

DISLOCATION OF ISLAMIC SCIENTIFIC TRADITION THROUGH DIGITAL PUBLIC SPHERE: NETNOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS ON THE DISCOURSE OF AHL AL-SUNNAH WA AL-JAMA'A BETWEEN TRADITIONALIST AND MODERNIST MUSLIMS

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Abstract

On how digital public sphere distort traditional Islamic public sphere, many scholars are convinced that media's work is inextricably linked with producing false consciousness, in which its audiences' opinions are stirred and engineered for Ideological entrenchment. It is a consensus among scholars that media has the effectivity for the propaganda tools, while significant current media theories concern the role of media in favour of the power interest through the mechanism of algorigma; e.g., Echo chambers and filter bubbles. Based on netnographic data on Aswaja discourse, this paper attempts to unearth the dislocation of Islamic scientific tradition through digital public sphere. This paper argues that digital public sphere has played a significant role in disrupted the traditional Islamic scholarly tradition by instrumentalizing religious discourse to maintain hegemony over minority groups. This paper has an important contribution to understanding the mode of piety and religious practices used for cultural hegemony and the ways media plays its role in constructing and remaking the meaning of religious concepts and piety.

Keywords: *Digital Public Sphere, Islamic Scientific Tradition, Echo Chambers, Filter Bubbles, and Religious Discourse*

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Abstrak

Banyak cendekiawan yakin bahwa ruang publik digital telah secara signifikan mendistorsi ruang publik Islam tradisional. Mereka berpendapat bahwa peran media terkait erat dengan menciptakan kesadaran palsu, di mana opini masyarakat sengaja diarahkan dan dimanipulasi untuk penguatan ideologi. Menurut konsensus yang meluas di kalangan cendekiawan, media berfungsi sebagai alat propaganda yang efektif, sementara teori media kontemporer fokus pada bagaimana media bekerja demi kepentingan kekuasaan melalui mekanisme seperti algoritma, echo chambers (ruang gema), dan filter bubbles (gelembung filter). Berdasarkan data netnografi dari wacana dalam komunitas Aswaja, makalah ini berupaya mengungkap bagaimana ruang publik digital telah mengganggu tradisi keilmuan Islam tradisional. Makalah ini berargumen bahwa ruang publik digital telah memainkan peran penting dalam memanfaatkan wacana agama untuk mempertahankan hegemoni atas kelompok minoritas. Penelitian ini memberikan kontribusi penting dalam memahami mode kesalehan dan praktik keagamaan yang digunakan untuk hegemoni budaya, serta cara media memainkan perannya dalam membangun dan mengubah makna konsep keagamaan dan kesalehan.

Kata Kunci: Ruang Publik Digital, Tradisi Ilmiah Islam, Echo Chambers, Filter Bubbles, dan Wacana Agama.

مستخلص

وفيما يتعلق بكيفية تمثيل الصحافة والإعلام للواقع، فإن العديد من العلماء مقتنعون بأن عمل الصحافة والإعلام يرتبط ارتباطاً وثيقاً بإنتاج حقيقة شبه واقعية (pseudo-reality)، حيث تُثار آراء جمهورها وتُصمم لمصلحة الصحافة والإعلام. وقد كشفت المؤلفات الأكاديمية عن عمل الصحافة والإعلام عن ظهور عدة مواضيع مختلفة. وهناك توافق في الآراء بين العلماء على أن الصحافة والإعلام لها تأثير على الأدوات الدعائية (انظر هارولد لاسويل Harold Lasswell)، في حين أن النظريات الإعلامية الهامة الحالية تتعلق بدور الصحافة والإعلام في دعم مصلحة القوة من خلال آلية الهيمنة الثقافية، مثل الإنتاج والاختراع. وإذا تعتمد هذه الورقة على نظرية ستيوارت هول Stuart Hall للتمثيل والهيمنة الثقافية التي يتمتع بها أنطونيو غرامسكي Antonio Gramsci، فإنها تحاول كشف مخطط استخدام الميادين الدينية والتقوى كأداة للهيمنة الثقافية والسيطرة السياسية. وتذهب هذه الورقة إلى أن الصحافة والإعلام لعبت دوراً هاماً في اختراع المعاني والإشارة Ahlu al-sunnah wa al-jama'ah " كدراسة حالة في الخطاب الديني بين الوهابيين والأشاعرة، وهو ما يشوه ويوسع المعنى من خلال الممارسات الدلالية، مثل الوسم والقوالب النمطية والتأطير. وتسهم هذه الورقة إسهاماً هاماً في فهم أسلوب التقوى والممارسات الدينية المستخدمة في الهيمنة الثقافية والطريقة التي تؤدي بها الصحافة والإعلام دورها في بناء وإعادة صياغة معنى المفاهيم والتقوى الدينية.

الكلمات الرئيسية: دجيتال الآراء العام؛ الهيمنة الثقافية؛ التقاليد العلمية الإسلامية؛ والنقاش الدينية

A. Introduction

In contrast to modern discourse, Islamic ethical discourse aims to seek truth and to counter error through scientific discourse, which were undertaken many locations, such as

mosques, majlis ta'lim, jami'ah (university), books, and risalah (serial books)¹. While, digital public discourse tends to implant ideological entrenchment and radicalization through the mechanism of echo chambers and filter bubbles. A growing body of literature recognises the crucial role played by the digital public sphere in sustaining a group in power. The existing body of research on the public sphere suggests that propaganda through media, such as videos/images productions, labelling, naming and stereotyping, is an effective means of inculcating and maintaining cultural hegemony².

Furthermore, it is now well established that media has disrupted the traditional Islamic scholarly tradition by instrumentalizing religious discourse to maintain hegemony over minority groups. The increasing body of research on the digital public sphere and the role of media in shaping religious narratives reflects a growing academic interest in this phenomenon³. Simultaneously, the past decade has witnessed the rise of populism, including the involvement of religious figures, as a dominant force in global, national, and even local political arenas, often successfully advancing their political agendas. Within this context, populist movements have strategically employed religious doctrines and concepts within the digital public sphere as a means of consolidating power⁴.

This phenomenon is further exacerbated by the algorithmic structuring of digital media, which curates and prioritizes content based on user engagement patterns. Algorithms facilitate the formation of echo chambers and filter bubbles, wherein individuals are repeatedly exposed to information that aligns with their existing beliefs while being shielded from opposing viewpoints. In the case of religious discourse, these mechanisms reinforce particular theological interpretations and political ideologies, marginalizing alternative

¹ Alparslan Acikgenc, *Islamic Scientific Tradition in History* (Kuala Lumpur: Penerbit IKIM, Institut Kefahaman Islam Malaysia (IKIM), 2014).

² Hall, "Introduction to Media Studies at the Centre"; Hall, "The White of Their Eyes: Racist Ideologies and Media"; Hall, "Introduction"; Lengauer, "Sharing Semangat Taqwa: Social Media and Digital Islamic Socialities in Bandung"; Said, *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World*.

³ R. K. Fletcher, R., Robertson, C. T., & Nielsen, "How Many People Live in Political Echo Chambers and How Does It Affect Their News Consumption?," *Digital Journalism*, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2021.1945938>; Neil L Whitehead and Michael Wesch, *Human No More; Digital Subjectivities, Unhuman Subjects, and the End of Anthropology* (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2012); Sufri Eka Bhakti and Saifuddin Duhri, "The Digital Public Sphere and Muslim Piety in Aceh: Rethinking Habermas' Conception of Communicative Action," *Islam Realitas: Journal of Islamic and Social Studies* 8, no. 1 (2022): 12, https://doi.org/10.30983/islam_realitas.v8i1.5462; Saifuddin Duhri, "The Representation of God in Acehnese Qur'an Translation Wahhabi-Salafi Translations of Anthropomorphic Verses and the Verdict on Heresy," in *Qur'an Translation in Indonesia Scriptural Politics in a Multilingual State* (Routledge, 2024), 60–76.

⁴ Chandra Muzaffar and Syamsul, *Muslim, Dialog Dan Teror* (Bandung: Mizan Media Utama, 2004); Dayana Lengauer, "Sharing Semangat Taqwa: Social Media and Digital Islamic Socialities in Bandung," *Indonesia and the Malay World* 46, no. 134 (2018): 5–23; Fauzan Saleh, *Modern Trends in Islamic Theological Discourse in 20th Century Indonesia: A Critical Survey* (Leiden: Brill, 2001).

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perspectives and contributing to ideological rigidity⁵. Consequently, religious populism is amplified as digital platforms continuously push narratives that favor hegemonic religious-political actors, thereby undermining the pluralistic and discursive nature of traditional Islamic scholarship.

Both Habermas and Islamic intellectual traditions recognize the potential for power dynamics to distort rational discourse. Habermas critiques systemic inequalities that marginalize certain voices, undermining the egalitarian ethos of the public sphere. Similarly, Islamic ethics demand adherence to principles of justice (adl) and fairness (ihsan), ensuring that debates remain equitable and inclusive. In practice, however, the digital public sphere often exacerbates these challenges, as algorithmic curation and echo chambers reinforce ideological entrenchment, stifling the pluralistic ethos championed by both Habermas and Islamic scholarly traditions.

Stuart Hall's concept of the active audience suggests, however, that media consumers are not merely passive recipients of information but actively interpret and negotiate meanings based on their social and cultural contexts⁶. Within the digital public sphere, audiences may resist or reinterpret dominant religious narratives propagated through algorithmic filtering. While some individuals may internalize and reproduce populist religious discourse, others may critically engage with multiple perspectives, fostering alternative interpretations that challenge hegemonic structures. This dynamic underscores the complexity of digital media's role in shaping religious and political discourse, demonstrating that despite algorithmic biases, audiences retain agency in meaning-making processes.

This article poses a question on How does the digital public sphere distort Islamic scientific tradition, and What role does media play in shaping religious discourse between Wahhabis and traditionalists in Aceh?

This work specially poses questions about the state of Islamic tradition of knowledge within digital public sphere, particularly within the mechanism of echo bubble and filter chamber; and its locations and forms. This study employs virtual ethnography, semi-

⁵ A R Arguedas et al., "Echo Chambers, Filter Bubbles, and Polarisation: A Literature Review | Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism," *University of Oxford*, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.60625/risj-etxj-7k60>; Michael Wolfowicz, David Weisburd, and Badi Hasisi, "Examining the Interactive Effects of the Filter Bubble and the Echo Chamber on Radicalization," *Journal of Experimental Criminology* 19, no. 1 (2023): 119–41, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11292-021-09471-0>.

⁶ Stuart Hall, "The Spectacle of The 'Other,'" in *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, ed. Stuart Hall (London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1997); Stuart Hall, "The White of Their Eyes: Racist Ideologies and Media," in *Gender, Race, and Class in Media: A Text-Reader*, ed. Gail Dines and Jean Humex (Thousand Oaks, London, New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1995).

structured interviews, and thematic analysis to examine the dislocation of Islamic scientific tradition through the digital public sphere. Virtual ethnography involved observing online interactions on platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp, focusing on debates between Wahhabis and traditionalists in Aceh. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with several key informants, including religious leaders and digital activists, to gain deeper insights into participants' motivations and perceptions. Thematic analysis was used to identify recurring patterns in the data, ensuring a rigorous and systematic approach to interpreting the findings.

Based on virtual ethnography, interviews of relevant participants, and thematic analysis of modern religious discourse, this work argues that the digital public sphere has led to dislocating/misrepresenting Islam and dislocating Islamic tradition, undermining Islamic scientific tradition and engineering false consciousness. In contrast, the traditional public sphere had nurtured Islamic scientific tradition and true consciousness. However, there are few studies on the media use of religious identity and principle, e.g. ahlu al-sunnah wa al-jamah as the instrument for power and justifying actions against other minority groups of Muslims. This article demonstrates factors as the work of media in engineering religious truth and hegemony. At least, this work has two great significant contributions; it brings precaution against the setback of Islamic scientific tradition, and it gives a thoughtful stance on role of media in accelerating theological predicaments can both generate and prolong sectarian, political or radicalized narratives⁷.

B. Discussion

1. Traditional Public Sphere: Forms of tradition, and Location

Islamic scientific tradition is part of Islamic teaching and a sanctified deed. To seek knowledge is an obligation in Islam. It is contempt to be the ignorant, and learning is regarded as *ibadah*. Being learned people in Islam receives high status. It is witnessed by many Islamic sources that their roles are the replacement of the prophet's role; "Question the people of the Remembrance, if it should be that you do not know" (QS: 16:43) and "O my Lord, increase me in knowledge" (QS; 20:114) or the hadiths "Seek knowledge even in China," "Learned people are the heirs of the prophets," and "The ink of students is equal to the blood of martyrs on Judgment Day"⁸. In a momentum work of Abu Hamid Ghazali (d. 1111), as shown by Hatina⁹ Ghazali argues:

⁷ Edward Said and Edward Series Said, *October 3, 2001 the Clash of Ignorance* (Thunder's Mouth Press/Nation Books, n.d.).

⁸ Meir, 'Ulama', *Politics, and the Public Sphere: An Egyptian Perspective*.

⁹ Meir, 17.

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learned people or the 'ulama' are preferable to the ordinary believer by seventy levels and are closest to the level of prophecy. On the day of the resurrection of the dead, the 'ulama', together with the prophets and the saints, will merit serving as advocates for the people before Allah¹⁰.

Islamic scientific tradition is essentially based on the tradition of debate and argumentation¹¹. The first and divine learning is based on dialogue, which gives pre-existence and divine knowledge by way of debate. It is stated in the Al-Quran QS.AL-ARAF 7:172:

And 'remember' when your Lord brought forth from the loins of the children of Adam their descendants and had them testify regarding themselves. 'Allah asked,' "Am I not your Lord?" They replied, "Yes, You are! We testify." 'He cautioned,' "Now you have no right to say on Judgment Day, 'We were not aware of this.'"

Accordingly, the prophet's companions used to question the prophet for learning and ask for further knowledge¹². Questioning is essential for improving science, which is called a problematic stage by Alparsalan Acigenc¹³. It was evidenced by the deeds of ulema hadith, like Imam Bukhari and Imam Muslim in travelling to seek Hadith. Both of the Ulema travelled from one place to another place in search of Hadith. When they founded a hadith they did a process of "*tahammul wa al-ada*" (undertaking a burden and obligation for al-Hadith). This includes acceptance of a hadith, *sima'u* (listening) al-hadith, memorising and keeping it. While the second process of hadith tradition is *naqd al-hadith* (critique on al-hadith). This is the appraisal of al-hadith, by which a hadith can be categorised into *al-hadith al-sahih*, *al-dhaif* and *al-maudhu'*. By the method, the hadith is also categorised based on *sanad*, *Matan* and *rijalul Hadith*. Judging based on the three aspects, a hadith can be accepted or rejected.

Accordingly, Ibn Sina, one of the founders of Islamic scientific methodology, argues that all learning is discursive and begins with pre-existence knowledge. He views that knowledge as the mirror of reality that is expressed in the form of a statement, both in the form of a concept (*tasawwūr*) and proposition (*tasdīq*). Therefore, knowledge is derived from a word (conceptualisation) and a proposition, that is the combination of a concept with other

¹⁰ To overview, please refer to *Ihya' 'ulum al-din* (Revitalization of the Religious Sciences vol. 1, pp. 4–13).

¹¹ There is a verse named as al-mujadilah in Al-Quran. As so are many verses of Al-Quran confirming the tradition of debate for seeking knowledge, for instance see the verses of Al-Quran on the debate between the God and the angels concerning the khalifah of Adam Q 2; 30-34. The verses concerning the debate between the Prophet Abraham and King Namrud, Q 2; 258, see also Q 2; 259-260 and Q2; 66-71.

¹² There were some debates happen during the prophet, such as the most well-known debate concerning family issues, when Khaulah binti Tsa' laba debated her husband, till he cursed he proclaimed zihar. To overview more detailed, see Q9; 1-4. Also see Dhuhri, "Sejarah Singkat Ulama Dalam Merespon Wabah Virus."

¹³ Acikgenc, *Scientific Thought and Its Burdens: An Essay in the History and Philosophy of Science*; Acikgenc, *Islamic Scientific Tradition in History*.

concepts. Those expressions are true if they are valid according to deductive logic or Aristotelian logic and defensible in debate, which is now called the traditional public sphere.

Although the traditions have different grounds, both Ibn Sina's and Ibn Taymiyya's traditions prevailed the debate as the intellectual method to prove and falsify interlocutor arguments. The sophisticated argumentation narrated in *Dar' ta'arud al-aql wa'l-naql* of Ibn Taymiyyah¹⁴, *Tahafudh al-falasifah* of al-Ghazali, Ibn Rusd's *Tahafudh al-Tahafudh* and Ar-Raniry's refutation against Fansurians in his *hujjat al-Shiddiq* are illustrated a few of this classical scientific tradition of religious discourses. The debate was deeply grounded in respecting each other views and being tolerant of differences. Although Ibn Taymiyyah, Al-Ghazali, and Fansurians address their opponents as heresy, blasphemous and non-believer. The naming is not to be addressed for personal attack, but it is only to address to the indicators of the naming. For instance, al-Ghazali argues that there were 17 indicators of being heresy and three indicators of becoming non-believers. He did not aim at Ibn Sina personality, but he believed that Ibn Sina has embraced those indicators, which deserves him with those names.

It was known that traditional public sphere has been the locations for learning and teaching, discussion, debate, and argumentation¹⁵ which is basically used for instilling *burhan*¹⁶ or true consciousness and against declination. It, therefore, eradicates and is against false consciousness. Traditional Islamic public sphere commonly locate in mosques, *majlis ta'lim*, madrasah, and later in *ma'had* (institute) and *jami'ah* (university), or written materials, such as; books, *maqalah* (scientific paper), and *risalah* (serial books). Mosque was used to be as the earliest location of traditional public sphere in Islam. There was Islamic scientific tradition founded and developed by their predecessors. In mosque, the companions were taught by the prophet and called this tradition as *zawiyah*, which later in Aceh emerged Islamic traditional educational system or *dayah*, and become the predominant public sphere for Acehnese traditionalist¹⁷.

Aceh is now a province in Indonesia and was known as the catalyst of Islam in Southeast Asia. Along with the coming of Islam, Aceh had become the epicentre and the locus of development of Islamic intellectuality in the region, in particular any *firaq* of *kalam*s

¹⁴ Hallaq, *Ibn Taymiyya Agints the Greek Logicians*; Taymiyyah, *Al-Radd Ala al-Manthiqiyin*.

¹⁵ There are many Arabic terms that refer to this traditional method of public sphere, such as *mujadalah* (debate), *hiwar* (dialog), *munaqasyah* (discussion), *muhadharah* (presentation), *mushawarah* (consultation), *tadris* (teaching), *ta'lim* (educating), *ta'dib* (drilling), *muzakarah* (tutorial), and *muraja'ah* (review).

¹⁶ *Burhan* is the term introduced by Abid Jabiry which refers to...

¹⁷ Duhri, "MATURIDI KALAM AMONG ACEHNESE ASHA'IRAH; A Synthesis of Maturidi Influence on Dayah Community's Theology, Indonesia"; Duhri, *Dayah: Menapaki Pendidikan Warisan Endatu, Aceh*.

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(theological schools) and disciplines of Islamic knowledge¹⁸. Acehese society embraced thus cosmopolite culture, which every culture of Muslim worlds is intermingled and was the place where the melting pot of every Muslim ethnic group. Many decedents of Muslim origins are found in many Acehese grave stones and sites. Accordingly, many sects of kalam developed and became the host in Aceh, such as Shiah, Ash'ariete, Maturidiete and Khawarij¹⁹.

Since that time, several disputes have occurred between the groups regarding the discourse of religious truth. Unfortunately, the dispute between Fansuri's followers and Ar-Raniry was the worst. During the golden era, the dispute was ceased by the consensus under the banner of *ahlu al-sunnah wa al-jamaah*. In modern time, the dispute has, however, emerged again and occurs between Dayah community, also known as a traditionalist, and wahhabi, which is called as modernist. The conflict is under the same term; *ahlu al-sunnah wa al-jamaah*²⁰. Therefore, the term has played a crucial role in justifying the standard of Islam in Muslim society. The term is, however, contested and throughout history, its concept develops and is framed to meet many different groups of Islamic theology²¹.

A well-known example of the earliest discourse is the debate between Hasan al-Bashr and his disciple Wasil bin Atha' on the destinies of three people²² which occurred in Basrah

¹⁸ Duhuri, "ACEH SERAMBI MEKKAH (Studi tentang Peran Ibadah Haji dalam Pengembangan Peradaban Aceh)." Yatim, *Batu Aceh: Early Islamic Gravestones in Peninsular Malaysia*, 1988; Yatim, *Batu Aceh: Early Islamic Gravestones in Peninsular Malaysia*, 1988; Duhuri, Dahlan, and Zulfikar, *Buku Pedoman Ornamen Aceh Utara; Warisan Indatu Samudra Pasee*.

¹⁹ Duhuri, "MATURIDI KALAM AMONG ACEHNESE ASHA'IRAH; A Synthesis of Maturidi Influence on Dayah Community's Theology, Indonesia"; Atjeh, *Ahlus Sunnah Wal Djama'ah (Kenyakinan Dan I'tiqad)*.

²⁰ Duhuri, "The Text of Conservatism: The Role of Abbas' Ahl al-Sunnah Wa al-Jamā'ah in Underpinning Acehese Current Religious Violence." Saifuddin Duhuri, "The Representation of God in Acehese Qur'an Translation: Wahhabi-Salafi Translations of Anthropomorphic Verses and the Verdict on Heresy."

²¹ Saifuddin Duhuri, "Shari'a as Local Theology: Reflection on Acehese Culture and Identity," *Ulumuna* 19, no. 2 (2015): 437–62; Ayang Utriza Yakin, *Salafi Dakwah and the Dissemination of Islamic Puritanism In Indonesia: A Case Study of the Radio of Rodja*, *Ulumuna*, vol. 22, 2018, <https://doi.org/10.20414/ujis.v22i2.335>; Ja'far et al., "DISCOVERING THE LEGACY OF MANDAILING ULAMA: Education, Intellectuals, and Politics in North Sumatra in the Early 20th Century," *Ulumuna* 26, no. 2 (2022): 296–336, <https://doi.org/10.20414/ujis.v26i2.502>.

²² The account of the origin of Mutazalism given by Shahrastani is widely accepted as the standard one. According to his account, once Hasan Basri (d. 110/728), one of the earliest Sufis, was imparting instructions to his pupil in a mosque. Before the lessons were finished, someone turned up and asked, whether they should regard the grave sinner as a believer or an unbeliever. Hasan Basri was on the point of giving a reply to this query when a long-necked pupil, Wasil bin Ata (d. 131/748), burst into discussion with the assertion that the perpetrator of grave sins is neither a complete unbeliever nor a perfect; he is placed midway between unbelief and belief - an intermediate state, i.e., *manzila bayn al-manzilatayn* (a position between the two positions). Having spoken he strode to another pillar of the mosque followed by a number of those in the circle. Hasan Basri shot a swift glance at him and said that, "He has withdrawn (*i'tazala anna*) from us." From this remark originated the name, Mutazila or Mutazalite, i.e., the Withdrawers or Secessionists. See <http://www.ismaili.net/histoire/history04/history427.html>

mosque. Another example of Muslim location of traditional public sphere was books, which is known as the most predominant public sphere both for debate and advocating a group position. The evidence of written material can be clearly seen in the case of Ibn Taymiyyah refutation to “universal qanun” of traditionalists. To refute Ar-Razi’s book; *Asās al-taqdīs*, Ibn Taymiyya wrote a response in his book; *Dar’ ta’āruḍ al-‘aql wa’l-naql*, aw *Muwāfaqat ṣaḥīḥ al-manqūl li-ṣarīḥ al-ma’qūl*. Both have used labels against their opponents and proponents, such as *ahlu al-haq* (the rightests), *maqbul* (accepted), *haq* (right), *sunnah*, *bathil* (false), *bid’ah*, *kafir* (non-believer), but the claims were properly based on scientific appraisal and the rigidity of argumentations, not on personal preferences or political polarization interests. Even Fansurians and Ar-Ranirians used similar labels to address their interlocours.

Abid Jabiry concludes that those differences *into bayani’s, burhani’s and irfani’s* tradition. Abid Jabiri's framework of Bayani, Burhani, and Irfani categorizes the epistemological foundations of Islamic thought into three distinct but interrelated modes of knowledge production. Bayani represents a text-centered approach, relying on linguistic, juristic, and scriptural interpretations derived from classical sources such as the Qur'an, Hadith, and legal texts. It is primarily associated with traditional Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) and the authoritative role of scholars (*ulama*) in interpreting religious knowledge. Burhani, on the other hand, aligns with rationalist and philosophical methodologies, emphasizing logic, empirical reasoning, and Aristotelian thought, as exemplified by figures like Ibn Rushd and al-Farabi. This approach seeks to reconcile reason with revelation, advocating for a critical and demonstrative epistemology.

Lastly, Irfani represents a mystical and intuitive form of knowledge rooted in Sufi traditions, where truth is accessed through spiritual experience, illumination (*kashf*), and direct divine inspiration. Jabiri critiques the dominance of Bayani and Irfani in Islamic intellectual history, arguing that they contributed to a stagnation of critical reasoning and scientific inquiry. He advocates for a revitalization of Burhani reasoning as a means to restore rationalism and philosophical engagement in contemporary Islamic thought. Studying the nature of wahabbism and traditionalism teachings, Jabiry of the opinion that bayani reasoning, as it was advocated by Ibn Taymiyyah has been inextricably linked with wahhabism, while burhani reasoning is prevalence of traditionalist tradition of scientific process.

During the demise of Islamic civilisation, Islamic scientific tradition has been degraded. Muslim public sphere had been intervened, and engineered in order to serve colonialism. Imperial forces and colonial thinkers had schemed to control piety and religious affairs in order to succumb local people. The great case of this example is the emergence of

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Wahhabism in Arabian land and the support of British colonial/imperialism to this group. In short, Wahhabism was the minority group in the land. By the support of imperial power and King Saoud', Wahhabism had successfully taken control over the land. Upon establishment of Saoud kingdom, Wahhabism has been the formal teachings in the kingdom, while the other group of teachings, like Shi'a and Sufi's are banned. In the meantime, Su'ud regime declares the implementation of sharia under the umbrella of Wahhabism. It is interestingly viewed that the emergence of Wahhabism was intended to oppose traditionalism by way of sharia implementation and Wahhabi propaganda.

2. Modern Public Sphere and Islamic Polarization

Echo chambers and filter bubbles are the mechanism of modern digital public sphere. they are closely interconnected phenomena that have been associated with ideological entrenchment and radicalization, especially Islamic polarization, in which digital segmentation leads to exclusionary ideologies²³. An echo chamber is an enclosed media environment where individuals are mostly exposed to like-minded viewpoints while insulating from opposing views²⁴. The idea first described by Jamieson and Capella (2008) refers to the process by which people seek information that supports their beliefs while avoiding opposing views²⁵. In fact, research shows that there are cross-national differences, with echo chambers being much stronger in highly polarized societies, such as the United States, than in countries with robust public service broadcasters, like the UK and Germany²⁶. Echo chambers can reinforce ideologies, but they largely form as a result of self-selection instead of technological determinism²⁷.

The filter bubble hypothesis was first introduced by Pariser, which states that individuals are isolated from the global opinion space due to algorithmic personalization,

²³ B. Wolfowicz, M., Weisburd, D., & Hasisi, "Examining the Interactive Effects of the Filter Bubble and the Echo Chamber on Radicalization," *Journal of Experimental Criminology* 19 (2021): 119–141, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11292-021-09471-0>.

²⁴ Arguedas et al., "Echo Chambers, Filter Bubbles, and Polarisation: A Literature Review | Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism."

²⁵ Richard Fletcher, Craig T. Robertson, and Rasmus Kleis Nielsen, "How Many People Live in Politically Partisan Online News Echo Chambers in Different Countries?," *Journal of Quantitative Description: Digital Media* 1 (2021): 1–56, <https://doi.org/10.51685/jqd.2021.020>.

²⁶ J. M. Gentzkow, M., & Shapiro, "Ideological Segregation Online and Offline," *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 126, no. 4 (2011): 1799–1839, <https://doi.org/10.1093/qje/qjr044>.

²⁷ J. G. Nelson, J. L., & Webster, "(2017). Audience Currencies in the Age of Big Data," *International Journal of Communication*, no. 11 (2017): 2084–2104.

which reinforces their existing beliefs, effectively limiting diverse viewpoints²⁸. However, an increasing volume of research challenges this claim. Studies reveal that algorithmic recommendations slightly diversify news exposure rather than foster ideological isolation²⁹. For instance, studies analyzed data obtained using passive tracking data, which showed that search engines and social media platforms enable incidental exposure to counter-attitudinal content rather than creating closed information loops³⁰. Moreover, though algorithmic selection modulates content visibility, user preference remains the foremost determining media consumption patterns. While actively highly partisan individuals may selectively expose themselves to ideological bubbles, most users see a mix of diverse views on digital platforms³¹. Furthermore, recent research shows little empirical support for the idea that filter bubbles directly contribute to radicalization; self-selection plays a far more significant role in ideological reinforcement³².

Islamic polarization in the digital public sphere is shaped by ideological echo chambers and algorithmic curation that can both generate and prolong sectarian, political or radicalized narratives³³. This is illustrated in research by Bhakti and Duhri, who explored how social media platforms, specifically WhatsApp, have provided alternative public spheres for Acehese Muslims in Indonesia³⁴. On the other hand, some scholars argue that filter bubbles could facilitate radicalization as they repeatedly expose users who have met such material in the past, thus making them more likely to view similar content³⁵. However, empirical evidence indicates that self-selection is more critical than algorithmic exposure for radicalizing individuals³⁶. Studies of online radicalization have demonstrated that those who search for extremist content are more likely to radicalize through social learning processes

²⁸ Carl Packman, "Book Review: The Filter Bubble: What the Internet Is Hiding from You," *British Politics and Policy at LSE*, 2011, 294.

²⁹ Arguedas et al., "Echo Chambers, Filter Bubbles, and Polarisation: A Literature Review | Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism."

³⁰ Wolfowicz, Weisburd, and Hasisi, "Examining the Interactive Effects of the Filter Bubble and the Echo Chamber on Radicalization."

³¹ Seth Flaxman, Sharad Goel, and Justin M. Rao, "Filter Bubbles, Echo Chambers, and Online News Consumption," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 80, no. Specialissue1 (2016): 298–320, <https://doi.org/10.1093/poq/nfw006>.

³² Wolfowicz, Weisburd, and Hasisi, "Examining the Interactive Effects of the Filter Bubble and the Echo Chamber on Radicalization."

³³ Wolfowicz, M., Weisburd, D., & Hasisi, "Examining the Interactive Effects of the Filter Bubble and the Echo Chamber on Radicalization."

³⁴ Bhakti and Duhri, "The Digital Public Sphere and Muslim Piety in Aceh: Rethinking Habermas' Conception of Communicative Action."

³⁵ Alastair Reed, Haroro J Ingram, and Joe Whittaker, "DIRECTORATE GENERAL FOR INTERNAL POLICIES POLICY DEPARTMENT FOR CITIZENS' RIGHTS AND CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS CIVIL LIBERTIES, JUSTICE AND HOME AFFAIRS Countering Terrorist Narratives STUDY," n.d.

³⁶ Kieron O'Hara and David Stevens, "Echo Chambers and Online Radicalism: Assessing the Internet's Complicity in Violent Extremism Kieron O ' Hara," no. Sim (2004).

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and community reinforcement than passive exposure to algorithmically selected content³⁷. Moreover, even if some of its features are based on social media, studies show that personalization algorithms on platforms such as YouTube and Twitter can reinforce ideological homogeneity by recommending content based on previous user engagement, forming digital pathways to radical content³⁸. This emphasizes the need for more research focusing on the interaction of the filter bubble and echo chamber in online radicalization³⁹.

The concept of the public sphere, as described by Habermas⁴⁰, is a space in which rational-critical debate is held and where individuals engage in discussions that shape public opinion. While the Internet has made information more accessible to more people, it has also allowed for the proliferation of polarization, misinformation, and fragmentation⁴¹. While some scholars argue that the echo chambers and filter bubbles threaten the integrity of the public sphere because they deepen ideological divides, the empirical evidence depicts a more nuanced view. Studies show that most users still encounter diverse viewpoints, meaning the concerns about a fully fractured public space may be overstated⁴². In addition, the rise of social media platforms has led to greater public discourse engagement, allowing marginalized groups to amplify their voices and participate in public discourse⁴³. On the other hand, digital media might fuel partisan polarization, as partisans end up with intense negative attitudes about their political opponents, which can erode democratic deliberation⁴⁴. Despite these challenges, the Internet remains vital to the digital public sphere, influencing multifaceted political communication, activism, and social movements.

Although exaggerated in their impact, echo chambers and filter bubbles still create Islamic ethical problems based on principles of justice, truthfulness and moral values. They can distort public understanding, amplify ideological entrenchment and stifle cross-group dialogue, which makes it more challenging to land on truth and secure justice. In Islamic

³⁷ P. Neumann, "The Trouble with Radicalization. *International Affairs*" 89, no. 4 (2013): 873–893.

³⁸ J. Musa, O., & Bendett, "Islamic Extremism in the Digital Age: How Online Radicalization Works," *Middle East Policy* 17, no. 2 (2010): 43–56.

³⁹ Wolfowicz, Weisburd, and Hasisi, "Examining the Interactive Effects of the Filter Bubble and the Echo Chamber on Radicalization."

⁴⁰ J. Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989).

⁴¹ Arguedas et al., "Echo Chambers, Filter Bubbles, and Polarisation: A Literature Review | Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism."

⁴² Fletcher, R., Robertson, C. T., & Nielsen, "How Many People Live in Political Echo Chambers and How Does It Affect Their News Consumption?"

⁴³ Nelson, J. L., & Webster, "(2017). Audience Currencies in the Age of Big Data."

⁴⁴ Shanto Iyengar et al., "The Origins and Consequences of Affective Polarization in the United States," *Annual Review of Political Science* 22 (2019): 129–46, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-polisci-051117-073034>.

polarization, unchecked digital segmentation can lead to moral absolutism and exclusionary ideologies, which contradict the Islamic ethical discourse. On the other hand, the public sphere is a contested space where truth-seeking, ethical responsibility and inclusivity must be actively defended against misinformation and division. These risks can be redressed by both people and institutions through epistemic humility, digital literacy and an emphasis, as moral imperatives of the digital age, not on justice but, rather, truthfulness. In response to these risks, people and institutions must embrace epistemic humility, promote digital literacy, and uphold justice and truthfulness as foundational moral values based on Islamic ethical discourse.

Habermas's conception of the public sphere has historically been passed down to the next generation through different contexts, with the same goal: egalitarianism or equality, by applying norms such as social criticism to several aspects to influence political, social, and cultural, economic, and morality. However, Habermas has been criticised for neglecting religious discourse in the public sphere. In a criticism of Habermas⁴⁵, Calhoun argues that the original theory of the public sphere fails to account for the social exclusion of religious discourse. Like most mid-century scholars, Calhoun claims that Habermas assumed religion declined as societies modernised⁴⁶.

Although neglected by Habermas, many scholars proposed the notion of the religious public sphere, Eickelman and Salvatore further Habermas' earlier conception of public sphere⁴⁷. Casanova⁴⁸, Hefner⁴⁹, and Asad⁵⁰, even more, view that religion a pivotal location of the public sphere. They argue that religion has played an essential role in developing the public sphere outside the West Nowadays, Muslim society in Aceh for instance, have not only an active user of social media. However, they can also be digital journalists who can build individual narratives chosen as a form of social struggle to win their discourse, ideas, and understanding of religion, society, culture, and other aspects.

Habermas' theory of the public sphere emphasizes the importance of an 'ideal speech situation,' where individuals engage in rational-critical debate free from coercion, hierarchy, or external interference. In such a setting, participants are guided by norms of inclusivity,

⁴⁵ Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*.

⁴⁶ Calhoun, "Introduction: Habermas and the Public Sphere."

⁴⁷ Eickelman and Salvatore, "Public Islam and Its Common Good."

⁴⁸ JOSE' CASANOVA, "Religion, European Secular Identities, and European Integration," in *Religion in an Expanding Europe*, ed. Timothy A. Byrnes and Peter J. Katzenstein (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 6.

⁴⁹ Robert W. Hefner, "Public Islam and the Problem of Democratization," *Sociology of Religion: A Quarterly Review* 62, no. 4 (2001): 491–514, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3712438>.

⁵⁰ Muhammad Asad, "The Principles of State Management in Islam," 1961.

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equality, and mutual respect, fostering conditions conducive to consensus-building and truth-seeking. While Habermas' framework was developed within a secular, Western context, it offers valuable insights into the dynamics of discourse within Islamic intellectual traditions.

The public sphere is where Muslims participate as equals in rational discussion to pursue truth and the common good. There are several studies published by many scholars, such as *Modernizing Islam: Religion in the Public Sphere in Europe and the Middle East*; *The public sphere: liberal modernity, Catholicism, Islam*⁵¹; *Islam and secularity*; and *Introduction: the making of the Arab intellectual*. However, these publications do not discuss comprehensively and offer a different perspective regarding religious discourse to examine whether critical dimensions of the public sphere⁵² are considered within the modern public sphere, such as social media platforms as the transformative power among Muslims. In addition, there is no formal conception and inadequate theoretical lens regarding religious discourse and a public sphere.

Islamic intellectual traditions share certain affinities with Habermas' ideal speech situation, particularly in their emphasis on reasoned argumentation (*burhan*) and independent reasoning (*ijtihad*). For instance, classical Islamic scholars engaged in rigorous debates grounded in textual analysis, historical precedent, and logical consistency, reflecting a commitment to truth-seeking akin to Habermas' vision. However, Islamic discourse diverges from Habermas' secular framework by incorporating divine revelation (*wahy*) and ethical principles derived from the Quran and Hadith. These theological underpinnings introduce a moral dimension to Islamic debates, ensuring that discussions remain anchored in spiritual and ethical imperatives.

3. *The Fields and Location Modern Religious Discourse*

Appadurai's theory of global cultural flows provides a useful lens to understand the transnational dimensions of Islamic discourse in the digital age. For instance, the conflict between Wahhabis and traditionalists in Aceh is not merely local but part of broader ethnoscaping and ideoscaping shaped by global Islamic networks. Youth in Aceh access Salafi teachings online, facilitated by technoscapes like YouTube and WhatsApp, while traditionalists counteract these influences by producing localized content that emphasizes

⁵¹ Bhakti and Duhuri, "The Digital Public Sphere and Muslim Piety in Aceh: Rethinking Habermas' Conception of Communicative Action."

⁵² Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*.

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Acehnese customs and identity. Meanwhile, mediascapes amplify sectarian tensions, as caricatures and videos circulate rapidly, reinforcing ideological divides. The involvement of external financiers, such as Saudi-funded institutions, further complicates the financescape, illustrating how global forces intersect with local struggles for religious authority.

The modern discourses were based on disputes on the interpretation of *ahl al-sunnah wa al-jamaah* that lead to several disputes in the fields. The notable examples of the field were the mass mobilisations and protest against wahhabism of five movements, namely; the riot in Titeui, Gampong Pulo Raya, Pidie on Friday 18th April 2014⁵³, Baiturahman parade I, on Friday 19th December 2014 and parade II on 19th June 2015 at the heart of Banda Aceh, the blockage on Ma`had al-Sunnah Lampeuneurot on Thursday 20th August 2015 at Banda Aceh, the taking over Al-Izzah mosque management in North Aceh on Friday, 20th May 2016, and finally the mass protest and mobilisation against wahhabism situated in Oman Mosque on 27th January 2020. In short, all those incidents were motivated to relinquish wahhabi mosques and for taking control over their mosque managements. Although those incidents were mass amok on many places, but the debate of the justification of the taking control of the Wahhabis' occurred through digital media.

The riot of Titeui was exemplified the legendary protest and mass mobilisations against Wahhabi for it had made MPU of the Province to issue the Fatwa 09 on *Pemahaman, Pemikiran, Pengamalan dan Penyiaran Agama Islam di Aceh*/interpretation, thought, practice and broadcasting of Islam in Aceh in 2014⁵⁴. The fatwa also raised the concern of many local communities, including Middle East Graduate Students Association as shown below:

Iskandar: Seharus jih klo mereka dianggap sesat, tinggai lapor polisi dan biar polisi yg tangani, age kasus gafatar...

Ibrahim: Semoga para ulama di aceh betou2 ulama.....menyeu sampe ro.darah han ek dilep pekar urou ..akhirat

Iskandar: Tp polisi kedroe han digejet krn kekuatan hukum tuk tangkap awak nyan hana kuat, lg pula na fatwa tandingan yg dikeluarkan mui jakarta yg mengatakan salafi tidak sesat, dan meminta fatwa mpu aceh diperbaiki, krn tidak memenuhi syarat fatwa

Ibrahim: Lon kaleuh coba pakat utk menengahi..mulai dari kasus titeu.....ka keuh.ube kada yg samggop.

Zakaria: Beutoi tggk..

⁵³ See article entitles Ratusan Polisi Kawal Shalat Jumat di Masjid Pulo Raya, <https://www.tribunnews.com/regional/2014/04/18/ratusan-polisi-kawal-shalat-jumat-di-masjid-pulo-raya>, edited by Budi Prasetyo

⁵⁴ See https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKEwjpo9__vq33AhUGXWwGHadcBI4QFnoECAYQAQ&url=https%3A%2F%2Fppid.acehprov.go.id%2Ffinpub%2Fdownload%2FORijBkca&usg=AOvVaw1-YNu8Z_iNgIIs95hcE_dn

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fatwa MPU yang geuteken lee Tgk Muslim tentang sesat salafi, nyan dasar hukum mat parang bagi ureung dayah⁵⁵

Iskandar: It should be noted that if they are deemed misguided, it would be appropriate to report the matter to the police, allowing them to handle the case, as with the Gafatar incident...

Ibrahim: May the scholars in Aceh act as true scholars... until bloodshed occurs due to this matter. The end result is regrettable.

Iskandar: However, the police face challenges because their legal authority to apprehend individuals is insufficient, especially given the contradictory fatwa issued by the MUI (Indonesian Ulama Council) in Jakarta, which states that Salafis are not misguided and requests that the fatwa from the MPU (Aceh Religious Council) be revised, as it does not meet the necessary criteria for a valid fatwa.

Ibrahim: Perhaps an effort should be made to mediate... starting with the Titeu case... so that no further incidents occur.

Zakaria: Sir, please consider...

The fatwa issued by the MPU concerning the designation of Salafis as misguided has significant legal implications for religious leaders.

Justified by the fatwa, the mass of Aswaja have been greatly motivated to go against wahhabis, thus it has generated more and more mass protest in later time. By the fatwa, the traditionalists regard the mass protest and mobilisation are legal since the fatwa is seen as formal justification⁵⁶ for those movements, such as mentioned earlier.

Abbas: Poe jawaban Tgk Muslim?

Iskandar: Selain nyan, loen na cit komunikasi ngen mas fahmi salim di mui pusat....di peugah le mas fahmi fatwa mpu aceh jd bahan tertawan sm kiai2 dijakarta...mgkin got nyan dlam konteks bercanda tidak maksud menghina tgk2 aceh

Zakaria: Ya salam

Abbas: Mizaj! Kiban jawaban tgk muslim wate ne diskusi?

Iskandar: Meputa2 bg..sehinga ule loen pih meupata2

Pokok jih plueng kenoe, kedeh, age ingin melepas diri

Zakaria: Mungken wate nyan hana teupike bahwa fatwa nyoe akan menjadi landasan utk poh ureueng

Iskandar: Sehingga dlm diskusi fakultas syariah, banyak audince menganggap prof muslim dlm kasus ini bertaqiyyah...haha

Zakaria: Mnyoe ka jeuet keu pijakan lage kasus di lamoeuneurut, maka bisa jadi han akan diteubiet fatwa lage nyoe (husnuzzan mode on)

Abbas: What is Tgk Muslim's answer?

⁵⁵ A netnographic discussion on Facebook among Middle Eastern students featuring insights from Mizaj Iskandar, Muakhir Zakaria, Teuku Azhar, and Izawar on 17th July 2015

⁵⁶ The mechanisms that underpin the fatwa as the justification for going against wahhabism are fully misunderstood. MPU's fatwa does not have any legal claim, lawsuit so the acts to take over wahhabi mosque managements are not justified by the fatwa. The fatwa can not sufficiently to play as legal standing against wahhabism, such as taking control over their mosque management, blokage their education institution and dispossesse their properties

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Iskandar: Besides that, I also communicated with Mas Fahmi Salim at MUI Pusat... During the discussion, Mas Fahmi used the fatwa from MPU Aceh as a reference, which became a topic of discussion among the kiais in Jakarta... Maybe it was just a joke, not meant to insult the scholars of Aceh.

Zakaria: Ya salam (an expression of relief or disbelief).

Abbas: Mizaj! What's Tgk Muslim's answer regarding this discussion?

Iskandar: It's complicated, brother... so I'm still confused.

The main point is, he wants to distance himself.

Zakaria: Maybe he didn't realize that his fatwa would become a basis for others.

Iskandar: So, during the Sharia faculty discussion, many audience members thought Prof. Muslim was practicing taqiyyah (dissimulation) in this case... haha.

Zakaria: If this issue continues to be brought up in discussions like in lamoeuneurut, then perhaps his fatwa won't be accepted again (assuming good intentions here).

Baiturahman parade I occurred on Friday, 19th December 2014. It was started by the organisers of the mosque, seen as wahhabis, to ban Tastafi⁵⁷ teaching in Baiturahman great mosque, which eventually triggered the mass protest. Almost a year later, Baiturrahman Parade II occurred on 19th June 2015. Both parades were organised by oleh Majelis Ulama Nanggroe Aceh (MUNA)⁵⁸, Himpunan Ulama Dayah Aceh (HUDA)⁵⁹, and Front Pembela Islam (FPI)⁶⁰. On Friday 19th December 2014, there were a mass of people from every part of Aceh came to gather in Baiturrahman Mosque. Most of them are the representative of dayah in all Aceh. Some of them have started the trip earlier two days before the parade either by cars, bus and even motorcycle to seek Banda Aceh, since they were leaving from remote Aceh. Some are from proper Aceh (Aceh Rayeuk), so they needed several hours to arrive at the mosque. Some others are closer and become the host for people from the outside Banda Aceh. By the time, the route was crowd and had some traffic jams.

⁵⁷ Tastafi is abbreviated from Tasawwuf, Tauhid dan fiqh. It is the teaching based on the obligation to prioritise the competence in fiqh before doing tassawuf ritual, such as suluk and thariqah. On the contrary, MPTT/Majelis Pengkajian Tauhid Tasawuf is the group of ulema who view that fiqh is not the obligation to undertake sufi rituals. Both groups are in rival over religious public sphere in current Aceh.

⁵⁸ MUNA; Majelis Ulama Nanggroe Aceh or Acehnese state ulema consultary board

⁵⁹ HUDA; Himpunan Ulama Dayah Aceh or The associatio of Acehnese Dayah Ulema

⁶⁰ FPI; Front pembela Islam/Islamic front for Islam

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Figure 1: The Baiturrahman rally began at the grave of Teungku Syiah Kuala and proceeded to Baiturrahman. The photo captures the Dayah community's act of glorification while asserting their opposition to Wahhabism

It is observed that some Dayah students from North Aceh in the time, they took a rest in a mosque in Lhokseumawe for leaving to Banda Aceh. Wearing Dayah uniform, e.g., *peci*, *saroeng*, and *baju koko* along with *Rida*, they were motivated to extrude Wahhabists from Aceh and dispossess their assets. They were very young and innocence. Likewise, many other crowd to Banda Aceh, they were in common with Dayah's cultural identity, and were for one purpose to go against Wahhabism. The next day, the crowd had become massive. they rallied around Banda Aceh, starting from Tgk Abdurauf al-Singkili grave to Baiturrahman great mosque, which was about 4 kilo meters to Baiturrahman Mosque. The route was full of the people using Dayah's uniform in common.⁶¹ The first parade of Baiturrahman was named as the Acehnese people ultimatum upon the Acehnese governor (Ultimatum Rakyat Aceh Kepada Gubernur Aceh), which had 13 demands as below:

1. The management of Baiturrahman mosque should be restored as it was during the Sultan of Iskandar Muda, which was based on Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamaah and Shafi'ite school.
2. The existing decision act concerning the mosque organisation should be nullified since they had betrayed the people of Aceh
3. The organisers of Baiturrahmana have misled and violated the agreement of Acehnese Ulema by performing ibadah contravening the cosensus of majority people of Aceh.

⁶¹ I, Saifuddin Dhuhri observed those parades and met severla participants in local mosques somewhere in Lhokseuawe, North Aceh and Banda Aceh during the approaching these events.

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4. The organisers had slandered and progandaded againts the Friday morning Pengajian Tastafi, in which is taught by the charismatic ulema of Aceh. the police must, therefore, safeguard it against violence and disturbing i`tikaf.
5. The organiser of the mosque should not charge higher for Tastatafi and Majelis Zikir Ulama Ahlusunnah, On the other hand, they had not charged for Wahhabi's pengajian.
6. The great Imam of the Baiturrahmah Mosque had betrayed against the people of Aceh for unwittingly and secretly propogandated Wahhbai's teaching in Aceh by the abound with financial support of Yayasan Khadimul Haramain or LIPIA which is the direct underbow of Wahhabi's organisation in Saudi Arabia.
7. The great imam of Baiturrahman mosque had propogandate against FPI [the Front for Advocating Islam] by making them as valiant, and trouble makers. In fact, the [parade] is the will of all Acehnese people.
8. Therefore, the governor should relinquish the existing staffs of the mosque management to MPU [majelis Permusyawaratan Ulema] for the temporary phase, until then the MPU will hold a new management staff of the mosque.
9. Until this Friday (26/06/2015), did not change in the management of the great mosque, thus should not be blamed the people if there would be any chaos and unwanted matter occurs.
10. The people of Aceh are ready for fighting and sacrificing for restoring the dignity of the great mosque Baiturrahman as it was during Iskandar Muda Era.
11. The people of Aceh should not be terrorred by police ambushment, thousand military forces were employed,
12. the people would not withdraw for upholding the dignity of the mosque
13. We did wait as soon as possible the governor decision before everything would be too late.

They claimed that they the parade was not the will of a group or NGO but it was the will of all of Acehnese people, therefore, the first parade was successfully undertaken⁶². Interestingly, interviewing several participants of the protest critical on the motives of parades;

Dahlan: Coba analisa kembali ke 13 tuntutan parade santri tersebut... Intinya adalah perebutan Kekuasaan atas Pengelolaan Mesjid Raya Baiturrahman yang disitu sangat besar dana yang mengalir baik dari pemerintah maupun jamaah,

⁶² Interviewed with Hasan, Zulkhairi and Ahmad concerning the motivation of going to parade and the purpose of fighting against Wahhabism, 13 September 2015.

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Penempatan Kepala Dinas/Badan Aceh dari kelompok tertentu untuk menguasai Anggaran Proyek, Hibah dan Bansos serta menguntungkan sekelompok orang, memperkuat dan memperluas kekuasaan MPU diatas pemerintah agar lebih leluasa mengatur kekuasaan, serta untuk kepentingan Pilkada 2017 untuk menaikkan satu nama serta menjatuhkan kelompok yang lain.... UUD cit... (Ujung-Ujungnya Duit cit..)⁶³

Dahlan: Please analyze again the 13 demands made by the student parade... The essence of these demands revolves around the struggle for gaining control over the management of the Great Mosque Baiturrahman, where there is a significant flow of funds, both from the government and from the congregation. The placement of department heads or officials in Aceh from certain groups aims to control project budgets, grants, and social assistance programs, benefiting specific individuals or groups. This also seeks to strengthen and expand the authority of the MPU (Aceh Special Region Government) over the government, allowing them more freedom to manage power. Additionally, it serves the interests of the 2017 Regional Head Elections (Pilkada), aiming to elevate one name while undermining another group... UUD cit... (In the end, it's all about money...)

Fil: pesan abu tumin blang blah deh...abu hana gebi pegot demontrasile sebab demonstrasi kon etika islam, geken le abu persoalan agama diaceh tunggu hasil muzakarah ulama, bersama pe, erintah aceh....kon ngon demo peseleso masalah...nyan y long baca pesan bak berita dua uro ilikot....⁶⁴

Fil: sends a message: "Abu Tumin, blah blah... Abu Hana Gebi protests because demonstrations are considered unethical according to Islamic principles. Regarding religious issues in Aceh, we should wait for the results of consultations with the ulama (religious scholars). Together with them, follow the orders of Aceh... Don't hold demonstrations to solve problems... Just read the news from Berita Dua Uro Ilikot."

The given disputes were not only played out in physical spaces but were also extensively discussed and contested in digital spaces, particularly on social media platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp. Facebook served as a public arena where both modernist and traditionalist Muslims engaged in debates, disseminated narratives, and mobilized support for their respective positions regarding the legitimacy of Wahhabi mosque management. Through posts, comments, and live discussions, users engaged in polemics, often citing theological arguments, historical precedents, and religious authority to justify their claims. Meanwhile, WhatsApp functioned as a more private yet equally influential medium, where group chats facilitated rapid coordination, strategic planning, and the spread of religious arguments among like-minded individuals. These digital platforms not only amplified the ideological contestation between modernist and traditionalist factions but also played a crucial

⁶³ <https://www.facebook.com/irwanda.dahlan?fref=ufi>

⁶⁴ <https://www.facebook.com/amfat.esdotfil?fref=ufi>

role in organizing offline mobilizations, reinforcing collective identities, and shaping public perceptions of Wahhabism within the broader discourse of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamaah.

Employing digital public sphere for debate

Modern social media has become an arena of debate between two Islamic groups in Aceh, Wahhabis and traditionalists. The two groups contest for legitimacy as the *ahlu al-sunnah wa al-jama'ah*. It is known that the debate between traditionalists, who are now in power particularly by MPU, Dinas Dayah and HUDA, and Wahhabis, who are minority and oppressed, has been around for a long time. If in the past, the debates had many places or locations, such as mosques, *majlis*, *madrasah*, and *jami'ah* (university), or in forms of written materials, such as; books, *maqalah*, *risalah*, and oral argumentation known as traditional public sphere, now the debate has been continuing by different places and forms, namely; digital media like; facebook and whatsUp. The scale of using facebook for this action is massive. It had effectively worked in mobilising crowd. By facebook, traditional religious discourse has shifted to digital public sphere, which were located in digital forms.

Unlike traditional public sphere, digital public sphere transgresses and overlaps private sphere into public sphere. For instance, the users of facebook are provided by many forms of digital public sphere, such as “home” where any post of a user can be consumed publicly. In “home” discussion and debate always occur between different groups, such as between wahhabis and traditionalists. Another form of facebook is ‘profile’ where any user can post their thoughts. Their private thoughts then automatically become public consumption, since the facebook system makes it publicity by running the thoughts into “home” form. There are other forms of facebook, like “about”, “photos”, “friends” and more importantly “group”.



Figure 2. The first poster reads: “Wahabi is Shi’a, Communism—Forbidden in Aceh.” The second states: “Wahhabi [!] Get Rid of the Land of Aceh.” These two posters were used in the field as part of an anti-Wahhabi campaign and later shared on Facebook to discredit Wahhabi arguments while reinforcing the legitimacy of ASWAJA’s stance. The use of a striking red color conveys a sense of urgency and implies a violent threat.

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The two posters above serve as reactions to the debate between Wahhabis and traditionalists within the MPU (Majelis Permusyawaratan Ulama), reflecting the broader pattern of discourse in the digital public sphere. Rather than engaging in substantive theological or scholarly debate, these responses exemplify the tendency to employ ad hominem attacks, where individuals focus on discrediting their opponents based on personal attributes rather than engaging with their arguments. Here they start to label and to stereo type their opponents by using cursing language, such as: Shi'a, communism, jews, Wahhabis, and pig. Such ad hominem attacks are also employed by a debate through digital public sphere as shown below:

*MJ: Beutoy tdk...
Biet keuh ta kalon dum...
That pungoe2 biet jipeuteubiet argumen...
Rupajih ka pungoe ihh krna beut tan...*⁶⁵

*That is true..., how crazy really it is the argument.
They are truly become crazy for having no job [insulting words]*

Further, discourse within digital spaces as is frequently marked by implicit or explicit threats of violence as demonstrated by the given posters, which serve as tools of coercion rather than mechanisms for intellectual engagement. Rather than relying on scholarly reasoning or theological debate, participants often resort to intimidation tactics to silence opposing views and assert dominance. This pattern is evident in the rhetoric employed in online discussions, where threats—whether direct or veiled—are used to delegitimize adversaries and discourage dissent as in the facebook discussion above. The use of violence, whether rhetorical or physical, transforms religious discourse into a battleground of power rather than a space for critical inquiry. In many cases, calls for mobilization against opponents, aggressive labeling, and incitements to action escalate tensions, further deepening ideological divisions. This environment not only undermines the integrity of religious scholarship but also fosters a culture in which force is perceived as a legitimate means of resolving theological disputes, eroding the principles of rational discourse and scholarly engagement that have historically characterized Islamic intellectual traditions.

*Zakaria: Kemungkinan pertumpahan darah rayek that2
Harus na yang mengalah, Mnyoe ta harap urg gampong yang mengalah sang susah tht
Iskandar: Iya..beklam loen na lewat keunan, aneuk abg dum yg ikot me parang
Zakaria: Astagfirullah
Iibr: tdk saifuddin: info terakhir kasus pengusiran di lampeuneurut: beuklam masyarakat ba parang kumpul di dayah tdk hasbi awak salafy pun siap pertahankan diri meunan info beuklam dari lokasi dudo trok awak polda, Kapolres, kodim, wakil bupati dll dlm 2 hari diberi ultimatum*

⁶⁵ <https://www.facebook.com/zoelfitri.djhon?fref=ufi>, 11th September 2015, 20.40 o'clock

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harus bisa dibereskan le bupati/wakil [salafy harus pindah dari lampeuneurut] sementara awak salafy siap pertahankan diri... menyo hana yg mengalah besar kemungkinan tumpah darah Zakaria: The possibility of bloodshed is high.

It must be one side that gives in, but I hope it won't be too difficult for the side that has to give in.

Iskandar: Yes... let's not escalate this further; we'll send our young people to join the fight.

Zakaria: Astagfirullah (Seeking forgiveness from Allah).

Ibr: Tgk Saifuddin: Latest information on the eviction case in Lampeuneurut: The community is gathering at Dayah Tgk Hasbi, and the Salafi group is ready to defend themselves. According to reports from the location, law enforcement officials such as the police chief, military commander, deputy regent, etc., have been given a two-day ultimatum to resolve the issue by the regent/deputy [the Salafis must leave Lampeuneurut]. Meanwhile, the Salafi group is prepared to defend themselves... if no one gives in, there is a high likelihood of bloodshed.

For instance the rally of Baiturrahman Mosque, the crowd yelled and declared their requisitions⁶⁶. Spending hours in Baiturrahman, then they moved to Governor Office to demand those 13 ultimata. The parades of mass protest and mobilisation were interestingly grounded in the use of digital media like facebook and hoax productions⁶⁷.

⁶⁶ The rally of Baiturrahman was managed by facebook, which was under the account: [Serambi Mekkah](#). Here is an example of post for calling the rally:

Seruan Ulama : Tanggal 01 Oktober 2015 Kita semua ke Syiah Kuala Dalam Rangka Masih Masalah kemarin (Ultimatum Rakyat Aceh kepada Pemerintah dan Bahaya Wahabi)

=====

Assalamu'alaikum Wr. Wb

Diberitahukan Kepada Kaum Muslimin, Ulama Menyerukan kepada kita Ahlussunnah Waljama'ah untuk dapat hadir pada hari Kamis Tanggal 01 Oktober 2015, bertempat di Halaman Makam Syiah Kuala. Dalam rangka Mempertegas tuntutan-tuntutan Parade kita yang lalu, dan apabila tuntutan-tuntutan itu tidak bisa direalisasikan oleh Pemerintah, maka konsekuensinya pertumpahan darah akan terjadi. Mohon disebarkan informasi ini kepada kaum Muslimin lainnya.

Wassalamu'alaikum Wr Wb.

Call from the Scholars (Ulama): October 1, 2015 – We All Head to Syiah Kuala Regarding the Ongoing Issues (The Ultimatum from Acehnese People to the Government and the Threat of Wahhabism)

Assalamu'alaikum Wr. Wb.

It is hereby informed to all Muslims that the scholars are calling upon Ahlussunnah Waljama'ah to attend on Thursday, October 1, 2015, at the Syiah Kuala Cemetery.

This gathering is aimed at reaffirming our demands from the previous parade, and if these demands cannot be fulfilled by the government, then there will be serious consequences, including bloodshed.

Please share this information with other Muslims.

Wassalamu'alaikum Wr. Wb.

For further reading, see: [Serambi Mekkah](#):

<https://www.facebook.com/Seurambi.Mekkah/photos/a.280960252108572.1073741828.210084952529436/432889313582331/?type=3&fref=nf>

⁶⁷ See further

<https://www.facebook.com/Seurambi.Mekkah/photos/a.280960252108572.1073741828.210084952529436/432889313582331/?type=3>

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Figure 3. The size and energy of the rally

This approach transforms the debate from an intellectual exchange to a contest of identity and authority, reinforcing ideological divisions rather than fostering meaningful dialogue. By using the Serambi Mekkah account, the Aswaja group exploited algorithmic, so the call meets the target individual through the mechanism of Echo Chambers, Filter Bubbles. Such tactics not only undermine the integrity of religious scholarship but also contribute to the erosion of a scientific approach to Islamic discourse, as they prioritise polemics and personal denigration over rigorous textual analysis and reasoned argumentation. Consequently, these debates often fail to produce constructive theological engagement, instead amplifying sectarian polarization and entrenching mutual hostility within the religious community.



Figure 4. The slogans fuel mass protests against Wahhabism, implicitly threatening violence against opponents. The first poster reads, "Wahhabism Destroys Islamic Creed,"

**SAIFUDDIN DHUHRI, SUFRI EKA BHAKTI, KAMARUZZAMAN
KAMARUZZAMAN, NURUL KHANSA FAUZIYAH, RIZQI WAHYUDI**

while the second declares, "There Is No Place for Wahhabism and Shi'a in Acehese Land."

Based on netnographic studies of facebook from 2014-2016 under theme of wahabism and aswaja, there were several forms of debate emerged in the facebook location. One of the most effective forms was hoax production like in the forms of video, image and caricature productions. Many users of facebook posted videos, or images productions as a means of arguing their argument and for falsifying their opponent's' point of view. By image or video productions they blatantly attack and refute their opponent views.



Figure 5. This caricature exemplifies visual satire, depicting the Wahhabi prayer posture in an exaggerated manner. The figure raises his hands straight up, portraying an "odd" way of praying, which is meant to highlight Wahhabi anti-social behavior and perceived arrogance. The accompanying text, "Finding Better Signal," further ridicules the gesture, implying absurdity.

The hoax was designed to attract attention rather than engage in reasoned debate. This digital technique is effectively to degrade their opponent since the media production is effectively to instil audiences' mind instantly by consuming them through social media. By picture/image production, stereotyping and labelling, Authoritative truth/taqlid and disrupted and mistifying meanings and figure and enchanting the wicked/bluring. Analysing the means of the discourses between wahhabis and traditionalists, this technique is very poisonous since the production had instilled false consciousness to audiences, which aims to hate wahhabis on the basis of illogic reasoning.

By using social media in particular Facebook, the debate has become more sophisticated that gives the users many forms of debate and make away to blow up a figure by mystic power so the audience will mesmerise him and give their consent for his legendary and grossness. For instance, a certain ulema is said to have karamah and any disobedience to him

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will suffer *teumeureka*⁶⁸. Another way, they demonstrate that the uleme is in great pain of being bullied and contempted by wahhabis. Like the word; that *sedeh teuh uleme tanyoe ka iteunak adak darah keuteim roe*/it is so sad that our ulema has been bullied, I am ready to spill my blood for our ulema's dignities.

Next, Singing and spelling of coarse language are also a dominant way to convince the other side. Instead of referencing to scientific indicators, proposing evidences and logical conclusion.



Figure 6. Two additional examples of visual media used to challenge Wahhabism are presented in this figure. These images serve as tools to critique Wahhabi ideology, using symbolism, satire, and visual rhetoric to highlight perceived flaws and reinforce opposition.

Finally. the method of debate was also employed by posing threat, such as threat of violence and threat of Acehnese ideology. In the observation, it is founded that they commenced by presenting Acehnese ideology to all audiences in the social median, then they were warned by threat of wahhabi's that eradicated Acehnese ideology, as stated below:

Ideologi tanyo Aceh:
Adat bak Po Teumeuruhom
Hukom bak Syiah Kuala

Bek sampoe meutuka ngen ideologi :
Adat bak Raja Saud
Hukom bak Muhammad bin Abdul wahab.

Qanun bak Al Bani
Reusam nibak Abdullah Bin Bazz

Our	Acehnese	Ideology
Custom is governed by Po	Law is upheld by <i>Teungku Syiah Kuala</i>	<i>Teumeureuhom</i>
It must never be replaced by a foreign ideology: Where custom is ruled by the King of Saudi Arabia And law is dictated by Muhammad bin Abdul Wahhab		
Where <i>Qanun</i> is defined by Al-Albani	And <i>Reusam</i> shaped by Abdullah bin Baz	

⁶⁸ Karamah is also known as *teumeureuka* in Acehnese language. It refers to superpower of an ulema which is the source of his charisma.

Accordingly, there is a song concerning inculcating hatred upon Wahhabi, which is commonly sung among Dayah community:

*Wahabi wahaboei...lahei bak ateung....aneuk buei, Wahabi whaboi, wahabi yahudi,.....kafee laknat.
Wahabi Wahaboei... born in rice fields... piglets," along with accusations like "Wahabi is a Jew," "infidel," and other derogatory slurs.*

The script above shows that the discourse of truth is seriously ideological. The mass mobilisation and protest were motivated by ideological articulation. People were called to fight for saving Acehnese ideology which is based on King Iskandar Muda's custom, and Syiah Kuala's wisdoms.

The rise of digital platforms has significantly disrupted the ideals of both Habermas' public sphere and Islamic intellectual traditions. Echo chambers and filter bubbles fragment audiences, isolating them from opposing viewpoints and reinforcing ideological polarization. Moreover, the prevalence of ad hominem attacks and coarse language undermines the rigorous standards of *burhan* and *ijtihad*, replacing reasoned argumentation with emotional appeals and rhetorical coercion. To reclaim the integrity of the public sphere, it is essential to foster environments that uphold the principles of inclusivity, equity, and intellectual rigor emphasized by both Habermas and Islamic scholarly tradition.

4. Ideological entrenchment and Dislocation of Islamic scientific tradition

Religious discourse within the digital public sphere has enabled media to exert significant control over religious piety and the construction of religious truth, in contrast to the traditional public sphere, which allowed for a relatively egalitarian and independent exchange among all participants. While the traditional public sphere fostered the advancement of Islamic scientific traditions by encouraging open discourse and scholarly engagement, the digital public sphere has, conversely, led to a decline in Islamic intellectual rigor. This is particularly evident in the debates between Wahhabis and traditionalists, where ideological entrenchment and fanaticism manifest through personal attacks on opponents, the elimination of scientific indicators, and threats of violence. Rather than engaging in substantive theological or scholarly debate, participants frequently resort to ad hominem attacks, discrediting opponents based on personal attributes rather than engaging with their arguments.

Furthermore, the absence of scientific indicators has undermined complex theological debates, such as references to jurisprudential frameworks, historical precedents, or scholarly

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consensus, has reduced complex theological debates to polemical rhetoric. Additionally, discourse in these digital spaces is often accompanied by implicit or explicit threats of violence, reinforcing an atmosphere of coercion rather than intellectual engagement. These findings align with those of Hashmi, U., Rashid, R., and Ahmad, M., who argue that self-preference in content selection within the digital public sphere is an ideological articulation rather than an objective engagement with religious discourse. This ideological framing is reinforced through naming, labeling, and stereotyping, mechanisms that further entrench division and limit genuine scholarly dialogue.

Disrupted traditional public sphere; inculcating conflict and prevailing Injustice

The debate in traditional public sphere tends to be direct, and only between the first and the second party, while generally the third party has only passive role or in absent. On the contrary through digital public sphere, every group of party has played active receptive role through coding and decoding. There are the third party who benefit from the discourse from the digital public sphere, through video/image production, labelling, naming and stereotyping, media has indeed played great role in controlling religious course, which leads to social conflict and take control over social reality. Since naming, categorising and stereotyping are the form of social control. They “do not only describe a prevailing reality. They also constitute that social reality, insofar as societies are discursively enacted.”⁶⁹ This leads gradually to undermine Islamic scientific tradition. This is evidenced by the findings of parade Baiturrahman I and II which demonstrated that the third party played through video/image production and labelling has expedite horizontal conflict such as the taking control over wahhabis’ mosques. Facebook is a good illustration of how digital public sphere undermines Islamic tradition of debate. Instead of bringing convincing argument, they use facebook to mobilise mass protest and to spread hoax through video and image productions⁷⁰.

Another disadvantage of digital public sphere is it is against expert authority and distorting the barrier between awwam (the ignorant) and (the intellect) khawash. Traditional dispute and formal discussion of Islamic themes only occurred between experts either direct ways as was demonstrated by Wasil bin Atha in his debate against his master Abu Musa Ash`ary, or between Abu Hasan Ash`ary against al Jubba`i. By the presence of media, debate

⁶⁹ Richard Harvey Brown, “Cultural Representation and Ideological Domination,” *Social Forces* 71, no. 3 (1993): 657–76, <https://doi.org/10.1093/sf/71.3.657>. Pp. 658-659.

⁷⁰ It was the facebook page that was named as Aswaja seuramoe Mekkah.

has met new conditions, which is not formal, instant and in extent/ not face to face. By this condition, the debate has not only occurred between experts, but dominantly between *awwam*, which eventually diminish the line between *Awwam* and *Khawwash*.

In the case of Farhan and Abu Mudi for instance, they have their own followers and community. They hold their teaching and preaching in their specific place and context. However, the media has played a role in spreading the teaching to unintended audiences, which lead to misrepresentation and underrepresentation the content of teaching. By the digital public sphere illustrated above, the context of its uniqueness has been dismantled, which makes the message loses its ground and gives many possible meaning. The meaning of the message in many ways has misunderstood. There are similarities between the role of digital public sphere founded in this study and those described by Salwa Ismail and Hatina.

Encouraging the formation of false consciousness

The dispute between both sides in the digital public sphere dominantly involved with using coarse languages, such as stereotyping, mystification and labelling as demonstrated above. Every group has tried to misrepresent their opponents by igniting hatred and mystifying their central figure, which eventually created false consciousness and accepted misrepresentation. By labeling individuals as 'Yahudi' (Jews) or 'bui' (pig), they are categorized as inferior and subjected to domination and control. These findings align with Harvey Brown's view that representing others often involves with giving false reality of the opponents and aims to legitimate their domination and ideology. Similarly, Stuart Hall suggested that representation by media is ideological and subject to false consciousness.⁷¹

At the same time, the debate lacks logical reasoning and robust arguments, but it helps the formation of naive reasoning and degrading formal epistemology. The misrepresentation of Islam on social media likely stems from false consciousness. It happened because of the shallow understanding of the Acehnese youth generation. In reality, this term has played a significant role in radicalising traditionalist ideology and justification for traditionalist Islamic activists fighting Wahhabism, most of the discourse discusses this term on social media and how this propaganda provoked a furious movement on the Muslim community in Aceh. For instance, the case of parade Baiturraman I and II, the horizontal confrontation for taking

⁷¹ Saifuddin Duhri, "The Representation of God in Acehnese Qur'an Translation: Wahhabi-Salafi Translations of Anthropomorphic Verses and the Verdict on Heresy," in *Qur'an Translation in Indonesia Scriptural Politics in a Multilingual State*, ed. Johanna Pink (London: Routledge, 2023); Saifuddin Duhri, "The Text of Conservatism: The Role of Abbas' Ahl Al-Sunnah Wa Al-Jamā'ah in Underpinning Acehnese Current Religious Violence," *Studia Islamika* 23, apr. 2016, no. North America (2016).

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over Mesjid Baitul A'la lilmujahidin, Beureuneun; the controversy over *shalat tarawieh* and other pious practices between modernists, in particular, Ustaz Farhan, and traditionalist; Abu Mudi Mesra. Under these cases, there is a big difference from Habermas' concept of communicative action because social media is not only a public sphere; it has also become a propaganda machine among the Muslim community in Aceh, causing horizontal conflict regarding Islamic values.

Ideally, the concept of the public sphere is both an idea and an ideology, where openness, inclusiveness, equality, and freedom were beyond reproach⁷². However, the false ideas about Islam within social media are somehow systematically managed to induce Muslim society in Aceh to hold. For instance, Muslim belief is tea in a cup when there is coffee in reality (post-truth). In this regard, Adorno defines ideology as socially necessary false consciousness, and the young Habermas accepts this definition. This false consciousness has emerged the dispute in Aceh between the Dayah community, a traditionalist, and Wahhabis called modernists through social media, Facebook. On the one hand, the religious practice must uphold the Islamic values derived from Al Qur'an and Hadith. At the same time, cultural values have contributed to religious practices within Muslim societies over many years ago in Aceh. As social media users, both traditionalists and modernists try to convince other Muslims to accept their proposed Islamic perspectives⁷³.

The most effective representation plays in this discourse is by using categorisation. By categorising the people into two groups, the first is *ahlu al-sunnah wa al-jamaah* and the second is not *ahlu al-sunnah wa al-jamaah*., this has created misery to wahhbis since they are claimed to not *ahlu al-sunnah wa al-jamaah* and allows misery reality. By claiming that their opponents or wahhabis are not *ahlu al-sunnah wa al-jamaah*, it makes new reality to them as the reality of outsiders, contempt peoples and the traitors. Furthermore, the labelling wahhabis as pig, dog and animals has dehumanised the subject by false representation. This evidences that digital public sphere does not improve Islamic tradition of debate but degrades it into inculcating false consciousness. It also confirms Habermas views that religious public sphere

⁷² Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*.

⁷³ Syarifuddin, "Islamic Plurality in the Perspectives of Ulama Dayah in Aceh," *Jurnal Ilmiah Peuradeun* 9, no. 3 (2021): 567–86, <https://doi.org/10.26811/peuradeun.v9i3.583>; Syamsuar et al., "Settlement of Islamic Sharia Violations in the Perspective of Teungku Dayah and Local Wisdom Values on the West Coast of Aceh," *Jurnal Ilmiah Peuradeun* 11, no. 3 (2023): 985–1004, <https://doi.org/10.26811/peuradeun.v11i3.995>; Saifuddin Dhuhri, "Art as A Cultural Instrument: The Role of Acehnese Art in Resolving Horizontal Conflict," *Jurnal Ilmiah Peuradeun* 4, no. 1 (2016): 89–102.

does not effectively develop civil society and democratic space and Acikgenc's view against western influence upon Islamic scientific tradition⁷⁴.

Arena of Gladiator; Fighting for Nihilism

Digital public sphere has totally shifted the academic debate into the arena of gladiator. Both proponents and opponents are urged to fight and have neither purpose and nor truth. Everyone has to fight for fighting and to counteract for counteracting. If a free fighter fights for his perfection, he is then a freeman, while the gladiator fights for nihilism. He is thus a slave, and has neither objective and nor end. He fights for the third party. Likewise, digital public sphere is the arena of gladiator. The discourse is the interest of the third party, who enjoys the fight by watching and gaming them. The players must conduct mimicry the lord, the lord have to enjoy euphemism. Image/video production, coarse language and mystifying figures are aimed to entertain the third party and to preserve their interests. The debate between wahhabis and tradionalist is in fact neither for seeking truth and nor for discovering new insights, but only for confirming an existing ideology of the third party and for their ideological legitimation.

The mass mobilisation and protest of the riot in Titeui, Baiturahman parade I, parade II, the blockage on Ma`had al-Sunnah Lampeuneurot, the taking over Al-Izzah mosque management in North Aceh and the mass protest and mobilisation against wahhabism situated in Oman Mosque can also be seen as the important examples of gladiator fights. The agenda of protests along with their demands are not inherently connected and has no rational basis. The debate has no argumentative statement, thesis, anti-thesis and synthesis. Instead, they used the threat of violence, coarse language, categorisation, naming and labelling to enable hegemony and taking control over opponents' asset and social reality.

C. Conclusion

The digital public sphere often mirrors the mechanisms of Orientalism as described by Edward Said, where dominant groups construct the 'Other'—in this case, Wahhabis—as deviant or heretical. For instance, caricatures depicting Wahhabis praying in odd ways or labeling them as 'pigs' or 'Jews' reflect a process of Othering that dehumanizes and delegitimizes their theological positions. This digital Orientalism not only reinforces existing power hierarchies but also disrupts the pluralistic ethos of Islamic intellectual traditions. By

⁷⁴ Alparslan Acikgenc, *Scientific Thought and Its Burdens: An Essay in the History and Philosophy of Science* (Istanbul: Fatih Universitesi Yayinlari, 2000).

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framing Wahhabis as outsiders, these representations echo colonial-era strategies of dividing Muslim communities to maintain control.

In spite of the social harmony and Islamic scientific advancement in its history, there are now debate between wahhabis and traditionalists concerning religious truth. The current discourse has both degraded Islamic tradition of knowledge and overpowered the third party on Islamic truth through new locations, e.g., facebook and whatsUp, and forms; home, group, profile, and about, which are called as digital public sphere. In contrast to classic Islamic scientific tradition, digital public sphere otherwise undermines Islamic scientific tradition, while traditional public sphere had contributed to advance Islamic tradition of knowledge. There are three findings that demonstrate digital public sphere role in deteriorating Islamic scientific tradition. Firstly, the digital public sphere has triggered horizontal conflicts as shown in the mass protests and mobilisations earlier, since media play the role in distorting representation practices and deploying hegemony. Secondly within digital public sphere, the system of representation has been controlled by the third party, which situated against expert authority by distorting the barrier between awwam and khawash. Finally, digital public sphere has encouraged the formation of false consciousness. By media, any party involved in the discourse will submit to naive reasoning that led to degrading formal epistemology of Islam. This study's findings contribute significantly to broader debates on digital ethics, misinformation, and polarization. The use of caricatures, memes, and coarse language to delegitimize opponents in Acehnese religious discourse parallels patterns observed in political misinformation campaigns worldwide. For instance, just as Wahhabis are labeled as 'heretics' or 'outsiders' in Aceh, political adversaries in Western democracies are often dehumanized through similar rhetorical tactics. Moreover, the prevalence of echo chambers and filter bubbles in Acehnese social media mirrors the ideological segregation documented in studies of U.S. and European online environments. By drawing these parallels, this article underscores the urgent need for interdisciplinary efforts to combat digital polarization and promote ethical engagement across cultural and religious boundaries. Initiatives such as media literacy education and algorithmic transparency could serve as valuable tools in addressing these challenges both within Islamic contexts and beyond.

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