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## **The Existence of Non-Muslim Minorities in Aceh Indonesia: A Study of Civil and Police Institutions**

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**Abstract:** The implementation of Islamic law in Aceh had impact for the existence of non-Muslim minority groups. Even though they are guaranteed freedom to worship, harmony and protected, and can live side by side with the Aceh society, on the other hand, they are also feeling the impact of sharia. These implications are experienced by Christian women, not only among civil groups but also police institutions. This article aims to complement the shortcomings of previous research, by mapping the relationships that existed between Muslim and non-Muslim groups in Aceh during the implementation of Islamic sharia. The research question is, how do these implications occur, and why public space is limited for them. This research was conducted in Banda Aceh involving six informants and some were women, civil society groups, and several police institutions, namely three Christian policewomen, through in-depth interviews and using several references related to the research subject. The results of the study indicated that, first, there are social spaces that have an impact on non-Muslim groups because they live in areas of Islamic sharia that require them to receive these regulations, such as the obligation to wear the veil for students, teachers and policewomen in police agencies. Then, there are limited facilities for worship, including for policewomen to provide spiritual guidance. Apart from that, there is little access to public space in government, which occurs among non-Muslim minority children who would like to develop their talents, as well as employees and in police agencies who could not develop their careers perfectly. This happens because they cannot have opportunities like the people of Aceh who are the "hosts". In this case, the government must be able to harmonize laws, including for minority groups in Aceh. It is hoped that the results of this research could adding references regarding the importance of increasing awareness and fostering the values of tolerance.

**Keywords:** Existence, non-Muslim minorities, Christian women, Shariah

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**Abstrak:** Penerapan syariat Islam yang mewarnai Aceh telah melahirkan implikasi terhadap keberadaan kelompok minoritas non-Muslim. Meskipun mereka dijamin kebebasan dalam beribadah, berada dalam keharmonisan serta dilindungi keberadaannya, dan dapat hidup berdampingan dengan masyarakat Aceh, namun tanpa disadari mereka juga merasakan dampak. Implikasi tersebut dialami oleh perempuan Kristen, tidak hanya di kalangan kelompok sipil, tetapi juga institusi kepolisian. Artikel ini bertujuan untuk melengkapi kekurangan dari penelitian sebelumnya, dengan memetakan relasi yang terjalin antara kelompok Muslim dan non-Muslim di Aceh selama pelaksanaan syariat Islam. Pertanyaan penelitian adalah, bagaimana implikasi tersebut terjadi dan mengapa ruang publik terbatas bagi mereka. Penelitian ini dilakukan di Banda Aceh dengan melibatkan informan dan sebagian dari kalangan perempuan, dari kelompok masyarakat sipil dan beberapa dari institusi kepolisian yaitu polwan Kristen, melalui wawancara mendalam dan dengan menggunakan beberapa referensi yang berkaitan dengan subjek penelitian. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahwa, pertama, adanya ruang-ruang sosial yang memberikan dampak bagi kelompok non-Muslim karena mereka tinggal di wilayah syariat Islam yang mengharuskan mereka menerima peraturan tersebut, seperti kewajiban berjibab bagi pelajar, guru dan polwan di lembaga kepolisian. Kemudian, terbatasnya sarana ibadah termasuk bagi polwan untuk melakukan bimbingan rohani. Selain itu, sedikit akses ruang publik di pemerintahan, terjadi pada anak-anak minoritas non-muslim yang ingin mengembangkan bakatnya, juga pada pegawai dan di instansi kepolisian tidak dapat mengembangkan karir dengan sempurna. Hal ini terjadi karena mereka tidak bisa memiliki kesempatan seperti masyarakat Aceh yang merupakan “tuan rumah”. Dalam hal ini pemerintah harus mampu melakukan harmonisasi hukum termasuk bagi kelompok minoritas di Aceh. Diharapkan hasil penelitian ini dapat menambah referensi mengenai pentingnya meningkatkan kesadaran, dan menumbuhkan nilai-nilai toleransi.

**Kata Kunci:** Eksistensi, minoritas non-Muslim, wanita kristen, Syariat Islam

## Introduction

The application of Islamic law in Aceh is only obligatory for Muslims. This is in accordance with the constitution of the Aceh Government or UUPA (*Undang-Undang Pemerintahan Aceh*), number 11 Year 2006, Chapter 17 Article 126, Verse 1 states that; Every Muslim in Aceh must comply with the sharia.<sup>1</sup> Futhermore, related to the non-Muslim minority group in Aceh it has been written in Article 126 Verse 2 that; Every one who lives in Aceh must respect to the

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<sup>1</sup> Muhammad Amin Suma, et.al., “The Implementation of Shari’a in Aceh: Between the Ideal and Factual Achievements,” *Ahkam: Jurnal Ilmu Syariah* 20, No. 1 (2021). Mohd Din and Al Yasa' Abubakar, “The Position of the Qanun Jinayat as a Forum for the Implementation of Sharia in Aceh in the Indonesian Constitution,” *Samarah: Jurnal Hukum Keluarga dan Hukum Islam* 5, no. 1 (2021).

sharia. This is strengthened by Article 127 Verse 1 which mentions that; The Aceh Province Government and the district or city government guarantee freedom, foster the harmony and protect the fellow of religious community to worship in accordance with their beliefs. In the Qanun No. 05/2000 emphasized that "other religions outside of Islam will be recognized in this area, they can carry out their religious teachings in accordance with their respective beliefs". However, the implication for non-Muslim minority groups still happen, eventhough in daily life they confess that they can live side by side with the Muslim society in Aceh. This implication is experienced both civilians and police circles that being the focus of this research.

So far, the previous studies on the relationship between Muslim and non-Muslims in Aceh have been written in various perspectives and discussions, such as the claim that minority groups in Aceh tend to see them as second-class citizens. The tendency towards their position as second-class citizens can be analyzed from three types of research. The first is a study of minority groups who must comply with all rules among Muslim groups in Aceh. Danial,<sup>2</sup> Ichwan,<sup>3</sup> Ichwan, et.al.<sup>4</sup> Then the second type, the Muslim majority group seems to be superior and dominates all aspects and public space in Aceh, such as the works by Ansor, including regulations on Muslim clothing for Christian women,<sup>5</sup> resulting in symbolic resistance,<sup>6</sup> similarities and differences response of Christian and Muslim woman regarding the clothing control,<sup>7</sup> sentiment and suspicion,<sup>8</sup> third space,<sup>9</sup> intolerance,<sup>10</sup> and counter public sphere.<sup>11</sup> The third type,

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<sup>2</sup> Danial Danial, "Syari'at Islam Dan Pluralitas Sosial ( Studi Tentang Minoritas Non-Muslim Dalam Qanun Syari'at Islam Di Aceh)," *Analisis XII*, no. 1 (2012), p. 71–92.

<sup>3</sup> Moch. Nur Ichwan, "Faith, Ethnicity and Iliberal Citizenship: Authority, Identity and Religious 'Others' in Aceh's Border Areas," *Ma'arif* 11, no. 1 (2016).

<sup>4</sup> Moch Nur Ichwan, et.al., "Islam and Dormant Citizenship: Soft Religious Ethno-Nationalism and Minorities in Aceh, Indonesia," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* (2020), p. 215–240.

<sup>5</sup> Muhammad Ansor and Cut Intan Meutia, "Jilbab Dan Reproduksi Identitas Perempuan Kristen Ruang Publik Sekolah Aceh," *Jurnal Kawistara* 6, no. 2 (2016), p. 157-174.

<sup>6</sup> Muhammad Ansor, "Being Woman In The Land of Shari'a: Politics of the Female Body, Piety and Resistance in Langsa," *Al-Jami'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies* 52, no. 1 (2014), p. 59-83.

<sup>7</sup> Muhammad Ansor, "'Kita Kan Beda!': Persamaan Remaja Perempuan Muslim Dan Kristen Di Langsa, Aceh," *Harmoni* 13, no. 2 (2014), p. 37-50.

<sup>8</sup> Muhammad Ansor, "We Are from the Same Ancestors: Cristian-Muslim Relation in Contemporary Aceh Singkil," *AL-ALBAB* 3, no. 1 (2014), p. 15.

<sup>9</sup> Muhammad Ansor, "Being Woman In The Land of Shari'a: Politics of the Female Body, Piety and Resistance in Langsa."

<sup>10</sup> Muhammad Ansor, et.al., "Under the Shadow of Sharia: Christian Muslim Relations from Acehnese Christian Experience.," *Komunitas* 8, no. 1 (2016), p. 125–134.

<sup>11</sup> Zulkarnaini, et.al., "Sharia in Power: Non-Muslims and the Performance of Islamic Politics in Aceh Public Sphere, Indonesia," *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies* 12, no. 2 (2022), p. 257–283.

although the majority and minority groups can live side by side, conflicts still occur, due to weak law enforcement in Aceh, as stated by Siregar,<sup>12</sup> Makin,<sup>13</sup> Mulyani et. al.<sup>14</sup> The three tendencies of studying the position on non-Muslim minority group that give birth to place non-Muslim minority groups as objects of the impact of implementing Islamic sharia, but ignore their response in perceiving and reading every regulation, both written and unwritten.

This paper is intended to complement the shortcomings of previous studies by mapping the problem of the relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims, especially Christian women. Accordingly, three questions were answered in this research: (a) How is the process of creating the implication of sharia for non-Muslims in Aceh (b) What are the factors that cause the limitation of public sphere for them. These two questions in the hope that will provide the solution to various problems between Muslim and non-Muslim groups in Aceh.

This research is used qualitative research to convey more deeply regarding the existence of non-Muslim minority in Aceh. As the previous study about the non-Muslim minority group in Aceh, this research also using the qualitative research, however the distinction of this research, the data collected in the civilians and police institutions. This research took the setting in Banda Aceh, which was the central capital of the Province of Aceh, and the representation of all regions in the Province of Aceh. This issue was chosen to complete the deficiencies regarding the minority studies that had been conducted before. And this study involved two groups, both from the civilian community and from the police institution. As for the police institution, researcher chose three research locations, namely from three different police institutions, in Polda Aceh, and others in *Polsek* (Police Resort)

With regard to data sources, primary and secondary data are used. Primary data were obtained through in-depth interviews with selected informants who were initially determined purposively, from both the Civil and Police circles. While secondary data used all types of literature and documents related to the topic of the article. There were six people involved, namely three non-Muslim policewomen (women), one fellow policeman (man), one non-Muslim Chinese descendants in Aceh (woman), and one from a Catholic religious leader (man).

With regard to sources of information, the researcher used primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained through in-depth interviews with

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<sup>12</sup> Hasnil Basri Siregar, "Lessons Learned from the Implementation of Islamic Shari ' Ah Criminal Law in Aceh, Indonesia," *Journal of Law and Religion* 24, no. 1 (2008), p. 143–176.

<sup>13</sup> Al Makin, "Islamic Acehese Identity, Sharia, and Christianization Rumor: A Study of the Narratives of the Attack on the Bethel Church in Penauyong Banda Aceh," *Journal of Indonesian Islam* 10, no. 1 (2016), p. 1–36,

<sup>14</sup> Moch. Nur Ichwan, et.al., "Conflict Aceh, Socio-Cultural Identities and Social Relations with the Acehese Muslim Majority," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 31, no. 2 (2020), p. 215–240.

selected informants who were initially determined purposively, both from the Civil and Police circles. While secondary data used all types of literature and documents related to the topic of the article. There were 6 people involved: namely three non-Muslim policewomen (women); three fellow policemen (men) from the three different institutions in Polda Aceh, and others in *Polsek* (Police Resort); three non-Muslim Chinese descendants in Aceh (two women a man); two academics (men); and one Catholic religious leader (man). As additional information, researcher also conducted interviews with three non-Muslim policewomen outside Banda Aceh related to the regulation on veiled uniforms.

In conducting data collection, researcher used participant observation, in-depth interviews and documentation with the selected twelve informants. Before conducting interviews with informants, researcher first made observations at both educational institutions and Peunayong, which was the base of Chinese descent. Researcher also made observations at police institutions where three non-Muslim policewomen carried out their duties.

All information from informants in the form of words or stories and the reasons from those observed in qualitative research become the main data. The duration of research in the field was approximately six months. All the interview results were written in the interview transcript. Furthermore, secondary data consists of various writings, journals, and photos on WhatsApp status as existing data. Informant activities that could be obtained from interviews by a recorder and cellphone camera were documents that could be used as authentic information related to the research focus.

### **Islam and Dominant Religion in Aceh**

Aceh is one of the Islamic provinces in Southeast Asia which has developed into an area that has Tamaddun character, namely implementing Islamic values in all sectors of urban life.<sup>15</sup> Based on the Indonesian Bureau of Statistics in 2010, Aceh was a region considered as a place where Islam had a real role in society. Muslims were the population with the highest percentage in the province of Aceh with more than 98% of around 4 million in 2010. Meutia said that areas with a Muslim majority uphold religious-based principles and local traditions that have a central role in daily life<sup>16</sup> They identify Islam through mutually agreed practices and interpretations. Therefore, Aceh has a strong religious character; besides that Aceh's history has not only shaped Islam as a religion, but also integrated it with social and spiritual values so that local policies

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<sup>15</sup> E. Zuraidi, et.al., "The Islamic Public Space Concept in The Southeast Asia Region as a Friendly Urban Design and Planning Enlightening," *IOP Conference Series: Earth and Environmental Science* 452, no. 1 (2020).

<sup>16</sup> Z. D. Meutia, "Built Urban Heritage Conservation in Islamic Societies: Study Case in Banda Aceh, Indonesia," *IOP Conference Series: Earth and Environmental Science* 70, no. 1 (2017), p. 1–6.

are set based on Sharia principles.<sup>17</sup> Islam, as the dominant religion in Aceh, takes up a larger space than other religions.<sup>18</sup> Even though the implementation of National law is still valid, the local government prefers sharia law. The implementation of the Sharia regional regulation allows interpreting Islamic law as a set of moral principles and ethical values. Islamic law has been institutionalized as part of regional regulations. The institutionalization of Islamic law began with the passage of Syiar in 1963.<sup>19</sup>

Even though Islam is the majority religion in Aceh, and Sharia is applied in society, non-Muslims live freely in practicing their religion and worship. This is acknowledged by Nur Ichwan et.al., that although there are different religious affiliations between Muslims and non-Muslims, where Muslim groups are the hosts, non-Muslims enjoy freer and broader rights.<sup>20</sup>

In line with that, Djawas emphasized based on data from six Sharia Courts that empirically sociologically, the position of non-Muslims actually chooses to submit and obey Islamic law. Non-Muslims are of the view that Qanun Jinayat is more efficient, affordable, effective and fast in resolving problems. This has been proven in several cases such as *maisir*, *khalwat (ikhtilāt)*, *khamar*, and sexual harassment. Therefore, in the context of legal politics, Islamic sharia and Qanun jinayat which were born from a democratic legal configuration gave birth to fair and equal laws that do not discriminate, including against non-Muslims.<sup>21</sup>

In this regard, Feener explained that Sharia in Aceh was an attempt at social engineering. Social engineering is an effort to restore the moral authority of society in accordance with the religious values adhered to by the people of Aceh for a long time. Don't just view Islamic law as just a political agenda and improving the legal system. Islamic Sharia is needed as part of the social transformation and agenda of contemporary Muslims in implementing future-oriented Islamic law—and not as a series of reactive measures.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Christine G. Schenk, "Islamic Leaders and The Legal Geography of Family Law in Aceh, Indonesia," *Geographical Journal* 184, no. 1 (2018), p. 8–18.

<sup>18</sup> Andrew Davis, "Defending Religious Pluralism for Religious Education," *Ethics and Education* 5, no. 3 (2010), p. 189–202.

<sup>19</sup> Schenk, "Islamic Leaders and The Legal Geography of Family Law in Aceh, Indonesia."

<sup>20</sup> Moch Nur Ichwan, et.al., "Islam and Dormant Citizenship: Soft Religious Ethno-Nationalism and Minorities in Aceh, Indonesia," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* (2020), p. 215–240.

<sup>21</sup> Mursyid Djawas, et. al., "The Position of Non-Muslims in the Implementation of Islamic Law in Aceh, Indonesia," *Ahkam: Jurnal Ilmu Syariah* 23, no. 1 (2023), p. 95–120.

<sup>22</sup> R. Michael Feener, "Social Engineering through Shari'a: Islamic Law and State-Directed Da'wa in Contemporary Aceh," *Islamic Law and Society* (2012). R. Michael Feener, "Social Engineering through Shari'a: Islamic Law and State-Directed Da'wa in Contemporary Aceh," *Journal Indon. L. Rev.* (2013).

Even though a number of studies also highlight the reality of the implementation of Islamic law, especially for non-Muslims, there are problems that still need improvement and improvement. However, referring to a number of realities and arguments above, as a region that has just emerged from prolonged conflict and the tsunami which damaged many social and economic facilities, Aceh can be used as a lesson and example in the life of national nationalism and religious tolerance as well as post-war peace conflict.

### **Islamic Law and non-Muslim Position in Aceh**

Several references regarding the position of non Muslim in Aceh have been written by many scholars and researchers, among them Mursyid Djawas et. al., he stated that the position of non Muslim coexistence with the Muslim society had described from the Prophet era. They were protected and living together with the Muslim society in Aceh. The result of his study argued that non-Muslims chose to conquered themselves to the qanun of sharia, eventhough they had other choise in National court.<sup>23</sup> The similar reasearch have been written by Abdul Halim, in which he stated that although the islamic sharia more often considered violation to the human right, however it become the choise for the non Muslim as their rational choise.<sup>24</sup> The similar study had been written by Muji Mulia in which the result of his research stated that in general after the aplication of islamic sharia in Aceh, the relation between Muslim and non-Muslim in Aceh especially in the social community showed the harmony. Eventhough in certain cases it still arose the conflict. Thus, in the context of nation, Pancasila as the *kalimatin sawa* ' to integrated the diversity in Aceh.<sup>25</sup> All the research have been limited in the civilians, in this research I would like to highlight both of environment, in civilians and police institution.

The application of Islamic law in Aceh has produced the impact to other groups in Aceh, as the previous explanation. However they try to understand that living in Aceh must respect to the implementation of Islamic sharia. Indeed, when asked about their experience in Aceh, they clarified that they coexistence with the Muslim society in Aceh. It is undeniable, In many conditions, they faced several situations such as they experienced various forms of limitation of access in social space and even experienced forms of coercion in their daily activities. Based on the field data found, the forms of limitation and coercion could be shown in three ways: first, the obligation to wear veils; limited facilities for houses of worship/churches; and limited access in occupying seats in government.

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<sup>23</sup> Mursyid Djawas, et. al., "The Position of Non-Muslims...", p. 95–120.

<sup>24</sup> Abdul Halim, "Non-Muslims in the Qanun Jinayat and the Choice of Law in Sharia Courts in Aceh," *Human Rights Review* 23, no. 2 (2022), p. 265–288.

<sup>25</sup> Muji Mulia, "Relasi Muslim Dan Non Muslim Dalam Negara Bangsa (Kajian Dari Perspektif Syariat Islam Di Aceh)" (Universitas Islam Negeri Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh, 2017).

## 1. The Obligation of Wearing the Veils

Claims from Muslim groups as hosts have full rights, and non-Muslims are considered guests with some rights granted by hosts, even non-Muslim groups themselves admit that as guests they have to respect their hosts.<sup>26</sup> It is undeniable that the application of Islamic law has encouraged the emergence of Christian women who wear the veil.<sup>27</sup> In Langsa, there was also experience of Christians being required to wear the veil in public spaces.<sup>28</sup> Another phenomenon was that there were two Christian female students at Unsyiah in Banda Aceh and Christian female students at Unsam Lhokseumawe who, although there was no compulsion for them to wear the veil, the academic environment often perceived them as something that must be veiled.<sup>29</sup>

Likewise, what happened in the police institution, where based on observations and data for 2018, the total number of policewomen throughout Aceh was 755, with details of 754 Muslim policewomen and 10 non-Muslim policewomen. All of these policewomen wore veiled uniforms, both Muslim and non-Muslim policewomen, including three policewomen in Banda Aceh with the informant 1, informant 2 and informant 3. They used the symbol of the Islamic religion not only in the office but also in their neighborhood and campus according to their respective experiences. Informant 1 and 2 wore veils when they moved to Aceh with their husbands, who were both TNI soldiers.

Meanwhile, informant 3 was born in Aceh because her father was also an active police officer in Banda Aceh. Maria also did not feel strange to the customs of the people of Aceh, including wearing a veil. Researcher even read her WhatsApp story which expressed her heart and showed a photo of a policewoman without a veil with a short haircut above the neck with the caption: "I wish like this wearing a uniform without a veil, but what should I do, the hair must often be covered with a veil, but everything will be nice in one time...".

## 2. Limited Provision of Houses of Worship/Church Facilities

The implication of Islamic sharia was also indicated on the limited number of houses of worship for non-Muslim minority groups. This was evidenced by statistical data from the Aceh Ministry of Religion in 2015, where mosques were the most places of worship compared to churches, temples and monasteries. The most dominant Muslim houses of worship were in Aceh Timur, and the fewest were in the city of Sabang. The number of mosques from 23 district/cities was

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<sup>26</sup> Moch Nur chwan, et.al., "Conflict Aceh, Socio-Cultural Identities and Social Relations with the Acehnese Muslim Majority."

<sup>27</sup> Muhammad Ansor and Cut Meutia, "Jilbab Dan Reproduksi Identitas Perempuan Kristen," *Kawistara* 6, no. 2 (2016).

<sup>28</sup> Muhammad Ansor, "Under the Shadow of Sharia: Christian Muslim Relations from Acehnese Christian Experience."

<sup>29</sup> Muhammad Ansor, "Being Like Other Faith: Jilbab and Hybrid Identities If Cristian Students in Aceh", *Jurnal Panamas* 29, No. 1 (2016), p. 11-30.



recorded at 3,928 units. In Aceh Timur 372 units, Aceh Utara 328 units, Aceh Barat District 290 units, and Sabang 21 unit.<sup>30</sup>

Houses of worship for Christians were scattered in a number of districts/cities with 61 units of churches, consisting of 19 units of Catholic churches and 42 units of Christian churches. Most Christian churches were found in Aceh Tenggara with 30 units, Aceh Singkil 4 units, and 1 unit of each in Banda Aceh, Bireuen, Aceh Tengah, Sabang, Lhokseumawe, and Langsa.<sup>31</sup>

Catholic churches were mostly in Aceh Tenggara with eight units. Meanwhile, in the city of Banda Aceh, Aceh Tengah, Bireuen, Sabang City, Subulussalam, Lhokseumawe City and Aceh Barat, each has one unit of Catholic church. Furthermore, there were nine monasteries for houses of worship belonging to Buddhists in Aceh, four units in Banda Aceh, while in Aceh Tengah, Bireuen, Langsa City, Lhokseumawe City and Sabang City, one unit of each.<sup>32</sup>

This phenomena also occur in the police institution, as told by the three non-Muslim policewomen (informant 1, 2 and 3) in the three police institutions that explained previous, in which they faced the difficulty to carrying out the spiritual guidance, because worship facilities were not available for non Muslim groups.

### 3. Limited Public Sphere in Occupying Seats in Government

In general, non-Muslim minority groups in Aceh were still limited in public space to take part in various fields and jobs. One example was experienced by a minority child who wanted to register to become a Tourism Ambassador candidate but did not realize, because one of the conditions was must be Muslim.<sup>33</sup>

Likewise at the Aceh Ministry of Religion office, although given the opportunity to represent their respective religions in Aceh, they were still limited and dominated by the majority of Muslims. Among the representatives of religions in the Aceh Ministry of Religion were Catholics, Protestants, Buddhists and Hindus. As the result of interview with Baron as the informant 4, at the Aceh Province Ministry of Religion office there were several non-Muslim civil servants including: one Hindus, three Protestants, two Catholics and three Buddhists, while there were 280 Muslims.

Likewise for non-Muslim minorities, as stated by informant 1 in the police institution, she said that the public space in Aceh is still very limited. She gave an example such as the opportunity for them to occupy a seat in the government. They do not fully gained trust. Meanwhile, according to her, non-Muslim groups

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<sup>30</sup> Ridwan Iskandar, "Inilah Data Rumah Ibadah Di Provinsi Aceh, Masjid Paling Banyak Di Aceh Timur, Paling Sedikit Di Sabang," *GO Aceh.Co*, November 2015.

<sup>31</sup> Ridwan Iskandar, "Inilah Data Rumah Ibadah.

<sup>32</sup> Ridwan Iskandar, "Inilah Data Rumah Ibadah.

<sup>33</sup> Cut Della Razaqna, "Cerita Minoritas Di Tanah Serambi Mekkah," *SumberPost*, January 22, 2020.

should also have the same rights as the majority of Muslims in general, and there was nothing wrong with taking part in it.

#### 4. Segregation Attitude to non-Muslim in Aceh

Even though the relationship between Muslim majority in Aceh and non-Muslim group harmoniously intertwined, however they faced many problems without realizing. Such as an attitude of part groups also occurred in the form of staying away from or keeping a distance from them after knowing they were non-Muslims. This was experienced by Chinese children on Pocut Baren Street where they played with their Muslim peers. However, the mothers of these Muslim children often called them and forbade them not to play with the children of Chinese descent. Thus, these children often experienced body shaming from Muslim children, known as narrow eyes, snub noses and so on.

Furthermore, researcher also conducted interviews with colleagues from one of the non-Muslim policewomen named informant 3. She admitted that when they were going to hold an event involving village officials and the activity was held at the mosque, several figures in the village asked the personnel to prohibit informant 3 from entering the mosque, because they knew she was non-Muslim. This was also felt by the third informant from police institution when she was studying at campus of Muhammadiyah, where some of her Muslim friends kept their distance from her when they learned that she was a Christian.

#### 5. Problems of Majority and Minority Citizens

In the Ichwan's research, he stated that, the people of Aceh claim them self as citizenship of the host; it is seen as a "land of sharia" (*Nanggroe Syariat*), also as an Islamic land with the majority of Muslims and non-Muslims are considered comparable to the "guests". His other findings also prove that it is not only Acehnese who define themselves against "others", but also the way of non-Muslims view themselves as the second-class citizen, who must respect the Muslim people in Aceh as the host.<sup>34</sup> So it is undeniable that Islamic sharia has implications for non-Muslims, and has the potential to create legal tensions at the regional and even national levels.<sup>35</sup>

Similar research from Ichwan et. al.<sup>36</sup> discussed citizenship in Aceh based on sharia, as well as ethnoreligious nationalism, as well as its impact on minority rights in Aceh. Ichwan et al, asserted that Acehnese citizens are divided on the

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<sup>34</sup> Moch Nur Ichwan, "Faith, Ethnicity and Ileberal Citizenship: Authority, Identity and Religious 'Others' in Aceh's Border Areas."

<sup>35</sup> Moch Nur Ichwan, *Ten The Politics of Shari'atization: Central Governmental and Regional Discourses of Shari'a Implementation in Aceh*, ed. Michael Feener and Mark Cammack (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

<sup>36</sup> Moch Nur Ichwan, et.al., "Islam and Dormant Citizenship: Soft Religious Ethno-Nationalism and Minorities in Aceh, Indonesia."

basis of religion or "citizens of the ummah" who are considered "hosts" in sharia land, with their full rights, and non-citizens who are considered guests, with some rights granted by the "hosts".

Ichwan and others also argue that inactive citizenship is a synthesis between 4 political traditions, namely: Islam, ethnicity, Indonesia and the West. Talking about Islamic and Christian relations, as the researchers found, explains that for the context of Aceh it is different from other countries such as European countries. There, citizenship is seen as a layered construction that encompasses local, ethnic and national. While in the context of Aceh it refers to citizenship based on religious affiliation, where Muslims as first-class citizens (hosts) and non-Muslims as second-class citizens (guests).<sup>37</sup>

### **The Existence of Non-Muslim Minority in Aceh**

The results of the study show that the occurrence of discriminatory treatment from the majority group has perceived non-Muslim minority groups to accept every regulation both written and unwritten. In conclusion, the dynamics of religious identity and cultural norms in Aceh, Indonesia, reflect a complex interplay between Islamic law, societal expectations, and individual agency. While Muslim groups assert their rights as hosts, granting certain privileges to non-Muslim guests, the imposition of the veil on Christian women in public spaces underscores the pervasive influence of Islamic practices. This influence extends even to non-Muslim policewomen, as evidenced by the uniform veiling of all female officers in Aceh, regardless of their religious affiliation. The experiences of informants within the police force highlight both the conformity to local customs and the internal conflicts faced by individuals navigating their identities within a religiously conservative environment. Thus, the case of Aceh offers a nuanced understanding of how religious norms shape social interactions and individual choices, illustrating the complexities of coexistence in diverse societies. This finding is accordance with the previous statement of other researcher in which the non-Muslim minority group in Aceh coexist with the Muslim majority.<sup>38</sup> This idea is supported by Mulia<sup>39</sup> in which he stated that Muslim minority and Muslim majority in Aceh can live side by side however for certain cases it arose the conflict.

The compliance of minority groups with clothing regulations, as well as the given punishments, makes them forced to accept without being able to resist in the public sphere. This has proven that there has been an attitude of superiority from the Muslim majority over minority groups due to rules legitimized by the

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<sup>37</sup> Moch Nur Ichwan, et.al.

<sup>38</sup> Mursyid Djawas, et. al., "The Position of Non-Muslims in the Implementation of Islamic Law in Aceh, Indonesia."

<sup>39</sup> Muji Mulia, "Relasi Muslim dan Non Muslim dalam Negara Bangsa (Kajian Dari Perspektif Syariat Islam Di Aceh)."

State. Therefore, it is important to instill an attitude of tolerance in children starting from the family room, the neighborhood, to educational institutions from elementary school to university.

The implication of sharia towards non-Muslim groups, it indicated that they are not given the widest possible opportunity to occupy positions in the government, both in civilian circles and in police institutions. The attitude shown by part people of Aceh has given birth to an understanding of claim truth (claiming that only he is right) by some people, so that all religions outside of Islam are considered wrong, as experienced by Chinese children who were not given the freedom to play with Muslim children. These treatments can also have an impact on the small number of non-Muslim groups who are forced to accept all the rules. Meanwhile, when conducting in-depth interviews, as researcher did with several non-Muslim policewomen, they had a desire to present their identity in public sphere, but the work environment and society reconstructed their identity.

It is different when compared to the situation in Europe, where for Muslim minority groups public space is more formal in nature such as the freedom to carry out worship such as prayer, the provision of halal-branded food specifically for Muslims, and special funerals for minority Muslims. Meanwhile in Southeast Asia, public space is given more widely to minority groups, where they are fulfilled with the right to live in all aspects including the social and political fields.<sup>40</sup>

The results of this study have proven that the potential for discrimination still characterizes the implementation of sharia in Aceh, eventhough both of circle in civilians and police institutions receive all regulations on them. This can be proven by the absence of synchronization between qanuns that give freedom to them to be protected and given freedom according to their religion, but in reality there are still intolerant practices both for civil society and within the police institution. An attitude of exclusivism, if it occurs in the long term, can potentially lead to Ethnicity, Religion, Race, and Inter-Group (*Suku, Ras, Agama dan Ras/SARA*) conflict.

Solutions that can be offered is as explained by Abdullah in his article that the *tsunami* event was one of the triggers for the clash of local identities and the influence of global construction. According to him, one of the efforts to reproduce and create public space is through dialogue, where it is hoped that this space will form an atmosphere of openness, egalitarianism, and inclusivism from various diverse groups. This space can later penetrate through groups of ethnics, religions,

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<sup>40</sup> Ahmad Suaedy, "Islam, Identitas Dan Minoritas Di Asia Tenggara," *Kajian Wilayah* 1, no. 2 (2010), p. 237–252.

political parties, and all forms of interests, all of which can be managed through dialogue or deliberation.<sup>41</sup>

The influence of Islamic Sharia law in Aceh is evident not only in societal norms and individual practices but also in the allocation of resources, such as places of worship. Statistical data reveals a stark contrast in the distribution of mosques compared to churches, temples, and monasteries, with mosques overwhelmingly outnumbering other religious institutions. This unequal distribution poses challenges for non-Muslim minority groups, as evidenced by the scarcity of worship facilities available to them, as highlighted by the experiences of non-Muslim policewomen. The limited availability of houses of worship for non-Muslims not only reflects the dominance of Islamic norms but also raises questions about religious freedom and inclusivity within the region. Thus, the disparities in access to places of worship underscore the complexities of religious coexistence and the need for greater efforts to ensure equal rights and opportunities for all religious communities in Aceh. This argument is in accordance with the statement of Ichwan<sup>42</sup> in which he stated that the minority group in Aceh as the second-class citizens, hence all their rights were different with majority group as the "host". Similar research had been done by Al Makin<sup>43</sup> related to the worship houses, in which the application of Islamic sharia in Aceh impacted the destruction of the church in Aceh some years ago.

The experiences of non-Muslim minority groups in Aceh highlight persistent challenges in accessing public spaces and participating fully in various fields and jobs. Instances such as the requirement for Tourism Ambassador candidates to be Muslim and the dominance of Muslims in government offices illustrate the limitations faced by non-Muslims in the region. Despite the presence of representatives from diverse religions in official capacities, their influence remains marginalized compared to the Muslim majority. The testimonies of individuals, like informant 1 within the police institution, further emphasize the ongoing struggle for equal rights and opportunities for non-Muslims in Aceh. Moving forward, fostering inclusivity and recognizing the rights of all religious communities is crucial for promoting harmony and fairness within the region. Efforts to expand access to public spaces and ensure equal representation across various sectors are essential steps towards building a more inclusive society in Aceh.

Indeed, the minority group in Aceh got the minority rights in Aceh, however in the land of sharia the access is limited. For minority rights in Aceh

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<sup>41</sup> Ibnu Mujib Mujib, et.al., "'Islam' in the Global Village: Post-Tsunami Dialog and Negotiation of Aceh Identity," *Al-Albab* 2, no. 2 (2013), p. 221–236.

<sup>42</sup> Moch. Nur Ichwan, et.al., "Islam and Dormant Citizenship: Soft Religious Ethno-Nationalism and Minorities in Aceh, Indonesia."

<sup>43</sup> Al Makin, "Islamic Acehnese Identity, Sharia, and Christianization Rumor: A Study of the Narratives of the Attack on the Bethel Church in Penauyong Banda Aceh."

available the positive space, in which the government provide the public sphere that could be conducted for positive activities. However, as a minority group they cannot positioned in the central position, because Aceh is the privilege area. As explained by Carmona,<sup>44</sup> he stated that there are four function of typology spaces such as positive spaces, that controlled by the government for positive activities.

While the relationship between the Muslim majority and non-Muslim groups in Aceh may appear harmonious on the surface, underlying challenges and prejudices persist, often unnoticed or unacknowledged. Instances of social exclusion and discrimination, such as the reluctance of some Muslim parents to allow their children to interact with Chinese-descended peers or the exclusion of non-Muslims from certain events and spaces, reveal the complexities of coexistence in the region. The experiences shared by informant 3 underscore the enduring barriers faced by non-Muslims, even in seemingly inclusive environments like educational institutions and workplaces. These instances of prejudice and discrimination highlight the need for continued efforts to promote understanding, tolerance, and inclusivity among all members of Acehnese society. Only through mutual respect and acceptance can true harmony and cohesion be achieved, fostering a more equitable and compassionate community for all.

The problems of the majority and minorities forget the social reality that exists in almost all countries and nations in the world that have pluralistic and diverse societies. For example, it can be seen in India, where the majority is Hindu and the Muslim minority, or Myanmar, which is the majority Buddhist and the Muslim minority. Or in the Indonesian context of Papua and East Nusa Tenggara, which are predominantly Christian. In these countries or regions, there are a number of problems and dynamics in relations between the majority and minorities, this is also the case in Aceh, which is predominantly Muslim.

Ichwan's research sheds light on the complex dynamics of citizenship and identity in Aceh, where the application of Islamic Sharia law plays a central role in shaping social hierarchies and legal tensions. The perception of Aceh as a "land of Sharia" reinforces the notion of Muslims as hosts and non-Muslims as guests, with implications for the rights and status of both groups. Notably, Ichwan's findings underscore the internalization of this hierarchy among both Acehnese Muslims and non-Muslims, perpetuating a system where non-Muslims are viewed as second-class citizens obligated to respect the dominant Muslim population.

Furthermore, collaborative research with Mulyani and Salim delves into the intricacies of citizenship in Aceh within the framework of Sharia and ethnoreligious nationalism. This research highlights the division of Acehnese citizens along religious lines, with Muslims enjoying full rights as hosts and non-

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<sup>44</sup> Matthew Carmona, *Public Places Urban Spaces The Dimensions of Urban Design* (New York: Routledge, 2021).

Muslims granted limited rights as guests. The concept of "inactive citizenship" synthesized from various political traditions further complicates the landscape of citizenship in Aceh.

Importantly, the research emphasizes the unique context of Aceh compared to other countries, where citizenship is defined not only by national and ethnic identities but also by religious affiliation. This distinction manifests in a layered construction of citizenship, where Muslims are privileged as first-class citizens and non-Muslims are relegated to second-class status.

Overall, Ichwan's research calls attention to the multifaceted nature of citizenship and identity in Aceh, highlighting the need for greater understanding and dialogue to address the complexities and challenges faced by religious and ethnic minorities in the region. Only through inclusive policies and efforts to bridge divides can Aceh truly embody the principles of equality and justice for all its citizens, irrespective of religious belief or background. The phenomena presented here offers a fascinating glimpse into the complexities of religion and identity among Indonesian ethnic minorities, particularly in Aceh.

This revelation as the research by Jane,<sup>45</sup> prompted a deeper exploration into the meaning of "religion" (agama) within the Wana community, revealing a nuanced understanding shaped by interactions with the dominant Muslim and Christian societies. The Wana's innovative response to Indonesia's "civil religion" demonstrates their agency in defining their own religious identity, distinct from their neighbors. The case underscores the importance of recognizing religion as an ethnic marker and highlights the need to understand how religion is culturally constituted in intereth Overall, this study contributes valuable insights into the dynamic relationship between religion, identity, and cultural exchange among Indonesian ethnic minorities.

## **Conclusion**

The implementation of sharia in Aceh generally places non-Muslims in an equal and non-discriminatory position. However, in some cases, there are things that are challenges in themselves. The comprehensive study presented here highlights the complex dynamics of citizenship, religious identity, and societal norms in Aceh, Indonesia. The implementation of sharia significantly influences social hierarchies and legal tensions, where Muslims are considered as hosts and non-Muslims as guests, thereby causing a complex interaction of rights and obligations between the two groups. This research highlights the challenges non-Muslim minority groups face in accessing public spaces, participating in government roles, and experiencing social inclusion, even though they live side by side in harmony with the Muslim majority. In addition, these findings

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<sup>45</sup> Jane Monnig Atkinson, "Religions in Dialogue: The Construction of an Indonesian Minority Religion," *American Ethnologist* 10, no. 04 (1983), p. 684–696.

underscore the prevalence of discrimination and segregationist attitudes towards non-Muslims, as evidenced by the limited provision of places of worship, restrictions on government positions, and examples of social exclusion. The implications of Sharia for non-Muslim groups are enormous, reflecting a system where non-Muslims are a minority group. Importantly, this research emphasizes the need for tolerance, inclusiveness, and dialogue to address the complexities and challenges faced by religious and ethnic minorities in Aceh. Efforts to increase understanding and bridge gaps are essential to fostering a more just and compassionate society in which all citizens, regardless of religion, can enjoy the same rights and opportunities. Ultimately, this study calls for proactive steps to uphold the principles of equality and justice for all individuals in Aceh, regardless of their religious beliefs or background. This research is not final and there are still many limitations in cases, informants and relevant theories, so further research is needed to accommodate or obtain a more comprehensive picture with a combination of methods and a larger number of informants from non-Muslim minorities who live in Aceh.

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