# *Re-Branding* of Aceh: Islamic Public Space Contestation, Special Autonomy and New Strategies

**Fathayatul Husna[1],**

[1]Teuku Umar University, Indonesia

[1]fathayatulhusna@utu.ac.id

## Abstract

*Aceh is well known as a region that applies Islamic law as a whole. Times have brought about the intake of social changes which also have an influence on the social order of religion in Aceh. researcher examined through two main conditions, before and after special autonomy legitimation. This theme should to be examined because researcher argue there is Islamic content development in Aceh public space. This paper examines the Islamic public sphere in Aceh as an area with Islamic legitimacy. the author wants to see how the discourse on Islamic public space after the development of technology at the same time and after the conflict. This type of research is descriptive qualitative. The author uses a virtual ethnography method. The result that the authors get is that the Islamic public sphere in Aceh has changed between before the special autonomy was passed and after the special autonomy. Obviously, the development of the Islamic public space in Aceh has been fed by technological developments after the.*

**Keywords:** Aceh, Islam, Public Space, Technology

## Introduction

Islam is the religion of the majority of the population in Aceh. Islam is developing very rapidly and following the wheel of the times. However, the times marked by the presence of information and communication technology contributed to the development of Islam. Some seem to give a negative color and some are positive.

The development of Islam in Aceh pays a lot of attention to various fields, such as education, health, religious knowledge, and various other fields. The driving force for the development of Islamic religious knowledge in various fields is inseparable from technological developments and parties who are competent in the use and utilization of technology. Regardless of its free use, technology is able to provide the best offer to elevate positive values in developing an area, one example

is the province of Aceh. development based on Islamic values in Aceh is driven by the proper use of technology. Therefore, the author sees the development of Islam as an attraction for the author to review in this article.

To begin this writing, the author starts from Habermas' theory which explains that the representation of public space creates "public authority" both at the national and international levels (Habermas et al., 1974). Habermas's pressure that the storage of rationality and public interest is the basis for the formation of public space (Prasetyo, 2012).

Previous scholars, such as Noorhaidi Hasan, Pia Karlson Minganti and Pamela J. Pricket. Hasan in his study describes the Islamic public space as seen through religious symbols and a new Islamic lifestyle in the public space. Hasan explained several examples of Islamic practices that are present in public spaces, such as the emergence of various styles of headscarves, halal make-up, Islamic bulletins and magazines, shari'ah finance, qashida and nasyid (Islamic music) and Islamic broadcasts on television (Hasan, 2009).

Seeing this development, this article will explain the emergence of Islamic public space in Aceh. The researcher will begin this article by discussing the period before and after the ratification of Islamic Shari'a autonomy in Aceh. Related to the ratification of special autonomy in Aceh, researchers will explore the image of Islamic public space. Furthermore, researchers will also explore the description of Islamic public space in Aceh after the ratification of special autonomy. Regarding the ratification of special autonomy in Aceh, researchers will experience the post-tsunami events in 2004 and their impact on the Islamic public space in Aceh.

Furthermore, this article will examine in depth whether the central government gives full rights to the Aceh government to regulate the governance structure? Then, to what extent is the power of the Aceh government to regulate Islamic public spaces and how does the Aceh government adjust to the current condition of Muslims in public spaces?

## Literature Review/Analytical Framework

Discussions about public spaces are interesting to discuss, one of which is about religious public spaces. The same thing was conveyed by Dale Eickelman and Armando Salvatore that public space is a place where the meaning of "common good" or the public interest is contested (Eickelman & Salvatore, 2002). For example, mutual openness to the ideas of certain groups, either independently or related to certain authorities (Gole, 2002). However, the concept of public space does not stop at that stage. Nilufer Gole coined the term public visibility, which is related to the technique of transforming something that is absolutely visible and audible to the public (Gole, 2002). Gole explained that this concept can be used to study Islam, so it is called Islamic public visibility. According to him, the public visibility of Islam emerged as a criticism of secularism. Therefore, the presence of Islam in the public space is a form of effort to reconstruct social relations with Islamic concepts and rituals. This was raised by Islamic "actors" through modern concepts, such as public discussions, global communication networks, consumption patterns, and market rules. They generally show their Islamic identity physically. He also explained that new Islamic practices in the public sphere would form a new habitus.

Gole explained the concept of Islamic public visibility to illustrate how Islamic practices are increasingly developing in Turkey, which is known as a secular public space. In contrast to Gole's study, researchers use the concept of Islamic public visibility to examine public spaces that are bound by Islamic law. Through the concept of Islamic public visibility, researchers will further explore how Islam emerged and its practices in Aceh.

# Research Method

This article is a type of qualitative descriptive writing by prioritizing in-depth explanations regarding objects. The author collects data through literator sources, both offline and online. This article is written using a virtual ethnographic approach. This approach is carried out by collecting, observing and involving the majority of references and information derived from internet search results, such as journal writing, online books and so on. This paper is supported by a variety of website information to see the track record of an object. Furthermore, the writing raises the theme of the new Islamic public space in Aceh. The basic thing about this theme is that the writer wants to see how Islamic discourse is discussed in an environment with legitimacy of Islamic law? How is Islam increasingly developing in Aceh's public space?

# Analysis

*Islamic Public Space Prior to Ratification of Special Autonomy in Aceh*

Prior to the official enforcement of Islamic sharia rules in 1999, Islamic discourse in Aceh had been implemented long before the Aceh conflict occurred. The conflict occurred in Aceh in 1953. At that time Teuku Daud Beureueh proclaimed the Darul Islam/Indonesian Islamic Army (DI/TII) movement) (Basyar, 2008). One of the reasons for this conflict occurred because Indonesia did not keep its promise to legalize Aceh as an area based on Islamic law. The Indonesian government reneged on the agreement and wanted to unify Aceh with Sumatra. However, in 1959 this conflict subsided and Aceh was given special attention to govern its territory based on Islamic law and custom.

It doesn't stop there, the ratification of the implementation of Islamic law in Aceh has not been implemented properly by the government. Thus, in 1976 Hasan di Tiro declared Aceh to be independent (Bustamam-Ahmad, 2007). However, specifically Hasan di Tiro did not state that Aceh should be made an Islamic sharia area. He wants every Acehnese to have a spirit of nationalism (Bustamam-Ahmad, 2007).

Islamic public space has also been formed when the Aceh conflict occurred. Every GAM member and ruler of Aceh adheres to Islam and strives to defend Aceh to be independent and based on Islamic law. This is also evidenced by the existence of a union between Acehnese scholars to uphold Islamic-based education in Aceh, known as *dayah* (Feener, 2013). The public space built by the Acehnese ulema shows that Islam has also developed in the realm of Aceh education and has formed the structure of Islamic organizations in Aceh.

Of the various aspects and programs established by the government to strengthen Islam in Aceh, the Aceh government has also taken another path, namely through education. Implementation in the form of a curriculum is intended to strengthen students to know and understand the foundations of Islam. Islamic material in the school environment is applied evenly and at the same level as other scientific material (Marzuki, 2016).

At the beginning of the 20th century, Aceh formed a modern educational appearance called madrasah. Madrasas were built using a blend of religious and secular concepts (Marzuki, 2016). For modernist Muslims, the development of Islamic education in Aceh reshaped the widespread spread of Islamic teachings. This development is fully supported by the All Aceh Ulama Association (PUSA) (Feener, 2013). After receiving great support from PUSA, the number of madrasas has grown in Aceh and every madrasah graduate is required to be able to reshape Muslim thinking.

In addition, learning Islamic material in schools is still very limited. The school only gave 2 hours to teach Islamic material to the participants. This shows an imbalance between Islamic knowledge and the general knowledge they acquire. Ironically, the notion of heretical sects is being increasingly reported in Aceh. This issue is troubling the people of Aceh, especially worrying about the Islam of the generation of students (Marzuki, 2016). The government and its staff took steps to find a solution to this issue.

Recently, the government established a program that will be implemented at the elementary school (SD), junior high school (SMP) and senior high school (SMA) levels. This program is called Diniyyah.(Marzuki, 2016) The purpose of establishing this program is to increase the time and opportunity for students to study Islam.

The concept of Diniyyah learning at each school level is different. At the elementary and junior high school levels, they are allocated to participate in the Diniyyah program for 4 hours a week or given the opportunity 2 days a week. The time allotted ranges from 2pm to 4pm. It is different from the Diniyyah program in high school, which is only devoted to one heart a week from 2 pm to 5.30 pm. The implementation of the Diniyyah program has not been implemented evenly in other regions. This program is implemented within the scope of Banda Aceh.

Diniyyah program teachers will be given equal facilities and rights with Civil Servants (PNS). The Islamic materials taught are about the science of Fiqh, morals, monotheism and the Koran. Uniquely, in addition to this learning, through the Diniyyah program it also teaches students to understand Jawi writing (Malay written using Arabic script) (Marzuki, 2016).

The implementation of the Diniyyah education curriculum was launched for the first time in collaboration with the Banda Aceh Kankemenag with the Cultural Education Office and the Banda Aceh Dayah Education Office. Therefore, learning from the Diniyyah program is one of the references for the new face of Islam in the education space.

Apart from education, long before the conflict between Aceh and the central government occurred, Islam had developed rapidly in Aceh. Prior to the implementation of special autonomy, the discourse that developed at that time was tied to the tragedy of the conflict between Aceh and the Government of Indonesia.

Based on the dissatisfaction of the Acehnese rulers with the central government, it resulted in armed conflict in the 1950s.

### Islamic Public Space After the Ratification of Special Autonomy in Aceh

One of the emergences of democratic forms in the Reformation era was the reformation of Islamic discourse in the public space. The discourse on the formation of an Islamic public sphere has caught the attention of a number of researchers, such as Noorhaidi Hasan (Hasan, 2009) and Syaifuddin Zuhri (Zuhri, 2012). Both explained that the public sphere of Islam in Indonesia after the New Order was marked by the transformation that occurred in various aspects, such as cultural, social and technological developments. Formation and strengthening of Islamic public spaces in Aceh

Initiation of the leadership of the rulers of Aceh. Aceh is the only region that has the privilege to apply Islamic sharia rules as a whole. Since the approval was given through Law no. 44 of 1999 concerning the Privileges of the Province of the Special Region of Aceh and Law no. 18 of 2001 concerning Special Autonomy, Aceh opens up a golden opportunity to re-implement Islamic rules in the government setting (Noerdin, 2005). In addition, another reason for this ratification was made at the request of the Indonesian government to the Aceh government to immediately formulate regulations related to customs, education and the application of Islamic law (Noerdin, 2005). This request was submitted to answer the demands of the people of Aceh for independence because Islamic law was not legalized in Aceh. The application of Islamic law in government settings is also referred to as siyasah syar'iyyah.

After Law no. 44 of 1999 was passed, the implementation of Islam in the government system has not gone as planned. However, the Aceh regional government is trying to declare 5 regional regulations (Perda) (Fajarni, 2015). In addition, the Aceh government also established a number of institutions to ensure the successful implementation of Islamic law in Aceh, such as the Islamic Sharia Service (DSI), Wilayatul Hisbah (WH), Ulema Consultative Council (MPU) and the Sharia Court (Ulya, 2016). These four institutions are important components to form an Islamic public space in Aceh.

During the leadership of Megawati Soekarno Putri, the government passed Law no. 18 of 2001 concerning Special Autonomy for Aceh Province (Amal & Panggabean, 2004). Through the ratification of this law, Aceh is more serious about implementing Islamic sharia rules known as Qanun. The term Qanun was coined by the Governor of Aceh, Abdullah Puteh. Various rules regarding the social life of the Acehnese people are regulated in the Qanun. For example, in Qanun No. 11 of 2002 concerning the implementation of Islamic law in the fields of aqidah, worship and Islamic symbols (*No Title*, n.d.-a).

Regarding the field of aqidah, Aceh only adheres to the beliefs of Ahlussunnah Wal Jama'ah. Related to this, Aceh firmly does not accept other Islamic sects such as Syi'ah, Mu'tazilah and Ahmadiyya (Ichwan, 2007). Meanwhile in the field of worship, Qanun No. 11 of 2002 only regulates the prayer and fasting of Ramadan. To support the convenience of the community in worshiping, the Aceh government was asked to provide the best facilities. In addition, public transportation managers

are also asked to provide facilities for the obligation to pray for passengers. This rule regarding worship also regulates the prohibition to eat and drink in open areas during the fasting month of Ramadan. This applies to Muslims who are not included in certain exceptions (Ichwan, 2007).

In the field of Islamic symbols, all activities are required to support the values of Islamic symbols. This activity is supported by a number of concepts such as Malay-Arabic text, Muslim calendar and Islamic dress (Ichwan, 2007). Every Muslim is required to wear Islamic clothing. Muslim women are required to cover their genitals with clothes that do not form the body and are required to wear a headscarf. While men are required to cover the body at least between the navel and the knees. With this rule in place, Moch. Nur Ichwan explained that Islamic clothing is no longer an option, but a requirement for government regulations and official enforcement (Ichwan, 2007).

The central government asked to be careful about issuing special regulations in Aceh. This is stated in Law no. 32 of 2004 which emphasizes not contradicting the public interest, regional regulations and higher levels of legislation. Higher level regulations or the Central Government are tasked with overseeing the implementation of Regional Regulations with predetermined policies (Anggriani, 2011). Supervision is given not to restrain, but as a control over regional actions so that they are in accordance with applicable regulations. Thus, the legitimacy of Islamic sharia rules in Aceh cannot be applied freely, even though the privileges are given in full to the Aceh government.

This view certainly makes it important for the Government of Aceh to think about the consequences that will occur. Sanctions given by the Government of Aceh against a case and contrary to a higher law, the state has the authority to re-examine the rule (Jalil, 2010). For example, if an arrest is made by the WH for violating Islamic law, the police will be in charge of carrying out the investigation, which will be forwarded to the prosecutor's office and delegated to the court. This shows that the rules of Islamic Sharia are still subject to the rules that apply nationally.

It can be concluded that after the implementation of special autonomy in Aceh, the "rulers" of Aceh were not given full freedom to implement and make decisions related to government regulations. Although, the privilege to carry out Islamic law is implemented and given officially, the Aceh government is required to carry out negotiations or deliberations with the Indonesian government.

In addition to the ratification of special autonomy in Aceh, changes in the social sphere in Aceh also developed after the 2004 tsunami. After the 2004 earthquake and tsunami, Aceh underwent very drastic changes both in terms of the political, social, cultural and religious systems (Ichwan, 2013). In an online newspaper it was reported that Christianization efforts had been carried out after the 2004 Tsunami. In an editorial it was reported that Christianization efforts were carried out considering the Acehnese people's economy was still below the poverty and unemployment line (Juli, 2018). In another editorial, it is stated that the main target of Christianization in Aceh is housewives who are in the lower social class (Juli, 2018). This shows that the ongoing Christianization efforts in Aceh are not only carried out through the distribution of aid to the tsunami victims, but have the main target, namely women, especially housewives whose lives are classified as poor.

Christianization of Acehnese women is still being carried out today. In fact, a young woman in Aceh has become an evangelist (Juli, 2018).

In addition, the trading center is only limited to the market. For shopping, the people of Aceh are used to shopping at the market or on weekends (one big market day). Shopping centers such as malls have not yet been established. After the Tsunami, shopping centers, hotel accommodations, access roads began to be built. Aceh is entering a phase of "rehabilitation" on a large scale and aid from various regions has flocked to Aceh. Therefore, it is only natural that the influence of globalization, Western culture and modernization is happening in Aceh today. This change also offends the Islamic public space in Aceh. People's lifestyle is now very consumptive. Women who previously had very limited presence in public spaces are now used to appearing in public spaces, even wearing clothes that are not in accordance with Islamic sharia regulations. They are also often seen traveling with men who are not mahrams.

The presence of opposite sex interactions in public spaces triggers the practice of khalwat and adultery. David Kloos explained that the perpetrators of khalwat and adultery were also increasing after the tsunami (Kloos, 2013). He presented an overview of khalwat and adultery that occurred in Aceh after the Tsunami. He argued that khalwat and adultery were increasing in Aceh because Aceh had been openly known to the world after the 2004 Tsunami and the end of the 2005 conflict. He also saw that the post-tsunami 2004 was a point of growth in the number of workers in Aceh, the influx of Western culture and globalization (Kloos, 2013).

Therefore, efforts to strengthen Islam after the Tsunami were intensified by a number of Islamic activists and organizations. Syamsul Bahri as the writer of the online editorial opinion provided input regarding efforts to protect Acehnese Islam. He explained that young people are the most important actors to communicate Islam creatively (Bahri, 2015). One of the efforts made by Illiza Saaduddin as mayor of Banda Aceh for the 2012-2017 period. During his leadership, he tried to campaign for Islamic law (Kloos, 2013).

### New Aceh Re-Branding Strategy: Islam and Technological Developments in Aceh

As mentioned in the previous sub-chapter that after the tsunami tragedy 2004 in Aceh brought new changes, both in terms of politics, economy, culture and religion. This change is no exception related to technological developments and globalization. As a province with Islamic sharia status, the presence of accelerated technology and globalization has become a testing factor and a challenge for Aceh to maintain its privileges.

A number of creative programs are present to keep up with the times and technology. This creative program is inseparable from Islamic material. Not long ago, Aceh has become famous in the eyes of the world because it is one of the areas with the status of the World's Best Halal Cultural Destination. This achievement is not only limited to winning the halal tourism competition, but also shows that the people managing Aceh tourism have used technological facilities properly. For example, Aceh's achievements in the halal tourism arena cannot be separated from assistance, cooperation and support from the Government of Aceh. The Aceh

Culture and Tourism Office as an institution mandated to realize Aceh's victory as an Islamic sharia destination.

Not long ago, Aceh has become increasingly known in the eyes of the world thanks to the "Halal" achievements it has achieved. In 2016 Indonesia won the overall champion title at the World Halal Tourism Award (WHTA) event in Abu Dhabi on 24 October – 25 October 2016 (Hayati, 2016). In this event Indonesia received awards in 12 of 16 categories. Among several provinces and a number of categories, Aceh won 2 awards at once, namely the World's Best Airport for Halal Travelers (Sultan Iskandar Muda) and the World's Best Halal Cultural Destination.

Aceh's achievements in the halal tourism arena are inseparable from the assistance, cooperation and support of the Government of Aceh. The Aceh Culture and Tourism Office as an institution mandated to realize Aceh's victory as an Islamic sharia destination. Through the website www.disbudpar.acehprov.go.id the theme "The Light of Aceh" was introduced to the public.

> "In collaboration with the district/city government, Aceh tourism has been packaged in a new branding, "The Light of Aceh" or "Cahaya Aceh". This reflects the enthusiasm for the whole society which is united through the Islamic Shari'a which is Rahmatan lil 'alamiin, as a bright light that invites the values of goodness, prosperity, and provides benefits and kindness to all parties." (Disbudpar Aceh, "Branding Baru 'The Light of Aceh," 2019)

The Light of Aceh as a symbol to reflect on Aceh based on Islamic Sharia. The researcher argues that the method used by the Government of Aceh is to use the Aceh re-branding concept. The Aceh government is trying to show a new concept to introduce Aceh to the corners of the world. One of them is the use of the international grammar "The Light of Aceh" which means "The Light of Aceh". The choice of this grammar is to reach the global public domain.

In addition, the Aceh Culture and Tourism Office (Disbudpar) also emphasized that tourism in Aceh has great potential for Aceh's progress after the oil and gas era.(Disbudpar Aceh, "Branding Baru 'The Light of Aceh," 2019). This has a great opportunity to stabilize and increase Aceh's regional income.

Islam has indeed been integrated with the life of Aceh since Islam was brought in by traders from the Middle East. So that Islam and Acehnese customs cannot be separated. In the current era of technological development, every issue and phenomenon that occurs in society is easily accessible. In fact, every region in the world can be known through information obtained through technology. Therefore, Aceh, with its specialty in implementing Islamic law, needs to be introduced through technology. Not only related to Islamic rules, Aceh was also introduced regarding the potential for tourism and culture in it.

As previously explained, Aceh won the Gold Medal at the World Halal Tourism Award (WHTA). This achievement can be achieved with the support and cooperation of various parties, one of which is the Intercession Marketing Communication (Marcomm). Based in Yogyakarta, Syafaat Marcomm under the leadership of Andika Dwijatmiko focuses on sharia branding (*No Title*, n.d.-b). This advertising process uses Islamic law-based systems and contracts.

Syafaat Marcomm actively uses social media such as Instagram to publish ongoing activities and projects. One of the projects being carried out is collaborating with the Aceh government to realize Aceh as part of halal tourism. The logo of "The Light of Aceh" is often published through Syafaat Marcomm's Instagram account.

The theme "The Light Aceh" was also published via the Instagram account. Every published post wants to show that Aceh is an area that is rich in culture, has Islamic values and holds natural wealth.



**Figure 1.** Upload of "The Light of Aceh" Character on Instagram Syafaat Marcomm

Apart from Instagram, "The Light Aceh" is also published via Youtube. The video "The Light Aceh" was published by the Aceh Disbudpar Youtube account.(*The Light of Aceh, a Part of Wonderful Indonesia-Disbudpar Aceh*, 2019).



**Figure 2.** Video upload of "The Light of Aceh" on the Aceh Culture and Tourism Office Youtube

This shows that to maintain the existence of Islam in Aceh, it has kept pace with the times and technology. The re-branding of Islam that was carried out presented a new face of Islam through tourism. This can be concluded that there is an effort from the Aceh government to show that Islam in Aceh is no longer seen as rigid by the community. However, by showing a combination of Islamic law, culture and tourism in Aceh, it can attract the attention of everyone outside Aceh to visit Aceh. On the other hand, it will grow economic benefits in Aceh. Thus, it can be understood that Islamic public space in Aceh in the era of technological development is supported by lighter concepts.

## Conclusions

The development of Islam was shown after the implementation of Islamic Sharia autonomy in Aceh and after the 2004 tsunami tragedy. In contrast to the period before the ratification of the special Islamic Sharia autonomy, precisely when the conflict occurred, the state of Islam was very worried. Nonetheless, Islamic law in Aceh became stronger in the future. Before the implementation of Islamic law autonomy in Aceh, researchers only limited it to discourses regarding the era of conflict in Aceh. During the conflict between Aceh and the central government, Hasan di Tiro did not specifically state that he wanted to establish Aceh as an Islamic state, but he wanted the people of Aceh to maintain their spirit of nationalism. On the other hand, he supports Aceh to stand as an Islamic state. Researchers see that Islamic public space during the conflict period is still being discussed among each other in the governance structure.

In addition, when the autonomy of Islamic law was legalized and after the 2004 tsunami, many changes occurred, one of which was the development of technology. Aceh is increasingly known for the implementation of Islam which is very strict and full of applicable rules. However, Aceh is also known as the driving force for halal tourism, so Aceh is also known for its regional and tourism achievements.

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## About The Authors

The author's full name is Fathayatul Husna, S.Ikom., M.A. The author is a graduate of the Masters in Islamic Communication and Society Studies Concentration, Interdisciplinary Islamic Studies Study Program, Sunan Kalijaga State Islamic University Yogyakarta (2019) and an alumnus of the Bachelor's Degree in Communication Studies Study Program in Public Relations Concentration at UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta (2016). Currently, the author contributes as a lecturer at Teuku Umar University, Communication Study Program. and become an online tutor in *Terbuka* University for Communication Studies Study Program.

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