposed by the Habibie government in February 1999, traditional *ulama* and *santri* now felt freer to express support for independence.²⁰ In January 1999, *santri* representatives attended a national student congress organised by Sentral Informasi Referendum Aceh (SIRA), the most prominent student-based pro-referendum movement.²¹ In April, under the leadership of Tgk Bulqaini, *santri* established their own student movement called Rabithah Thaliban Aceh or Thaliban for short, a name that gave them some problems given global developments. But with 75,000 members, Thaliban quickly showed its ability to mobilise huge crowds. It became a significant player in local politics, as did its affiliate, Himpunan Ulama Dayah Aceh (HUDA), founded in September 1999.

These groups rose to national fame when in September 1999 they held a mass prayer rally involving some 2,000 people at the Baiturrahman Mosque attended by Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur), shortly to be elected president, and other national political figures. Gus Dur famously unveiled a big banner that read: “The Aceh Conflict Can Only Be Solved by a Referendum” (*konflik Aceh hanya bisa diselesaikan dengan referendum*).²² HUDA and Thaliban felt further empowered by Gus Dur, who recruited *ulama* as partners to try to win the hearts of Acehnese.²³

In April 2000, HUDA and Thaliban were planning to hold an Acehnese People's Congress (Kongres Rakyat Aceh, KRA), in which 1,500 Acehnese would debate special autonomy versus independence. The Indonesian military opposed the idea, believing it would turn into a pro-independence rally. Local GAM commanders were also opposed, seeing the KRA as a threat to the momentum for a referendum but also perhaps seeing the politically active *ulama* as potential rivals.²⁴ Under pressure from all sides, HUDA and Thaliban cancelled the conference, temporarily withdrew from politics and shifted their attention to gaining influence within the MUI.

The MUI suddenly had become more powerful with the national parliament's enactment of Law 44/1999 on “Implementation of Special Status for the Special Region of Aceh”. Article 9 gave *ulama* a bigger role in “giving advice on local government policies”. Their influence increased

20 IPAC interview with Tgk Bulqaini, Banda Aceh, 23 July 2016. Tgk. Bulqaini said that referendum was a safe choice; it was the middle way between independence and special autonomy. He said: “If we're pro-autonomy, GAM would be our enemy. If we're pro-independence, we'll get trouble from TNI. A referendum would save us all the trouble.”

21 IPAC interview with Tgk. Bulqaini, 23 July 2016.

22 Stanley Adi Prasetyo and Teresa Birks, “Background and political situation in Aceh”, in Olle Törnquist, Stanley Adi Prasetyo and Teresa Birks (eds), *Aceh: The Role of Democracy for Peace and Reconstruction*, (Yogyakarta, 2010), p. 62.

23 IPAC interview with the director of Abdurrahman Wahid Centre, Jakarta, 17 August 2016; See also Teuku Kamal Fasya, “Gus Dur dan Aceh,” *Kompas*, 30 December 2014. Bulqaini became very close to Gus Dur; he was invited to the presidential palace at least three times during the relatively short period of Gus Dur's presidency. During his September 1999 visit to Aceh, Gus Dur was scheduled to attend HUDA's inauguration but could not make it due to a scheduling conflict. But he did attend a student rally, organised by Thaliban, Sentral Informasi Referendum Aceh (SIRA) and other civil society groups, which turned out to be a rally for a referendum. In 2000, Gus Dur secured a grant from Brunei Darussalam for peace efforts in Aceh. The grant was managed by Yayasan Aswaja Aceh, a traditionalist foundation headed by Afdhal Yasin, the former leader of the National Awakening Party (Partai Kebangkitan Bangsa, PKB) Aceh, which many saw as a form of favouritism, since Gus Dur was the national founder of PKB. The grant was used, among other things, to facilitate the travel of traditionalist *ulama* and other civil society activists to meet with Gus Dur in Jakarta.

24 IPAC interview with Tgk. Syamaun Risyad, the convener of Acehnese People's Congress (Kongres Rakyat Aceh, KRA), Lhokseumawe, 25 July 2016; “KRA Ditunda Hingga Medio Mei . Tgk Abdullah Sjafe'i Menolak”, *Serambi Indonesia*, “16 April 2000. “Sekjen GAM: KRA Penting Untuk Aceh,” *Serambi Indonesia*, 5 April 2000. A local GAM faction in Pidie reportedly intimidated KRA organisers. The home of KRA convener, Syamaun Risyad, was burnt down. There was also an assassination attempt targeted at Syamaun's courier.

still further with national parliament's adoption of Law No.18/2001 on Special Autonomy for Aceh which for the first time explicitly gave Aceh the right to implement *shari'a*. The old MUI structure was disbanded in 2002 and replaced by a new body with the old name of MPU, as if to highlight its Acehese characteristics. Members of the council were elected from among candidates selected by community leaders and elders at village and district levels – a big advantage for *dayah ulama*.²⁵ Where modernists were elected, as in Lhokseumawe in 2008, some traditionalists mobilised their students to protest and even vandalise MPU offices.²⁶

But if the MPU was now in traditionalist hands, another key institution remained dominated by the modernists: the Office of Islamic Shari'a (DSI), a key player in the drafting of *shari'a* legislation.²⁷ Many modernists saw control over this office as an opportunity to “modernise” Islam in Aceh. One regulation that became the focus of debate was Qanun 11/2002 on Implementation of Islamic Law in Faith, Worship and Law (*Pelaksanaan Syariat Islam Bidang Aqidah, Ibadah, dan Syariah*), especially in its definition of acceptable Islamic faith (*aqidah*).²⁸ Traditionalists, represented by MPU's vice chairman Tgk Daud Zamzami, demanded the inclusion of the term “Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah” as the only acceptable *aqidah* in Aceh – which would exclude Shi'a and other minority sects. The modernists initially rejected such a limitation but finally gave in because a senior cleric gave a written warning that no grassroots ulama would help enforce the law if it did not mention the phrase “Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah”.²⁹

The phrase eventually made its way into other *qanun* and fatwa. In 2007, the MPU issued Fatwa 4/2007 on Guidelines for Identification of Deviant Sects. It listed thirteen criteria for determining deviance, including “believing in a religious creed that does not conform to that of Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah”. As with the 2002 *qanun*, the 2007 fatwa never defined the term.

III. TARGETING SALAFIS

Attacks on Salafis picked up around the time of the 2006 and 2007 local elections, mostly in Bireuen and Aceh Besar districts.³⁰ These were by no means the first instance of traditionalist violence. In 1998, a Salafi school in Leung Putu, in what is now Pidie Jaya district, had been burned down by a mob from neighbouring villages. The school was run by a Saudi-educated Acehese cleric, Ustadz Faisal Hasan Sufi, whom the mob accused of spreading deviant beliefs. After the attack the traditionalists retook the mosque.³¹ More systematic attacks on modernist/Salafi mosques followed.

The return of some Acehese Salafis from Yemen in late 2000s and their success in spreading

25 These procedures were mandated by a provincial regulation adopted in 2000 that predates the Special Autonomy Law.

26 IPAC interview with Tgk. Syamaun Risyad, Lhokseumawe, 25 July 2016. See also “Terkait Ricuh di Kantor MPU Tiga Santri Jadi Tersangka”, *Serambi Indonesia*, 11 June 2008. On 9 June 2008, a *dayah* mob led by FPI-Aceh leader Muslim At-Tahiry attacked the MPU Lhokseumawe office, protesting the re-election of Syamaun Risyad as MPU-Lhokseumawe chairman. Three students were arrested but their leader was left untouched. Syamaun went on to become the chairman but eventually resigned because the *dayah* community allegedly lobbied the local government to delay the funding for MPU. In Syamaun's words, “those *dayah* people made it very difficult for me to do my work”.

27 For more on DSI and the Islamic *shari'a* structure in Aceh, see Alyasa Abubakar, *Bunga Rampai Pelaksanaan Syariat Islam: Pendukung Qanun Pelaksanaan Syariat Islam*, (Banda Aceh, 2009).

28 IPAC interview with leaders of FPI-Aceh, Banda Aceh, 26 May 2016. In terms of *shari'a* legislation, the disagreement between Salafis and *dayah* clerics is over the definition of Sunni orthodoxy. Both groups, however, agree that *shari'a* is a good thing for Aceh. Some FPI-Aceh figures went as far as saying, “of course we support *shari'a*. We, the *dayah ulama*, have not been involved much in *qanun* drafting, except during the public hearing [at DPRA] or through MPU. But we don't mind. Let those professors draft the *qanun*. We care more about the implementation, because we are men of action.”

29 Arskal Salim, *Challenging the Secular State: The Islamization of Law in Modern Indonesia*, (Honolulu, 2008), p. 160.

30 Most of the elections took place in December 2006 but Bireuen was one of the two districts which voted in 2007 because the bupati's terms had not expired.

31 IPAC interview with a Salafi teacher in Aceh Besar, 22 May 2016. See also “Dialog Keislaman Membedah Aliran Sesat dan Ikhtilafiyah,” *dewandakwahaceh.com*, 1 August 2008.

study groups around Aceh prompted a backlash from traditionalist groups, who targeted three kinds of Salafis: Yemen-oriented salafis, Saudi-oriented Salafis, and the so-called “Wahhabi-leaning Muhammadiyah” (*Muhammadiyah yang ke-wahabi-wahabian*).

Traditionalists do not distinguish between Salafism and Muhammadiyah, partly because Muhammadiyah in Aceh is generally more puritan and closer to Salafis than its Javanese counterpart. As one Muhammadiyah leader in Aceh said:

The Salafis and Muhammadiyah share the purification doctrine, but we emphasise more on *tajdid* or modernisation, whereas the Salafis apply purification too strictly. Everything is *bid'ah*. When I came back to Aceh [from Yogyakarta] in 2006, I was surprised that the Friday sermons in Muhammadiyah mosques always cite *hadits bid'ah*, which of course angered the *dayah* community. That doesn't happen anymore in Jogja or anywhere else in Java! But in Aceh, Muhammadiyah has a Salafi colour.³²

By 2006 as the campaign for governor in the first post-conflict election got underway, political and religious divisions were becoming difficult to untangle. Some of the anti-Salafi attacks may have been linked to campaign rivalries, while others were driven more by a perception that Salafis, many of whom came from outside Aceh, were growing in number and threatening traditional practices.

A. *The First GAM Elections*

The 2006 race for governor pitted Irwandi Yusuf, former GAM propaganda chief, and his running mate, Muhammad Nazar, founder of the pro-independence student movement, SIRA, against a slate backed by the former diaspora leaders of GAM who had lived abroad for most of the conflict. Irwandi and Nazar stood as independents. Their main rivals, running under the banner of the National Mandate Party (PAN), an established national political party, was led by Humam Hamid, a non-GAM intellectual and community leader, and Hasbi Abdullah, brother of Zaini Abdullah, GAM's former “foreign minister”. Traditional ulama were initially divided between these two slates, though many other candidates were also on the ballot.

One of the most influential traditionalist clerics, Tgk Hasanoel Basri (known as Abu Mudi), the leader of MUDI Mesra, the largest *dayah* in Aceh, supported Humam and Hasbi not only because he was related to Humam but also reportedly because he and Irwandi had an ongoing personal feud.³³ MUDI Mesra had 7,000 students and was the centre of a network of 200 schools and several thousand alumni, a potentially important asset in a tight race. Irwandi received the endorsement of Abi Lampisang – a member of GAM since 1982 who later became the imam of Islamic Defenders Front (FPI)-Aceh – and Tgk Bulqaini, Nazar's friend from the pro-referendum campaign.

The support of the traditionalist clerics was thus split, and while Irwandi eventually won, it was largely due to the post-agreement euphoria, Acehnese unwillingness to vote for a national party when they had an alternative, and the role of former combatants who became a formidable get-out-the-vote machine.³⁴ At this point, the clerics were not sufficiently powerful relative to other players to have much influence over the outcome.

32 IPAC interview with the leader of Muhammadiyah-Bireuen, Bireuen, 25 July 2016; IPAC interview with the secretary of Muhammadiyah's Central Board, Jakarta, 16 August 2016. The secretary explained that since its inception Muhammadiyah has never been a monolithic entity. Muhammadiyah in Sumatra generally has a more puritan outlook than its more syncretistic counterpart in Yogyakarta. For the history of Muhammadiyah Aceh and its Padang connection, see “Pegawai pemerintah Belanda Menjadi Pendiri Muhammadiyah di Aceh,” *sangpencerah.id*, 28 April 2014.

33 IPAC interview with a senior teacher at MUDI Mesra, Samalanga, 24 July 2016. MUDI Mesra is actually an acronym. The full name is Ma'hadal Ulum Diniyyah Islamiyyah Mesjid Raya.

34 International Crisis Group (ICG), “Pre-election Anxieties in Aceh,” Briefing No. 81/Asia, 9 September 2008.

The peace agreement included a provision that local parties in Aceh would be allowed to contest local elections, and beginning in 2007, the new parties began registering with the Ministry of Law and Human Rights. Even before the ex-diaspora GAM leaders registered Partai Aceh in 2008, the traditionalist clerics were being pulled in different directions. In mid-2007, Abi Lampisang founded the Obedient and God-fearing Generation of Aceh (Geuneurasi Beusaboh Thaat dan Taqwa, Gabthat) political party “to test the strength of the Irwandi faction among pro-GAM ulama.”³⁵ In February 2008, a competitor to Gabthat emerged in the form of the Aceh Sovereignty Party (Partai Daulat Aceh, PDA). Led by Abu Mudi and Tgk Nasir Waly, the owner of the oldest *dayah* in Aceh, Dayah Labuhan Haji, the party was widely believed to be the creation of the State Intelligence Agency (Badan Intelijen Negara, BIN) in an effort to undercut Irwandi.³⁶ By promoting itself as the true defender of Islamic law, PDA managed to recruit some pro-GAM ulama who were concerned over Irwandi’s lack of commitment to *shari’a* expansion.³⁷

In April 2008, Irwandi and Nazar held a meeting with *dayah ulama* from across Aceh in an effort to improve relations. The ulama used the opportunity to complain that they had been treated like step-children (*dianaktirikan*). They demanded more funding for the newly established Office for the Development of Dayah Education [Badan Pembinaan Pendidikan Dayah].³⁸ Their demand was instantly approved: funding rose from Rp 178 billion in 2008 to Rp 223 billion in 2009.³⁹ Many ulama, however, gave more credit to Nazar than Irwandi – indeed they gave him credit for establishing the office in the first place. A Samalanga cleric commented:

The proposal for a Dayah Bureau [Badan Dayah] was actually passed by the provincial legislature in 2007 because at that time we had Tgk Harmen Nuriqmar, son of Abuya Nasir Waly and other pro-*dayah ulama* as members. But it still needed executive approval. That’s when Nazar came in handy. Nazar has a natural affinity to us; he was like a brother to Tgk Bulqaini, he had a *dayah* education too. If it weren’t for him, the establishment of the Dayah Bureau wouldn’t have been that easy.⁴⁰

As the 2009 elections approached some *dayah ulama* including PDA founder Abu Mudi and Abu Pantan – the former HUDA leader – suddenly began suggesting in sermons and local media that a regulation Irwandi had issued two years earlier was opening the door for the spread of Christianity.⁴¹ Flyers alleging the same were distributed to *dayah* in the GAM heartland. In fact, the regulation in question merely implemented a national ministerial decree and made it more difficult in Aceh than in the rest of Indonesia to build new houses of worship.⁴² Irwandi later accused the former military commander of Aceh Utara, Let.Col Yoseph, of spreading disinformation to discredit Partai Aceh and himself in traditionalist circles, although by this time, Irwandi and the Partai Aceh leadership were seriously at odds.⁴³

35 ICG, op. cit.

36 IPAC interview with a traditionalist youth figure, Banda Aceh, 23 July 2016; IPAC interview with a senior teacher at MUDI Mesra, Samalanga, 24 July 2016. One pro-Nazar ulama was reportedly called to a meeting with BIN in Jakarta in 2008. He was asked if he was interested in establishing an Islamic party with some assistance from the central government. The cleric answered that while he and his colleagues wanted to establish a party, BIN’s support would be a liability to such a party. The project was then offered to the then HUDA leader, Abu Pantan, who reportedly appointed Abu Mudi to carry out the task.

37 ICG, op. cit. On Irwandi’s reluctance to expand the role of Islamic *shari’a* in public policies, see Feener, op.cit., p. 216.

38 Firman Hidayat, “Pemerintah Aceh Bantu Jaringan Internet untuk 10 Dayah,” *Theglobejournal.com*, 21 September 2011.

39 Bustami Usman, “Kebijakan Badan Pembinaan Dayah Aceh dalam peningkatan Mutu Pendidikan Dayah,” 2015 (unpublished presentation).

40 IPAC interview with a senior teacher at MUDI Mesra, Samalanga, 24 July 2016.

41 IPAC phone interview with Munawwar Liza, former Sabang walikota and SIRA activist, July 2016; Irwandi Yusuf, “Kisah Pergub No. 25/2007 dan Fitnah oleh Al-Kazzab tentang Pendirian Rumah Ibadah di Aceh”, *Acehmerdekapost.com*, 14 February 2012.

42 This was Governor’s Regulation 25/2007 (Pergub 25/2007) on Guidelines for the Establishment of Houses of Worship.

43 Irwandi Yusuf, “Kisah Pergub no. 25/2007 dan Fitnah oleh Al-Kazzab tentang Pendirian Rumah Ibadah di Aceh”, *Acehmerdekapost.com*, 14 February 2012.

The emergence of PDA and Gabhat convinced Partai Aceh leaders that they too needed to have their own ulama organisation and in April 2008 sponsored the establishment of Majelis Ulama Nanggroe Aceh (MUNA), dominated by religious teachers who had fought with GAM and served as imams for the guerrillas.⁴⁴

The impact of all this courting of ulama support was to vastly increase the resources available to traditionalist ulama and thus their political clout. It also made them more competitive with the hitherto better resourced modernists and Salafis and more assertive in their demands.

B. Attacks in Bireuen

Bireuen was one district where the tensions between traditionalists and modernist/Salafis ran particularly high. In 2006, a traditionalist mob led by a senior cleric had tried to take over the Bireuen grand mosque. The mosque had been practising the modernist way of worship at least since the 1960s when a former PUSA/DI leader, Daud Hamzah, became the imam. As traditionalists occupied the mosque, the modernist congregation fought back; both sides threw stones but no one was seriously injured.⁴⁵ The then bupati, Mustafa Geulanggang, was an NU member and sided with the traditionalists. In 2007, Geulanggang, who was running for a second term, issued an official letter that removed the existing mosque board (*takmir*) on the basis that it was a public mosque (*masjid jami'*) and therefore fell under the government control.⁴⁶ Later that year, two smaller mosques in Bireuen were also occupied by traditionalists. These efforts were not enough for Geulanggang to win the election, and he lost overwhelmingly to the GAM-linked independent, Nurdin Abdul Rahman.

Nurdin was in fact more sympathetic to Muhammadiyah, and his struggle with the traditionalists was evidence of their growing clout.⁴⁷ In 2008, he approved Muhammadiyah's plan to build a new Masjid Taqwa – a common name for Muhammadiyah mosques in Aceh – before the location had been announced. In 2009, he supported the construction of a new mosque, also named Masjid Taqwa, in Kutablang sub-district that was going to be funded by a Qatari organisation, the Sheik Eid bin Muhammad at-Thani Foundation.⁴⁸ Local villagers opposed the construction on the grounds that there was already a public mosque in the sub-district. They met with the bupati the night before the groundbreaking ceremony, demanding its cancellation; but Nurdin had no intention of complying. As Nurdin's car was approaching the ceremony site, an angry mob ambushed his car, trying to attack him. The crowd, in the hundreds, later burned the warehouses where the mosque construction materials were kept.⁴⁹ The police took no action; the district police chief, Saladin merely said that whether or not the mosque was built was up

44 IPAC interview with MUNA leader, Tgk Ali Basyah, Banda Aceh, 23 May 2016. MUNA clerics also took part in the Aswaja Parade, but unlike HUDA, their main concern was to secure positions in the Wali Nanggroe structure. Wali Naggroe, literally means the head of state, and was a position created for the late GAM leader, Hasan Tiro. According to Qanun 9/2013, the Wali is essentially a cultural guardian and ceremonial leader with no political power. On 15 August 2016, MUNA head, Tgk Ali Basyah and six other prominent *dayah ulama* were sworn in as members of Tuha Peuet, the advisory council under the Wali Nanggroe structure.

45 IPAC interview with the leader of Muhammadiyah-Bireuen, Bireuen, 25 July 2016; IPAC interview with a leading figure of Dewan Dakwah Islamiyah Indonesia (DDII)-Aceh, Banda Aceh, 22 May 2016.

46 IPAC interview with a leading figure of Dewan Dakwah Islamiyah Indonesia (DDII)-Aceh, Banda Aceh, 22 May 2016.

47 IPAC phone interview with Nurdin Abdul Rahman, former bupati of Bireuen, August 2016. Nurdin has a strong modernist background. His grandparents were PUSA members and Nurdin himself is now part of the Muhammadiyah-Bireuen board.

48 IPAC interview with a Salafi teacher in Aceh Besar, 22 May 2016. The local name of the foundation is As-Shilah. It was established in Aceh around 2005 to help with post-tsunami reconstruction; the headquarters was moved to Jakarta in 2009. In addition to mosques, As-Shilah Foundation has also funded a few schools in Aceh including Ma'had Ali Ash-Shiddiq whose lecturers are dominated by alumni of Andalus University, a Salafi-linked university in Sana'a, Yemen. Despite its Qatar origins, the Indonesian branch of the foundation is headed by a Yemeni Sheik Ali Al-Sa'dy, which explains the strong Yemeni connection. The foundation also sponsored Acehnese students to study in Yemen.

49 IPAC phone interview with Nurdin Abdul Rahman, August 2016.

to MPU and the religious affairs ministry. The head of MPU-Bireuen supported the villagers, arguing that “we at MPU believe that building a new mosque nearby an existing one would create divisions among the ummat.”⁵⁰ In the end, the construction was cancelled.

The attack in Kutablang might have been linked to the Qatari funding, which is often associated with Salafis and Wahhabis. In 2007, villagers targeted another Middle Eastern-linked school in Lampeneureut, Aceh Besar called Ma’had As-Sunnah. Some staff members and visitors were reportedly evicted from the housing complex because they failed to produce a local ID card.

The school had a long history. It had been established by a Javanese teacher, Ustadz Ali Basuki in 2001. Ali, who had just returned from his study in Medina, Saudi Arabia, was sent to Aceh by well-known Salafi cleric Ja’far Umar Thalib, who was then at the height of his influence as head of Laskar Jihad in Ambon.⁵¹ Ustadz Ali ran religious study groups at university campuses and mosques in Banda Aceh, where he recruited students and middle class professionals. One of his recruits was Pak Daus, the owner of a famous restaurant chain, Nasi Goreng Daus (“Daus Fried Rice”). Pak Daus bought a plot of land in Lampeneureut for a future school and sent family members to study at different Salafi schools in Java.⁵²

Daus also sent family members to centres of salafi learning in Yemen. In 2008, a relative named Harits Abu Naufal and a few fellow students returned to Aceh and started teaching at Ma’had As-Sunnah. As-Sunnah’s founder, Ali Basuki, by this time had gone back to Java and most faculty and students were Acehnese. There were a few Javanese, however, and the school had frequent visitors from outside Aceh. All this strained their relationship with the locals. One villager explained why the Salafis were not accepted:

After the tsunami, all sorts of people came to Aceh, like those guys wearing rolled-up pants [a common derogatory reference to Salafis].⁵³ They’re not from around here; they built a school and started telling our children that our traditions are wrong. *Maulid* is haram, *kenduri* [traditional feasts] are also haram. We stopped sending our children to their school. What happened in 2007 was that they had all these visitors who stayed here for a few days but didn’t report. We had a rule that visitors staying overnight must report to the village head and show their ID cards. They didn’t respect our rules.⁵⁴

There was also unhappiness among some *dayah ulama* with Muhammadiyah expansion – in part because in terms of educational performance, the traditionalists fell short. In 2009, Muhammadiyah in Bireuen elected a new chief whose primary mission was to revive its inactive branches. In 2011, he began to organise Muhammadiyah events in public, in defiance of an unwritten rule in rural villages in Aceh that Muhammadiyah could not hold big events openly. He also started sending Muhammadiyah preachers to Samalanga, the home base of MUDI Mesra, the huge traditionalist *dayah* that had supported Irwandi’s GAM-backed opponents in

50 “Bupati Bireuen Dihadang Massa Saat Hadiri Seremoni di Masjid”, *Seputaraceh.com*, 12 September 2009.

51 Noorhaidi Hasan, “Faith and Politics: The Rise of the Laskar Jihad in the Era of Transition in Indonesia”, *Indonesia*, Vol. 73 (2002), pp. 145-169. Born to an Indonesian Arab family in East Java, Ja’far Umar Thalib studied at the Saudi-funded LIPIA in Jakarta, before continuing his education at the Maududi Islamic School in Pakistan in 1986. He visited Afghanistan in 1987 but did not participate in the jihad. In 1991, he pursued further studies in Yemen with the prominent Salafi cleric, Sheik Muqbil ibn Hadi al-Wadi’i. Ja’far returned to Indonesia and established a school in Yogyakarta called Ihya al-Sunnah that became the centre of a network of salafi institutions and discussion groups. Their alumni then spread his teaching after returning to their home towns. Following the outbreak of Muslim-Christian sectarian conflict in Maluku in 1999, Ja’far in April 2000 founded Laskar Jihad and began recruiting fighters to send there. Laskar Jihad members saw themselves as fighting Christian separatists in Maluku, and as such made common cause with the Indonesian military. Their arrival in Aceh was widely seen as an anti-GAM, anti-separatist ploy backed by the military.

52 IPAC interview with teachers at Ma’had As-Sunnah, Aceh Besar, 21 July 2016.

53 Salafis believe that having pants or garments below the ankle is a sign of arrogance. They base their opinion on a hadith that says: “There are three at whom Allah will not look on the Day of Resurrection, nor will He sanctify them, and theirs will be a painful torment: the one who does not give anything except that he reminds (the recipient of his gift), the one who drags his garment (below the ankles), and the one who sells his product by means of false oaths.”

54 IPAC interview with a local villager of Lampeneureut, Aceh Besar, 21 July 2016.

2006.⁵⁵ He subsequently established a Qur'an school that turned out to be very popular. Students had such a high rate of success in the Quran reading test that is compulsory for all Acehese primary school students that parents preferred the school to those run by traditionalist clerics.

Eventually, however, community hostility against both the Salafi and Muhammadiyah schools subsided, making the traditionalists even more uneasy, since it seemed to suggest that both were gaining acceptance.

C. *The Impact of Irwandi-Nazar Rift*

Irwandi and Nazar, his deputy, never close, grew more and more irritated with each other as their first term drew to a close and both decided to run for governor. The *dayah ulama* were quick to exploit the rift: extracting promises from both while the two still had the power to deliver. Nazar, as the product of *dayah* schools, was seen as the more sympathetic.

In late 2010, despite his efforts at rapprochement, Irwandi had another fallout with the traditionalists, especially the pro-Abu Mudi group from PDA. Earlier, in June, Nazar had arranged for Abu Mudi to be appointed *khatib* for the Idul Fitri prayer.⁵⁶ Nazar's move was widely appreciated by *dayah ulama* as the position is usually reserved for Ar-Raniry professors. But in September, Irwandi suddenly decided that Alyasa Abu Bakar, the former head of Shari'a Office and a leading figure of Muhammadiyah, would be the new *khatib*. It turned out that Irwandi had already appointed him to the job before Nazar gave Abu Mudi's name to the press. Nazar seems to have worked quietly with the Aceh Special Characteristics and Social Welfare Bureau (Biro Keistimewaan dan Kesra Aceh) to try to undermine Alyasa's appointment.⁵⁷ The tussle strengthened the conviction of Abu Mudi and his supporters that Irwandi was against them.

By early 2011, Irwandi and Nazar were actively campaigning and competing for the *dayah* vote. Both claimed the credit for populist social programs, notably free health insurance (Jaminan Kesehatan Aceh, JKA) and a *dayah* development program. Nazar in particular campaigned on an Islamic platform.⁵⁸ He emphasised the strengthening of *shari'a*; he also went around to the traditionalist schools, promising to ask 40 state-owned enterprises to fund *dayah*-based economic programs.⁵⁹ Irwandi sought *dayah* votes by pointing to increased government funding for the Dayah Bureau, his introduction of an "Internet for Dayah" program and his enactment of a regulation (Pergub 47/2010) that sought to improve the quality of *dayah* education through a standardised curriculum.⁶⁰

The competition between the two men could explain why in early 2012, rumours of Irwandi's alleged Christianisation project suddenly resurfaced. Irwandi wrote a furious op-ed in response entitled "The Story of Pergub No. 25/2007 and the Liar's Slander", accusing the TNI and its ulama partners of conducting a black campaign against him. In the end, most *dayah ulama* backed neither Irwandi nor Nazar but rather the Partai Aceh slate of Zaini Abdullah and Muzakir Manaf.

By this point, the *dayah ulama* were not going to be satisfied by vague promises and handouts.

55 IPAC interview with a senior teacher at MUDI Mesra, Samalanga, 24 July 2016. In 2016, MUDI Mesra has around 7,000 students and over 200 branches around Aceh. Most of HUDA's prominent leaders are alumni of MUDI Mesra. It also claims to have over 10,000 members in alumni network.

56 IPAC interview with a senior teacher at MUDI Mesra, Samalanga, 24 July 2016.

57 "Gubernur Ganti Khatib Idul Fitri Secara Mendadak," Acehkita.com, 10 September 2010.

58 "Nazar: Syariat Islam Harus Tegak di Aceh," nahimunkar.com, 20 March 2011.

59 "Wagub Letakkan Batu Pertama Pembangunan Dayah," Acehtraffic.com, June 2011.

60 "Pemerintah Aceh Prioritas Syari'ah dan Pendidikan Dayah," dayahamal.com, July 2015.

They wanted to use political influence to secure changes in public policy, and that meant more frontal challenges to the modernists. One critical battle was over the state's role in defining and enforcing Islamic orthodoxy.

D. More Pressure to Define Orthodoxy

Pressure on the government to clearly define Islamic orthodoxy mounted in 2011 as local and national media gave prominent play to the case of an alleged deviant sect called Millata Abraham (also known as Millah Ibrahim or Millah Abraham in other areas); it later evolved into another sect, Gafatar.⁶¹ The sect reportedly attracted 700 followers, mostly students, across Aceh. Millata Abraham became such a high profile case that the Aceh governor banned it. Three months later the MPU produced a new fatwa outlining 34 criteria that defined Aswaja: four points were targeted at Shi'a, and at least two could potentially be used against Salafis and Muhammadiyah.⁶²

Having successfully imposed their own definition of religious orthodoxy, traditional ulama pushed for the implementation of the Shafi'i school of Islamic jurisprudence, as in Brunei Darussalam.⁶³ They first put forward the proposal in 2010 as one of the recommendations of a conference (*muhasabah ulama*) at Dayah Labuhan Haji, South Aceh.⁶⁴ The idea resurfaced during the drafting of a *qanun* on Fundamentals of Islamic Law (*Pokok-Pokok Syariat Islam*) in 2014. Just days before the *qanun* was passed, a highly publicised congress held by MPU-East Aceh recommended that the Shafi'i school be the official *mazhab* and that all elected executives and legislators be required to be adherents. A Partai Aceh member of the provincial legislature (Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat Aceh, DPRA) from East Aceh, Iskandar Usman Al Farlaky, promised that he and his colleagues would incorporate the recommendation into the draft *qanun* because "it could contain the development of deviant sects in Aceh".⁶⁵

The proposal prompted an outcry from modernist intellectuals. One complained that what the *dayah* leaders really wanted was not just the Shafi'i *mazhab* – which embraces a diverse range of opinions – but rather their own interpretation of it.⁶⁶ Backed by some Golkar legislators, the modernists were able to change the phrase from "official *mazhab*" to "the prioritised *mazhab*" (*mazhab yang diprioritaskan*) and also add a qualifier, that groups in Aceh that practise any of

61 Millata Abraham was linked to Qiyadah Islamiyah, an Islamic sect founded by Ahmad Mosadeq that was declared deviant by MUI's central board in 2007. In 2008, Mosadeq, a former member of a Jakarta and West Java-based Darul Islam splinter known as KW9, was jailed for four years on blasphemy charges. By late 2010, Millata Abraham was spreading in West Java and Sumatra in Indonesia and in Selangor, Malaysia. In 2012, the group was rebranded as Gerakan Fajar Nusantara (Gafatar) and officially registered as a non-government organisation with branches in almost all Indonesian provinces. In December 2015, Gafatar prompted a nationwide controversy as it was linked to several cases of disappearances in Java. In January 2016, the police found some of those reported missing among 2,816 people living in a Gafatar commune in West Kalimantan. In February, the government termed them "victims of a cult" and began repatriating them to their home regions. It also made them participate in religious rehabilitation programs conducted by MUI and other Islamic organisations. See "Sejarah Lahirnya Gafatar: Dari Mushadeq ke Mushadeq Lagi," *Tempo.co*, 14 January 2016; Rinaldi Fakhrana, "Melongok 'Negara' Gafatar di Belantara Kalimantan," *Cnnindonesia.com*, 25 January 2016; Kristian Erdianto, "1.611 Pengungsi Eks Gafatar Dipulangkan, Masyarakat Diimbau Menerima," *Kompas.com*, 22 January 2016.

62 IPAC interview with the secretary of Muhammadiyah's central board, Jakarta, 16 August 2016. Two of the 34 criteria could negatively affect Muhammadiyah and Salafis. Point 26, requiring belief in theological concepts related to the afterlife, such as the bridge above the hell (*sirath*) and the good vs. bad deeds scale (*mizan*) is problematic because these terms have many different interpretations. Muhammadiyah, for instance, interprets *sirath* metaphorically as a path that would lead to goodness while most traditionalists believe in the existence of a physical pathway that Muslims would have to pass through on Judgment Day. The most controversial was Point 34 on praying for the dead. Known as *tahlilan*, periodic prayers and commemoration for the dead are a hallmark of traditionalist practice but shunned by modernists who doubt they will bring any benefit to the deceased. Based on the MPU criteria, anyone who rejects the belief that "the dead...would benefit from prayers of the living" could be considered as deviating from Sunni orthodoxy.

63 The reference to Brunei was made by several *dayah ulama* interviewed.

64 Tgk Teuku Zulfakhri, "Satu Mazhab Resmi untuk Aceh," *Kompasiana.com*, 21 May 2010.

65 "DPRA Dukung Mazhab Syafiyah Menjadi Mazhab Pemerintah Aceh," *Beritasore.com*, 20 October 2014.

66 Aslam Nur, "Mazhab Syafi'i atau Syafi'iyah?," *Serambi Indonesia*, 26 September 2014.

the other three schools (Hanafi, Maliki, or Hanbali) could not be forced to practise the Shafi'i.⁶⁷ Thus the *dayah ulama* failed in their bid.

The traditionalists also failed in their attempts to persuade Governor Zaini Abdullah, elected in 2012, to implement the Shafi'i way of worshipping at the Baiturrahman Mosque. The mosque has followed the modernist way of worship for decades. Traditional ulama demanded an amendment of a provincial government regulation (Pergub 37/2013) on the mosque's management to include an additional rule requiring the Shafi'i way of praying.

When their demands were not met, some HUDA members decided to try vigilante tactics—as practised by the Islamic Defenders Front (Front Pembela Islam, FPI), a Jakarta-based organisation that established a foothold in Aceh after the tsunami. Initially rejected as a Javanese import, hundreds of FPI members had come to Aceh to help collect and bury bodies, improving FPI's image among Acehnese.⁶⁸ The Aceh branch of FPI was pioneered by two *dayah* alumni, Yusuf Qardhawy and Muslim At-Tahiry in 2005. The leader of the Aswaja movement, Tgk. Bulqaini, first met with At Tahiry in early 2008 during an FPI protest against a school for allegedly having pornographic books in its library.⁶⁹ Bulqaini was asked by the school to negotiate with at-Tahiry to stop the protest, but instead he became interested in recruiting Tahiry and his members into the *dayah* movement. FPI has been a partner of HUDA ever since. With conventional lobbying having failed, the traditionalists decided to turn toward FPI-style raids and mass actions to stem the growth of Muhammadiyah and Salafism, which by now had moved into traditionalist strongholds.

E. Lead-up to the MPU Fatwa

As Salafi study groups grew, so did resistance from traditionalists. In September 2014, the MPU issued a fatwa condemning Salafism as deviant. This was essentially a response to a conflict in a village in Pidie district, triggered by personal issues between followers of the Salafi study group (*pengajian*) and their traditionalist family members, as well as rivalry between the village head (*keuchik*) and the sub-district chief.

Gampong Pulo Raya in Titeu subdistrict, Pidie had been a modernist/Salafi stronghold for decades. Faisal Hasan Sufi, the Salafi ustadz whose school was burned in 1998, used to teach there. Unlike neighbouring villages, Pulo Raya had not celebrated Maulid for at least two decades and the people there prayed the Muhammadiyah way. Around 2011, the village mosque was renovated using Qatari aid. As it was about to be reopened, the *keuchik* was looking for a new ustadz to teach there. He was introduced to Ustadz Abu Rifqy, a Yemeni-oriented Salafi who just married a Pidie woman, and offered him the job. By 2014, Abu Rifqy's *pengajian* had hundreds of participants; Ust Harits and other As-Sunnah ustadzs also led it once a week. Abu Rifqy also set up a Qur'an school for children that by 2014 had 100 students.⁷⁰ Some participants who came from traditionalist families started to fight with their relatives because they refused to participate in mass prayers and other traditional events. Complaints about Salafi exclusivism and arrogance spread by word of mouth. It was rumoured that Salafi landowners were intimidating farmers into joining the *pengajian* by threatening to take away their land, and that Salafis were accusing everyone outside their group of being infidels. One man even claimed to have been evicted from his own home by his Salafi family because he refused to join them.⁷¹ Local military officers were also suspicious of Abu Rifqy's activities, but he said he explained to them that Salafi teaching

67 IPAC interview with the leader of Muhammadiyah-Bireuen, Bireuen, 25 July 2016; IPAC phone interview with Nurdin Abdul Rahman, the former bupati of Bireuen, August 2016.

68 "Relawan FPI Tidur di Kuburan," *Tempo.co*, 12 January 2005.

69 The books were actually teenage romance novels and biology books containing pictures of human anatomy.

70 IPAC phone interview with Abu Rifqy, 14 August 2016.

71 Amiruddin's complaint letter, in "Himpunan Bahan Sidang paripurna-V Tanggal 23-25 Juni 2014," MPU Aceh, June 2014.

emphasises respect toward the rulers and even prohibits criticising the government in public.⁷²

Anti-Salafi sentiment spread to neighbouring villages when Titeu sub-district chief (*camat*) Idrus spoke at a Maulid *pengajian* at Gampong Loih in April 2013. Criticising Pulo Raya for rejecting Maulid, he said:

I don't want people to leave the tradition. Prophetic tradition recommends [*disunnahkan*] that we celebrate birthdays [the Prophet's birthday]. If we don't want to pray, that means we're arrogant, smug.

The *keuchik* and people of Pulo Raya then decided to sue Idrus for defamation, but this only hardened his position.⁷³ In retaliation, Idrus arranged in March 2014 for a Maulid *pengajian* to be held in Pulo Raya, with himself and the head of MPU-Pidie, Tgk Nasir Ibrahim, as speakers. He spoke with pride of himself as a *dayah* graduate and again stressed the importance of respecting tradition. Participants cheered and shouted "Attack Wahhabis!"⁷⁴

On Friday 11 April 2014, hundreds of people from around the Titeu sub-district blocked the road to the Pulo Raya mosque to stop Abu Rifqy's followers from conducting Friday prayers. On 16 April MPU-Pidie met with all parties involved; participants agreed that Pulo Raya should temporarily stop Friday prayer activity to "avoid further conflict".⁷⁵ MPU-Pidie formed a special team to investigate the case. The team interrogated the Salafi teachers, confiscated the books used in the *pengajian*, and highlighted two points of concern: Salafis believe that Adam and Idris are not God's Messengers (*rasul*) but merely Prophets (*nabi*); and they believe that Allah sits in 'arsy (literally means throne).⁷⁶ These two reasons were also cited in the MPU fatwa as evidence of the deviance of Pulo Raya Salafis.⁷⁷

But Muhammadiyah members share the Salafi interpretation of 'arsy, which led them and other modernists to think that the fatwa was directed at them too.⁷⁸ After a few rounds of meetings, on 25 June 2014, the provincial MPU issued a strong fatwa:

The government should close down study groups, proselytisation, and sermons that have been labelled as deviant by MPU-Aceh, such as the Salafi study group at Gampong Pulo Raya in Titeu sub-district, Pidie and in other places, and ban their activities.⁷⁹

HUDA, FPI and government officials used the fatwa as a justification to ban Salafi discussion

72 IPAC phone interview with Abu Rifqy, 14 August 2016. Some Kodim officer asked Abu Rifqy why a village ustadz gives sermons in Indonesian (most local ustadzs speak in Acehnese). He explained to them the nature of his dakwah and that not everyone understands Acehnese. He believes that the military monitored his pengajians but some of the officers came to like his pengajian.

73 "Keuchik Gampong Pulo Raya Gugat Camat Titeu," *Serambi Indonesia*, 3 October 2013.

74 IPAC phone interview with Abu Rifqy, 14 August 2016.

75 "A Letter from MPU-Pidie to the provincial MPU regarding the Pulo Raya Religious Study Group," 5 May 2014.

76 Tim fatwa Majelis Tarjih dan Tajdid, "Allah Bersemayam di Atas 'Arsy," *Fastabiqu.com*, April 2015. Traditionalists and Salafis have different interpretations about the meaning of 'arsy. The word 'arsy is mentioned several times in Quran, the most oft-cited one is QS 7:54 10, which says: Indeed, your Lord is Allah who created the heavens and the earth in Six Days, and then He rose over the Throne. The question of whether God stays in a certain place is one of the most controversial ones in Islamic theology. Modernist ulama Rashid Ridha interpreted 'arsy as some kind of control room or space where all the affairs of worldly creatures are managed. Traditionalists criticise such an interpretation because to them, God is not confined to any place or time. Salafis believe that Adam and Idris are Prophets but not Messengers of God because they did not rule over people (*ummah*).

77 MPU Fatwa no. 9/2014 stipulates three sets of arguments for Salafi deviance, all of which are parochial issues that might apply to modernists as well. First, in matters of Islamic creed (*aqidah*), the Pulo Raya Salafis are said to believe that God sits on 'arsy and that Adam and Idris are Prophets and not Messengers. Second, in terms of worship rituals, the Pulo Raya Salafis reportedly prohibit *qunut* (additional prayers recited while standing during the dawn prayer) and the out-loud recitation of *niat* (intention) during *takbiratul ihram* (the beginning of prayers). Lastly, in terms of morality (*akhlaq*), the Salafis allegedly ban the celebration of Maulid and zikir, and prohibit the imitation of ulama.

78 IPAC interview with the leader of Dewan Dakwah Islamiyah Indonesia (DDII)-Aceh, Banda Aceh, 22 May 2016.

79 MPU, "Fatwa Majelis Permusyawaratan Ulama Aceh Nomor 9 Tahun 2014 tentang Pemahaman, Pemikiran, Pengamalan dan Penyiaran Agama Islam di Aceh," Banda Aceh, 25 June 2014.

groups and in some cases, attack them. On 4 September, the Titeu police chief sent 150 armed officers to Pulo Raya to prevent a brawl between anti-Salafi villagers and Salafi sympathisers. Police then summoned Idrus in connection with allegations that he had tried to incite the villagers to attack Salafis. In the end there was not enough evidence to charge him.⁸⁰

Yemen-oriented Salafis remained a favourite target. In March 2015, HUDA challenged Ustadz Harits to an Aswaja vs. Salafi public debate in Banda Aceh. To represent the traditionalists, HUDA invited Idrus Ramli, the hardline NU *kyai* from East Java known for his public debates with Wahhabis and Shi'a on YouTube.⁸¹ Harits declined the challenge, probably fearing an attack. On 20 August, hundreds of *dayah* students surrounded his school and warned that if the teachers did not leave Aceh within three days they would destroy the school because it was linked to the Pulo Raya group that had been declared deviant by MPU.⁸² Harits reported the incident to the police and in the end, no attack took place. He also approached the former commander of the Sultan Iskandar Muda airbase in Aceh. He said the commander came to like him so much that he invited him to give regular sermons at his house. Harits also claimed that he was invited to meet with President Jokowi when he transited at the military airbase in 2015. Many believed that the military connection has protected as-Sunnah from assault.⁸³

IV. ASWAJA PARADES AND THEIR AFTERMATH

A year after the MPU fatwa, HUDA and its partners intensified their anti-Salafi campaign, culminating in the Aswaja Parades I and II in September and October 2015 respectively. The rise of Aswaja movement coincided with the deepening friction between Governor Zaini Abdullah and Deputy Governor Muzakir Manaf. Feeling betrayed by Zaini's election promise to pay greater attention to *dayah*, the traditionalist ulama turned to Muzakir who was seeking their endorsement for a bid to succeed Zaini in 2017.⁸⁴

A. Zaini's Unfulfilled Promises to the Traditionalists

In 2012 the *dayah ulama* had been relatively united in their support for the Partai Aceh slate. Abu Mudi's camp believed that only the Zaini-Muzakir ticket could defeat Irwandi. Muzakir as the commander of GAM was the more popular figure and it was he, not Zaini, who attracted support for the ticket. From the beginning the *dayah* community leaders were concerned about Zaini's closeness to Muhammadiyah and the fact that Zaini's father had been a PUSA activist very close to Daud Beureueh. Muzakir apparently convinced them that he would make sure that *dayah* interests would be upheld. He also personally told several *dayah* leaders that he would secure more funding and more public roles for them.⁸⁵

Just weeks after Zaini and Muzakir were formally declared the winners, Muzakir, as a first

80 "Polres Pidie Panggil Camat Titeu," *Serambi Indonesia*, 6 September 2014. As of January 2015, Idrus became the head of Kantor Pembinaan Dayah Pidie.

81 HUDA even named the Aswaja parade after the Aswaja Garis Lurus movement that is often associated with Idrus Ramli. Garis Lurus (meaning the straight path) is a new phrase coined by some NU members for the conservative faction within NU that is actively involved in intolerant campaigns, including those against Shi'ism, Wahhabism and liberalism. For more on the Garis Lurus movement in NU, see IPAC, "The Anti-Shi'ah Movement in Indonesia," Report No. 27, 27 April 2016.

82 "Umat Islam Aceh Mengepung Markas Wahabi," *muslimedianews.com*, 21 August 2015.

83 IPAC interview with Tgk Bulqaini, Banda Aceh, 23 July 2016; IPAC interview the woman leader of Wahdah Islamiyah Aceh, Banda Aceh, 24 May 2016.

84 IPAC interview with a senior teacher at MUDI Mesra, Samalanga, 24 July 2016. Commenting on why *dayah* had to resort to mass mobilisation, the teacher said: "We didn't go down to the street during Irwandi leadership because he never promised us anything. But Zaini did, it was part of his election promises, we helped him win. Now we're just demanding what's been promised to us."

85 IPAC interview with a senior teacher at MUDI Mesra, Samalanga, 24 July 2016.

step toward fulfilling his promises, invited – and likely paid for – 170 ulama to travel to Mecca for *umrah* and collective prayer.⁸⁶ At the inauguration in June 2012, HUDA Secretary General Faisal Ali specifically warned the newly elected executives, “Promises to the people must be fulfilled, because in Islam, a promise is a debt.”⁸⁷

The traditionalists have been closely monitoring Zaini-Muzakir’s *dayah* policies ever since. In December 2012, one legislator and *dayah* alumnus told his traditionalist friends that the budget for the Dayah Office was going to be cut from Rp 136 billion [\$10 million] in 2012 to Rp 55 billion [\$4 million] in 2013. A *dayah* youth leader then wrote about it on *santridayah.com*, a leading traditionalist website, exposing the gap between Zaini’s promises and their implementation. Eventually the amount set aside in the 2013 budget for various *dayah* activities increased to Rp 186 billion [\$14 million].⁸⁸

The *dayah ulama* also claimed that Zaini and Muzakir had promised them more authority in mosque management and the religious bureaucracy. To implement this, the governor and deputy governor in March 2013 organised a monthly “high-level religious study group” [*kajian tinggi*] for policy-makers at the governor’s office. Traditionalists were invited as speakers in the first few sessions, then the governor’s office decided to alternate between modernist and traditionalist ulama. The *dayah* leaders were unhappy and quit the *pengajian* after a year.⁸⁹

In 2014, traditionalist ulama stepped up their demands for a large role in mosque management, using all means from political lobbying to occupation to mass protest. In April 2014, representatives of HUDA, Thaliban, MUNA, and MPU met with the Regional Secretary (Sekda). Those present agreed to sign an agreement on the implementation of Pergub 37/2013, a regulation setting out the management structure of the Baiturrahman mosque. It contained two important points. First, the governor was expected to ban civil servants, meaning university professors who were mostly modernists, from becoming imams. Second, prayer rituals at the Baiturrahman mosque, particularly on Friday and those during Ramadhan (*tarawih*), were to follow the traditionalist method.

As Ramadhan approached, the Baiturrahman imam officially changed the *tarawih* from eight to twenty *rakaat* to accommodate traditionalist demands. But it proved to be a fleeting victory. The same imam banned Abu Kuta Krueng’s traditionalist *pengajian* in December 2014, and Faisal Ali instantly accused Zaini’s brother-in-law, Muzakir Abdul Hamid, of being the “Wahhabi whisperer” who influenced the governor to “discriminate” against *dayah ulama*.⁹⁰ Muzakir Abdul Hamid is a graduate of LIPIA, the Salafi school (see below) and often accused of being a sympathiser of the Saudi-oriented Salafis.⁹¹ His official role as governor’s adviser convinced the traditionalists that Zaini was surrounded by Wahhabi lobbyists.⁹²

86 “Mealeum dan 170 Ulama Gelar Doa Bersama di Masjidil Haram,” partaiacehkotalhokseumawe.blogspot.com.au, May 2015.

87 Tgk. Mustafa Husen Woyla, “Zikir Perlahan Lupakan Dayah dan Isinya,” *santridayah.com*, 26 December 2012.

88 Usman, op. Cit.

89 IPAC interview with Alyasa Abu Bakar, Banda Aceh, 23 May 2016.

90 “Siapa Pembisik yang Melawang Pengajian Ulama Dayah di Masjid Baiturrahman?,” *atjehpost.co*, (undated).

91 There is a story among GAM people about how GAM founder Hasan Tiro scolded Muzakir Abdul Hamid at a GAM training camp in Libya in the 1980s. Hasan Tiro, the legend goes, once spoke in front of the trainees: “Do you know why I sent you all to Libya as opposed to Saudi Arabia or Iran? If I sent you to Saudi Arabia, you would be influenced by Wahhabism; they would ask you to bring home their ideology. If I sent you to Iran, they would also export their Shi’a ideology through you. If that happened, we would be fighting with our elders back home. So I sent you to Libya because even though they follow the Hanafi mazhab, theologically they are still Ash’ariyah, so it does not clash with Acehnese belief.” Then Muzakir interrupted, and said, “But Wahhabism is actually not as bad as you think,” to which Tiro apparently replied: “if you say that again, you’d better leave!” IPAC interview with Tgk Bulqaini, 23 July 2016. Bulqaini claimed to have heard the story from Muzakir Manaf and several other ex-combatants, although those who know Hasan Tiro, who came from a strongly modernist background, are sceptical of its truth.

92 “Masyarakat Aceh Desak Pengelolaan Masjid Raya Baiturrahman,” *dakwah.web.id*, 26 June 2015.

The incident only encouraged the ulama to step up lobbying of executive and legislative officials. On 6 May 2015, *dayah* representatives came to the provincial legislature office to meet with some legislators, mosque managers, and other officials to discuss implementation of the April 2014 agreement. On 9 May, HUDA leaders met with Zaini to deliver their recommendation on the implementation of the Shafi'i *mazhab* at public mosques, but they claimed that Zaini gave them a cold response.⁹³ Rumours began to circulate in the *dayah* community that after that meeting, Zaini told his staff members that Aswaja only consisted of four groups (HUDA, MUNA, Thaliban, and FPI) while modernists and Salafis were represented by 21. Upon hearing this, the traditionalists reportedly began to plan a massive protest to show Zaini how big they actually were.⁹⁴

B. Occupation of Baiturrahman and Concern over Saudi Influence

Three months before the first parade, on 19 June 2015, HUDA and FPI led the occupation of Baiturrahman Grand Mosque during Friday prayers. They forced the *khatib* to comply with traditionalist way of giving the sermon: holding a staff and repeating the call to prayer (*adzan*) twice.⁹⁵ FPI leader Tgk Abdul Wahid claimed that the mosque had fallen under Wahhabi control as evidenced by the establishment there of a branch of LIPIA, a Saudi-funded Arabic language school affiliated to Imam Muhammad Ibn Saud university in Riyadh. Established in 2007, LIPIA-Aceh was funded by the post-tsunami Saudi Charity Campaign Aceh (SCC). In September 2012, an MoU was signed between Ibn Saud University and the Baiturrahman mosque board on the establishment of a LIPIA campus in Aceh Besar. This was part of a major planned expansion of LIPIA in Indonesia more generally (in August 2016, the Rector of Ibn Saud University announced the establishment of three new LIPIA branches in Medan, Makassar, and Surabaya).⁹⁶

Tgk Bulqaini, the parade coordinator, added that Baiturrahman's imam regularly invited Saudi sheikhs while ignoring *dayah ulama*.⁹⁷ He noted how in December 2014, the imam and the head of Islamic Shari'a Office (Dinas Syariat Islam) had banned the *pengajian* of Abu Kuta Krueng, one of the most senior *dayah ulama*, at the grand mosque on a Friday morning on the grounds that the mosque had to be vacated to prepare for Friday prayer.⁹⁸ Meanwhile the Shari'a Office often hired Salafi ustadz to lead its *pengajian* and also to train government-sponsored preachers.⁹⁹

Salafi preachers, including those from Wahdah Islamiyah, were increasingly able to establish themselves at various public mosques in Aceh. All this fed into Aswaja propaganda that Aceh was being besieged by Salafis and that traditionalists were being marginalised – with clear

93 IPAC interview with a senior teacher at MUDI Mesra, Samalanga, 24 July 2016;

IPAC interview with Yusni Sabi, Banda Aceh, 26 May 2016; IPAC interview with Yusuf Qardhawi, the former FPI-Aceh leader, Banda Aceh, 23 May 2016.

94 IPAC interview with a senior teacher at MUDI Mesra, Samalanga, 24 July 2016.

95 "Hasil Mudzakaroh Adzan Jumat Dua Kali Sunnah Dan Muwalat Khutbah Adalah Syarat Sah", Sholawat.co, 27 October 2015; NU Online, "Memegang Tongkat Pada Saat Khutbah," nu.or.id, 15 April 2008.

Muhammadiyah does not require the *khatib* to hold a staff and only conducts one *adzan* before Friday prayers. According to traditionalists, the Prophet used to do one *adzan* for Friday prayer, but Khalifah Utsman, the third caliph, changed it to two because the Muslim population had grown rapidly so there was a need to repeat the call for prayer in case some of them did not hear the first time. Holding a staff is also a debatable issue. It is recommended by the Shafi'i *mazhab* based on a hadith that the Prophet used to hold on to a staff or bow when giving Friday sermons. To modernists and Salafis, such a practice is unnecessary because it does not affect the validity of the prayer.

96 "Arab Saudi Bangun Kampus Pendidikan Islam di Aceh," *Serambi Indonesia*, 7 September 2012; "Raja Salman Restui Pembukaan Tiga Kampus Baru LIPIA di Indonesia," *dewandakwah.or.id*, 25 August 2016.

97 IPAC interview with Tgk Bulqaini, Banda Aceh, 23 July 2016.

98 "HUDA: Ada yang Sebarakan Isu Ulama Dayah Ingin Rebut Masjid Raya Baiturrahman", *Atjehpost.co*, (undated). In the end Abu Kuta Krueng did not attend the *pengajian* and was replaced by a more junior cleric.

99 "Kunci Berdakwah Harus Miliki Ilmu dan Sabar, *Bandacehkota.go.id*, 31 May 2014.

economic consequences.¹⁰⁰

The stage for a massive protest was set.

C. Muzakir's Candidacy

The first Aswaja Parade took place on 10 September 2015. Representatives of HUDA, MUNA, Thaliban, and FPI tried to meet with Zaini to ask him to sign a thirteen-point petition.¹⁰¹ The last point was a threat to bring Zaini down if he did not fulfil their demands. In addition to the implementation of Shafi'i *madzhab* at mosques, the Aswaja group asked the government to "not appoint as heads of local government agencies those who do not share Aswaja beliefs".¹⁰² When Zaini refused to meet them, they went to see Muzakir, who told them to come back after Zaini left on the pilgrimage to Mecca, meaning Muzakir would have the authority to sign the petition on the governor's behalf.

On 15 September, five days later, Muzakir spoke at a *dayah* event in Meulaboh, West Aceh, telling the public that he had severed communication with Zaini and asked the ulama to endorse him in the upcoming election.¹⁰³

On 1 October, the four groups involved in the first parade organised an even bigger protest – the second Aswaja Parade – in which Muzakir made a grand entrance, was carried on shoulders by protesters on to the stage, gave a short speech encouraging the Aswaja youth to get more involved in mosque activities and signed the petition.¹⁰⁴ One cleric even declared him to be "the Umar Bin Khattab of the end of time", after the Prophet's companion who is known as the bravest Muslim warrior. The comparison was a reference to Muzakir's status as the former GAM military commander.¹⁰⁵ Such a statement marked the emerging alliance between Muzakir and the *dayah* community.

In 2016, *dayah* students formed a campaign team for Muzakir called "Sohibul Mualem" (friends of Mualem, another name for Muzakir). Muzakir's declared running mate for the 2017 elections, TA Khalid, was recommended by Abu Kuta Krueng, one of the most senior ulama in Aceh – although it was Khalid's political party affiliation rather than his affinity to the *dayah* that led Muzakir to choose him.¹⁰⁶ Muzakir and TA Khalid later visited many *dayah* including MUDI Mesra and personally promised to implement Aswaja in Aceh.¹⁰⁷ Finally, on 13 August, when Muzakir and Khalid officially declared their candidacy, all key Aswaja leaders appeared with them on stage, including Abu Mudi, Tgk Bulqaini, and Abu Kuta Krueng. For now, *dayah*

100 In addition to a monthly salary, imams of public mosques are in charge of managing a significant amount of the state budget for mosque maintenance – which does not apply to private mosques. In 2016, Baiturrahman Mosque received Rp 315 billion [US\$24 million] from the Aceh special autonomy budget (*dana otsus*), translating into not only high status and prestige but also abundant material benefits for whichever group controls it. See "Komisi IV," *dpra.acehprov.go.id*, 18 February 2016.

101 While Wahhabis became the main target, Aswaja protesters also carried anti-Shi'a and anti-Communist banners. Interestingly in Java, some elements of the Garis Lurus group allied with Salafis and modernists to establish a National Anti-Shi'a Alliance (ANNAS) in April 2014. But even then, some Garis Lurus figures including Idrus Ramli refused to join ANNAS because they thought it was dominated by Salafis. See IPAC, "The Anti-Shi'ah Movement in Indonesia," Report No. 27, 27 April 2016.

102 "Tuntutan parade Aswaja Tidak Ditandatangani, Gubernur Beralasan Sakit," *Acehmerdekapost.com*, 10 September 2015. Zaini, also running for the 2017 gubernatorial election, has recently been trying to approach *dayah* clerics by giving cars, free pilgrimage, and other aids. But many from the *dayah* community considered it too little, too late. See "Gubernur Serahkan Innova Operasional," *aceh.tribunnews.com*, 28 September 2016.

103 "Wagub Akui Putus Hubungan dengan Zaini," *Aceh.tribunnews.com*, 16 September 2015.

104 "Muzakir Manaf temui Ribuan Massa Aswaja," *ajnn.net*, 1 October 2015. Organisers claimed to have mobilised 50,000 protesters compared to 40,000 in the first parade, but these figures are not reliable.

105 Ibnu Hajar, "Ini dia Umar bin Khattab Akhir Zaman," *Aceh.tribunnews.com*, 2 October 2015.

106 "Ini Pesan Ulama kepada Muzakir Manaf-TA Khalid," *Acehterkini.com*, 14 August 2016.

107 Martunis Nisam, "Kepada Abu Mudi, Mualllem Janjikan Siap Jadikan Aceh yang Aswaja," *Khabarpopuler.com*, 5 August 2016.

ulama are counting on Muzakir and Khalid to achieve their goals.

The Aswaja Parades gave some young *ulama* a sense of their own strength, leading them to think further ahead. As one Aswaja leader said:

Our goal, in addition to changing the way of worshipping [into Shafi'i mazhab], is also to see how Acehnese people would respond if we mobilise them over religious issues. You've seen their enthusiastic response, and it was just me at the forefront. Could you imagine if someone as senior as Abu Kuta Krueng or Abu Tumin led the movement? There are still so many things we'd like to do in the future. In this [Aswaja] parade we just wanted to test the waters: are Acehnese still loyal to their *ulama*? Are they still loyal to Aswaja? Well they are! These people are like sleeping tigers, one day we will wake them up to chase Wahhabis and Shi'a... Our long term plan is to establish a new *ulama* party, but we are still waiting for the green light from Abu Mudi...God willing, if everything goes well, it will happen in 2019 [the national election]. Only we in the MUDI Mesra networks are capable of doing this kind of thing. If we start it then other *dayah* will follow.¹⁰⁸

D. More Violence Ahead?

As the traditionalists gain political confidence and extract more funding and appointments from politicians, the result could be more clashes with modernists and Salafis, especially because the latter appear to be equally convinced that they are winning acceptance in the population at large: as Quranic knowledge becomes increasingly a key to success for job placement and public office, the Muhammadiyah and Salafi schools can deliver results.¹⁰⁹

Salafi clerics were certainly exuding confidence in mid-2016 and suggesting that they are winning over not just traditionalists but Muhammadiyah members as well. Ustadz Harits from Mah'ad as-Sunnah, the school attacked in 2007, said in 2016 that his *pengajian* was now well received especially among urban professionals. He said with pride that he and his friends managed to recruit the director of Banda Aceh public hospital, and that he frequently led religious discussions for the hospital staff.¹¹⁰ Yemen alumni were also frequently invited to give sermons in Pidie, Meulaboh, Langsa, and other districts. Harits summarised the success of Salafi outreach as follows:

Thanks be to God, many people like our *pengajian* because we give strong arguments taken directly from Qur'an and sunnah. Not just in Banda Aceh –our *pengajian* in Meulaboh also has grown rapidly. Two years ago we started out with five students but now we have thousands, maybe it's because some high-ranking officials joined. Recently the Meulaboh *bupati* invited me to give dawn sermon (*safari subuh*) to his staff members. Muhammadiyah members also like our *pengajian*. Have you heard about the Muhammadiyah exodus to Salafism? I think it's true to some extent. Because Muhammadiyah has lost the puritan spirit of Ahmad Dahlan [its founder].¹¹¹

More to the point, several incidents of violence followed the Aswaja protests.

108 IPAC interview with a prominent Aswaja figure, Banda Aceh, 23 July 2016.

109 Salafi and modernist *pesantrens* emphasise on Quran memorisation and Arabic communication skills while traditional *dayah* mainly teaches classical Islamic literature known as the yellow books (*kitab kuning*). *Dayah* teachers often complain that they have not been appointed as imams at public mosques because the Acehnese government and people prefer those who memorise Qur'an (*hafidz*) and are fluent in foreign languages.

110 IPAC phone interview with Harits Abu Naufal, 12 August 2016; IPAC interview with a woman leader of Wahdah Islamiyah, Banda Aceh, 24 May 2016.

111 IPAC phone interview with Harits Abu Naufal, 12 August 2016.

In March 2016, a small Salafi school in Lam Awe, Aceh Besar that is linked to As-Sunnah in Banda Aceh was targeted by locals; the school was so badly damaged that all students and teachers had to evacuate; they had not returned as of September. The ustadz, Abdul Qodir Jailani, once taught at As-Sunnah but moved to Lam Awe around 2007 because of personal differences with Harits.¹¹² In 2009, some villagers wanted to expel him because he would not mingle with them for *tahlilan* and *kenduri*, but one village elder protected him. Many saw him as an arrogant newcomer. Not only did he stop going to the village mosque, but in 2011, he established his own mosque and school – which failed to get registration because the *keuchik* refused to provide a reference letter. In early 2016, a new *keuchik* approved the Salafi school, outraging those who had rejected the school before and sparking the attack.¹¹³ Afterwards, rumours circulated on Salafi WhatsApp groups that seven Salafi schools in Banda Aceh and Aceh Besar would be next.¹¹⁴ But instead, FPI and other traditionalist groups occupied four Muhammadiyah-linked mosques between March and June 2016. In October 2015, just three weeks after the second parade, MPU held a conference involving traditionalist, modernist and other ulama to resolve the struggle over control of Baiturrahman Mosque. The conference decided that holding a staff during the sermon and conducting two *adzans* in Friday prayers were “recommended” (*disunnahkan*) but not compulsory.

The recommendation, however, was enough to encourage FPI members to take matters into their own hands.¹¹⁵ On 28 March 2016, one day before the Lam Awe attack, an FPI mob occupied Ajun Mosque in Aceh Besar during Friday prayers. They accused the imam, a Gontor graduate, of being a Wahhabi (other Gontor alumni have also been so accused).¹¹⁶ In this case, the imam did not resist so the traditionalists managed to get him replaced by a local scholar.

A similar incident, involving FPI but organised by the local traditionalist ulama, happened at Masjid Al-Izzah in Kreung Mane, Aceh Timur. Al-Izzah was not a Muhammadiyah mosque

112 At first they split because of personal competition, Abdul Qadir was older but his position was lower than Harits. The friction between them deepened around 2014 because of the split in the broader Yemen-oriented Salafi community related to political events in Yemen and what became known as the Salafi Rodja controversy. The former refers to the differences between those who support Sheik Muhammad bin Abdilllah Al-Imam of Ma’bar, who signed a truce with the Houthi rebels, and those who oppose him and follow the pro-government Sheik Hani bin Buraik of Aden who declared jihad against Houthi Shi’a. Indonesian Salafi cleric Luqman Ba’abduh supported the latter, and so did Abdul Qodir. Ust Harits, on the other hand, followed Al-Imam, his teacher. Around 2010, the Yemeni-oriented Salafi community in Indonesia was also divided over the status of Salafi Rodja, a Jakarta-based group that ran the influential Rodja radio and TV. Some, including Luqman Ba’abduh, accused Rodja as colluding with the so-called “Salafi hizby” or political Salafis by befriending and receiving money from Saudi-funded foundations such as al-Sofwa. Ba’abduh’s camp, including Abdul Qodir, cited Sheik Rabi’s 2005 fatwa prohibiting any association with political Salafis. Harits not only supported Rodja’s dakwah style but he also imitated it by establishing his own radio station called Syiar Tauhid Aceh. For more on Yemeni Salafi split over the Houthi issue, see “Tahdzir Ulama2 Sunnah di Yaman terhadap Fitnah Hani bin Buraik,” *pelita-sunnah.blogspot.com.au*, 29 November 2014 and “The position of Shaykh Saalih al-Fawzaan with regard to the agreement between Shaykh Muhammed al-Imam and the Houthis”, *Salafibayaan.com*, 11 March 2015. On the Rodja controversies, see “Demi Halabiyun Rodja, Asatidzah Ahlussunnah-Pun Dibidiknya”, *tukpencarialhaq.com*, 17 November 2013; and “Ketika Ahlussunnah Dipaksa untuk Memilih, Siapa yang Cerdas,” *tukpencarialhaq.com*, 24 December 2012.

113 IPAC interview with Abdul Qodir’s wife, Banda Aceh, 24 May 2016.

114 Ibid.

115 FPI-Aceh is the only FPI branch that is known to have physically attacked Salafis. The founding leader of FPI, Habib Rizieq, is a traditionalist. But because of his Saudi educational background and vigilante actions, some NU leaders have accused him of being a Wahhabi. It does not help that Rizieq is friendly with famous modernist and Salafi jihadi figures such as Abu Jibril, the leader of Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia. However, when in mid-2015 Rizieq was accused by some Salafi clerics of being a Shi’a – due to his close ties to Shi’a *habibs* and hence his reluctance to brand Shi’a as deviant – he retorted that the Salafis themselves were evil and slanderous. Rizieq also turned to NU members for support by saying: “FPI is a child of NU, it’s just a little rebellious. NU does *tahlil*, so does FPI...The difference is just one, when there is an immoral entertainment place, NU members could only...pray ‘God, please close down this place’, and God answered their prayers [by] deploying FPI to burn it down.” Muhammad Jihad, “Ini Jahatnya Wahabi Menurut Habib Rizieq Syihab,” *muslimmedianews.com*, 28 June 2015.

116 “Ini Video Kericuhan di Masjid Ajun Soal Solat,” *canindonesia.com*, 3 April 2016; IPAC interview with Fakhruddin Lahmuddin, a Gontor graduate and teacher at several modernist boarding schools in Aceh. Gontor is a well-known modern *pesantren* in East Java with a vast alumni network and branches across the country.

but it did practise Muhamadiyah-style worship. It also hosted a monthly *pengajian* by Faisal Hasan Sufi. The traditionalists had secured an official letter from the Aceh Timur bupati ordering the replacement of the whole mosque board. They also argued that the mosque had violated the agreement of the October conference regarding the Friday sermon.¹¹⁷ This time, however, the takeover attempt eventually failed because Kreung Mane youth fought back through mass action and a social media campaign to retain their mosque.

In June 2016, a more complicated incident took place. It had become known six months earlier that a new Muhammadiyah mosque would be built in Juli sub-district, Bireuen, with Rp 1 billion [US\$75,000] funding from the Qatari Sheik Eid Foundation.¹¹⁸ Many people were alarmed by Muhammadiyah's growth there, with three new schools in the district in the preceding five years. The traditionalists, led by Edi Saputra, an ex-GAM combatant, were also unhappy because some Muhammadiyah members had mobilised a protest against a sand mining contract that he reportedly acquired without a proper bidding mechanism.¹¹⁹

He and his followers decided to retaliate. On 5 June 2016, they attacked the small mosque used by Muhammadiyah, called Meunasah Muhammad, and got into a fight with a few mosque-goers.¹²⁰ The night before the ceremony to lay the cornerstone for the new mosque, they mobilised hundreds of people to protest at the police office, demanding that construction be stopped because the mosque had not secured a building permit. The Juli police chief decided to postpone the ceremony for fear of public disturbances.¹²¹ The same reason was used by the Bireuen office of religious affairs ministry (*dinas agama*) to withhold a recommendation letter for the mosque. But after the central board of Muhammadiyah reported the case to the religious affairs minister and the issue gained national exposure, the minister himself apologised and requested the district office to issue the recommendation, although as of September 2016, the mosque still had not obtained a permit.¹²²

The potential for more violence if Muzakir Manaf mobilises the traditionalists on his behalf in the election is high. Men loyal to him were blamed for several of the murders that took place in the lead-up to the 2012 elections and for an assassination plot against Irwandi. If he encourages traditionalist vs modernist tensions, or if Muhammadiyah groups challenged his own economic interests, there could be trouble.

V. CONCLUSION

This report suggests that the political clout of traditionalist ulama is growing through association with powerful politicians, even as modernist and Salafi influence continues to expand in Aceh. This is not good news for anyone concerned about growing religious intolerance in Indonesia, and it is particularly not good news for Aceh. It suggests that the potential for expansion of *shari'a*, involvement of the provincial government in defining orthodoxy and deviance, and the prospects for discriminatory legislation are high. It also raises the prospect of more violence during the election encouraged by candidates eager for the traditionalist vote.

At another level, the tensions illustrate how many assumptions about Aceh's turn toward intolerance are too simplistic. As *shari'a* regulations are expanded, churches closed, dress

117 Kamal Usandi, "Tidak Biasanya Salat Jumat di Krueng Mane Dilakukan Dua Kali," goaceh.co, 20 May 2016.

118 "Kronologi Larangan Pembangunan Masjid," Sriwijayaaktual.com, 9 June 2016.

119 IPAC interview with the leader of Muhammadiyah-Bireuen, Bireuen, 25 July 2016.

120 "Pemuda Muhammadiyah Kecam Pmukulan Pengurus Musholla, pemudamuhammadiyahaceh.org, 9 June 2016.

121 "Warga Juli Tolak Pembangunan Masjid at-Taqwa Muhammadiyah di Bireuen," Ajnn.net, 9 June 2016.

122 Qommaria Rostanti, "Ini Kronologi Larangan Pembangunan Masjid Muhammadiyah di Aceh," Republika.co.id, 9 June 2016. The main obstacle to the permit was the failure to get a recommendation from the agency that must sign off on the construction of all houses of worship, the Religious Harmony Forum (Forum Kerukunan Umat Beragama, FKUB).

restrictions imposed and individuals subjected to public canings, some assume that this is the result of hardline Islamists coming in with Saudi aid after the tsunami. But much of the support for the expansion of *shari'a* has come from the *dayah ulama*. Their quarrel with the Salafis is over doctrinal issues and modes of worship, they have no quarrel over whether the state should have a greater role in enforcing morality; in their view, of course it should.

The post-tsunami growth of Salafi organisations is legitimate cause for concern, but it is not as though the traditionalists' increasing influence will lessen intolerance. It only means that the modernists themselves will be seen as deviant. That is a source of concern not only in Aceh but also in Java where a few cases of discrimination against modernist mosques have emerged recently, albeit to a much lesser extent.

There is no question that Aceh's unique ability to apply Islamic law more broadly has encouraged Islamic groups of all stripes to establish footholds from FPI and Hizbut Tahrir to the various Salafi groups. Local resistance in the past has largely been based on the fact that these groups were seen as outsiders, imports from Java or further afield. But there has been a steady process of "Acehnisation" of all of the above, so that religious outreach by the non-traditionalists is carried out by Acehnese, making unfamiliar doctrines and tactics more acceptable – and perhaps setting the stage for more fault-lines to be drawn among Acehnese themselves.

If Aceh is allowing local ulama to wield more clout, it has local politicians to blame. But the government in Jakarta is still responsible for religion and religious affairs, and it has the legal authority to overturn local laws that violate the Indonesian Constitution. The Yudhyono administration treated the GAM-led government with kid gloves, fearing that to push too hard might cause the 2005 peace pact to unravel. The more the line between mosque and state blurs, however, the more difficult protection of minorities may become – and that includes Salafis.

APPENDIX I: ABBREVIATIONS AND GLOSSARY

<i>akhlaq</i>	Islamic ethics or behaviour
<i>aqidah</i>	Islamic faith or theology
Badan Dayah	shortened version of Badan Pembinaan dan Pendidikan Dayah /Dayah Bureau
<i>bid'ah</i>	Unwarranted religious innovation
BIN	Badan Intelijen Negara/State Intelligence Agency
<i>bupati</i>	District head
<i>camat</i>	Sub-district head
<i>dayah</i>	traditional Islamic boarding schools in Aceh
DDII	Dewan Dakwah Islamiyah Indonesia
DI	Darul Islam
DPRA	Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat Aceh/Aceh Provincial Legislature
DSI	Dinas Syariat Islam/Office of Islamic Shari'a
<i>fatwa</i>	religious ruling
<i>fiqh</i>	Islamic jurisprudence
FKUB	Forum Kerukunan Umat Beragama/Religious Harmony Forum
FPI	Front Pembela Islam/Islamic Defenders Front
Gabthat	Geuneurasi Beusaboh Thaat dan Taqwa /the Obedient and God-fearing Generation of Aceh
GAM	Gerakan Aceh Merdeka/Free Aceh Movement
<i>gampong</i>	village
<i>hajj</i>	Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca
HT	Hizbut Tahrir
HTI	Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia
HUDA	Himpunan Ulama Dayah Aceh/Association of Acehnese <i>dayah</i> clerics
IAIN	Institut Agama Islam Indonesia/State Islamic Institute
<i>ijtihad</i>	Independent jurisprudential reasoning
<i>kenduri</i>	mass prayer accompanied by a feast
<i>keuchik</i>	village head
KRA	Kongres Rakyat Aceh/Aceh People's Congress
LIPIA	Lembaga Ilmu Pengetahuan Islam dan Arab/Institute for Islamic and Arabic Learning
<i>madrasah</i>	modern Islamic schools
Maulid	celebration of Prophet Muhammad's birthday
<i>mazhab</i>	school of thought in Islamic jurisprudence
<i>masjid</i>	mosque
<i>meunasah</i>	small mosque
MPU	Majelis Permusyawaratan Ulama/Aceh's Ulama Council
MUI	Majelis Ulama Indonesia/Indonesian Ulama Council
MUNA	Majelis Ulama Nanggroe Aceh/Acehnese Ulama Council
NU	Nahdlatul Ulama

Otsus	Otonomi khusus/special autonomy
PA	Partai Aceh/Aceh Party
PDA	Partai Daulat Aceh/Aceh Sovereign Party
<i>pengajian</i>	Religious study group
Pergub	Peraturan Gubernur/Governor Regulation
PERTI	Persatuan Tarbiyah Islamiyah/Islamic Education Association
<i>pesantren</i>	Islamic boarding schools
PKI	Partai Komunis Indonesia, Indonesian Communist Party
PSII	Partai Serikat Islam Indonesia
Parmusi	Persaudaraan Muslimin Indonesia
<i>qanun</i>	Aceh's regional regulations, including those related to <i>shari'a</i>
Reformasi	The post-new order period of "reform" in Indonesia
<i>shari'a</i>	Islamic law
SIRA	Sentral Informasi Referendum Aceh/Centre of Information for Aceh's Referendum
<i>tahlilan</i>	periodic prayers and commemoration for the dead
<i>taqlid</i>	imitation of particular ulama
<i>tauhid</i>	the oneness of God
Thaliban	Rabithah Thaliban Aceh/Association of Acehnese <i>dayah</i> students
Tgk.	Teungku, title used by Acehnese ulama
TNI	Tentara Nasional Indonesia/the Indonesian military
<i>ulama</i>	Islamic religious scholars in Indonesia. This Arabic plural form of <i>'alim</i> is also used to call an individual scholar
<i>uleebalang</i>	Acehnese traditional landed aristocracy
<i>Ummat</i> (<i>ummah</i>)	Islamic community
<i>umrah</i>	Lesser pilgrimage to Mecca
<i>ziarah kubur</i>	praying at graves
<i>zikir</i>	chanting of spiritual remembrance of God

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