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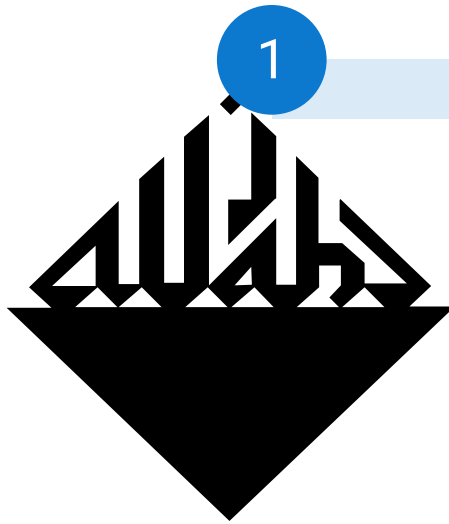**May 8, 2023 10:17 AM GMT+7**

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STUDIA ISLAMIKA

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Islam, Ethnicity and Secession: Forms of Cultural Mobilization in Aceh Rebellions

Ali Munhanif

The Text of Conservatism: The Role of Abbas' *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah* in Underpinning Acehnese Current Religious Violence

Saifuddin Dhuhri

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The Text of Conservatism: The Role of Abbas' *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamāʿah* in Underpinning Acehnese Current Religious Violence

Abstract: *There have been considerable numbers of studies on radicalism and their relationships with the theology of Islamic groups. However, textual analysis of Ashʿārīyah group such as* "Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamāʿah", *still lack serious attention from scholars. This article is an attempt to meet these needs, by analyzing critically the book by Sirajuddin Abbas,* Iʿtiqad Ahlussunnah Wal-Jamaah. *This book by Indonesian scholar is very highly regarded among the traditional Islamic movement in Aceh. In fact, this book has become a guide in finding a justification for acts of anarchy happened between modernist and traditional Islamic groups. Using a Fairlough critical analysis, this article will reveal how the book is used as a justification for anarchy, ideological means and collective identity formation. In addition, analysis of this book is verified by conducting interviews and searching for relationships between the texts of Ashʿārīyah group to find out about the new insights and Sirajuddin Abbas's role in the elucidation of the concept of* Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamāʿah *among Dayah community in Aceh.*

Keywords: *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamāʿah,* Reinterpretation, Wahhabism, Traditionalism, Radicalism.

Abstrak: *Kajian-kajian tentang radikalisme dan relasinya dengan aqidah masing-masing* firqah-firqah *Islam sudah banyak dilakukan. Namun, tektual analisis terhadap buku-buku* firqah Asy'ariyah; Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah, *masih kurang mendapat pehartian akademisi secara serius. Artikel ini adalah suatu usaha untuk memenuhi kebutuhan tersebut, dengan menganalisa secara kritis buku Sirajuddin Abbas;* I`tiqad Ahlussunnah Wal-Jamaah. *Buku karya beliau ini sangat tinggi kedudukannya dikalangan gerakan Islam tradisional di Aceh. Bahkan, buku ini menjadi pedoman umum dalam mencari pembenaran terhadap tindakan-tindakan anarkis yang terjadi diantara kelompok Islam modernis dan tradisional. Dengan mengunakan pendekatan analisa kritis Fairlough, tulisan ini akan mengungkap bagaimana buku ini digunakan sebagai alat pembenaran terhadap tindakan anarkis, media ideologis dan identitas kollektif. Selain itu, analisa buku ini akan diverifikasi dengan melakukan interview dan mencari relasi antara teks-teks Asy'ariyah lainnya untuk menemukan tentang sisi baru dan peran Sirajuddin Abbas dalam pemaknaan konsep* Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah *dikalangan masyarakat Dayah di Aceh.*

Kata kunci: *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah*, Asy'ariyah, Pemaknaan Ulang, Wahhabiyah, Radikalisme.

ملخص: لقد أجريت دراسات كثيرة في التطرف وعلاقته بالمذاهب الإسلامية، غير أن تحليل النصوص للكتب التي تندرج تحت فرقة الأشاعرة التابعة لأهل السنة والجماعة لم تكن محل اهتمام جدي من قبل الأكاديميين. وهذا المقال هو محاولة لتلبية هذه الاحتياجات، وذلك من خلال القيام بتحليل الكتاب الذي ألفه سراج الدين عباس والذي يحمل عنوان «*I`tiqad Ahlussunnah Wal-Jamaah*» (اعتقاد أهل السنة والجماعة). وقد احتل هذا الكتاب مكانة عالية في أوساط الحركات الإسلامية التقليدية في آتشيه، بل أصبح دليلا عاما في البحث عن المبررات للإجراءات الفوضوية التي وقعت بين الجماعات الإسلامية الحديثة والتقليدية. ويكشف هذا المقال عن مدى استغلال هذا الكتاب أداة لتبرير الإجراءات الفوضوية، ووسيلة أيديولوجية، وهوية جماعية مستخدما في ذلك مقاربة التحليل النقدي عند فيركلاف Fairclough. كما يتم التحقق من هذا التحليل عن طريق إجراء المقابلات، والبحث عن العلاقات بين النصوص الأخرى المرتبطة بفرقة الأشاعرة بهدف الوقوف على الجانب الجديد والدور الذي قام به سراج الدين عباس في توضيح مفهوم أهل السنة والجماعة في مجتمع دايه بآتشيه.

الكلمات المفتاحية: أهل السنة والجماعة، الأشاعرة، إعادة تفسير، الوهابية، التطرف.

Currently Abbas' book, entitled *I`tiqad Ahlussunnah Wal-Jamaah*, is well known and extremely popular among traditionalist Muslims[1] in contemporary Aceh. Its recognition is confirmed by local bookshop keepers, Dayah students, and many local Ash'arist adherents, the book is considered one of the most crucial readings for traditionalist Muslims in Aceh. The term *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah* is derived from the prophet tradition. It is often abbreviated to *ASWAJA*,[2] the prophet tradition predicted this would be the only accepted and standard theology, whereas the rest are heretical (*sesat*) and misguided. Recently, more and more violent attacks on minority Islamic groups, including Wahhabist groups, have been reported in Aceh.[3]

Much work on the *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah* has been undertaken by traditionalist Muslims (Al-Adalbī 2010; Al-Lalikai; Atjeh 1969; Barton and Feally 1996; Bruinessen 2008; Dhofier 1994; Fealy 2004; Al-Khalaq 2000; Noer 1987, 1988; Okbah 2012; al-Uthaimin 1992). However, few studies have been found that use a textual analysis on the traditionalist Muslim book, which stands as their political ideology and identity. The literature, however, does elaborate on the historical account of *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah* and the explanation about the significance of *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah* as an Islamic group identity and ideology. Previous studies reported that Ash'ārīst or traditionalist and Salafi established an argument that the term *Ahl al-Sunnah* is the essence of Islamic religion and the standard theology of the Islamic faith (Ash'ārī 939; Atjeh 1969; al-Ghazali 1983; Okbah 2012).

A strong relationship between Salafism and radical groups[4] of Islam, to some extent the existence of terrorism in the contemporary Indonesia, was reported in the literature (Azra 2002, 23 and 2006, 11–14; Bruinessen 2008, 218; Fealy 2004). Salafi sects in many cases may be associated with radical Muslims and violent attacks. For instance, Azra shows that many Indonesian scholars, with special reference to Nūr al-Dīn al-Ranīrī and 'Abd al-Ra'ūf al-Sinkilī, have continuiously studied Islam and experienced Islamic practices in Medina, Mecca, Cairo and other Islamic centres in the Middle East, from 17th and 18th centuries to the contemporary times (Azra 2002, 2004b). Upon their return, they introduced Salafi thought and teachings through many social activities, such as study circles (*majelis taklim*), and they created networks such as the Hizbut-Tahrir, Muhammadiyah, Persis and political parties, like Masjumi (Azra 2002, 25).

As a result of the teachings, many unwanted actions occurred, such as condemnation of the secular system of the Indonesian state, the attacks on sinful (*maʿṣiyah*)[5] places, such as discotheques and bars (Azra 2002), and the justification for violent acts against brother Muslims (Azra 2006b), who had a strong connection with various groups of Salafi movements. Contrary to expectations, this study did not find a significant difference between Salafi and traditionalist movements. Based on the contemporary activities of Acehnese traditionalist Muslims[6], I argue that both Salafi and traditionalist Muslims are liable for contributing violent actions. This article is an attempt to respond to questions about the textual basis those actions are justified, to what extent the Abbas' book *Iʿtiqad Ahlussunnah Wal-Jamaah* had a role in supporting the spread of hatred towards Salafi/Wahhabi Muslims, and how it contributed to either developing or eclipsing the Ashʿārīst school of Islamic theology. The article will answer those issues and provide background knowledge through a critical analysis of Sirajuddin Abbas' text, in which traditionalist Muslim ideology and identity are crafted.

This article is generated from research using Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA).[7] In accordance with Fairclough's procedure (1995, 2003), three levels of analysis are required for doing critical discourse analysis of any cultural text. Accordingly, I analyzed Abbas' book, *Iʿtiqad Ahlussunnah Wal-Jamaah*, on three different levels: social practice, discursive practice, and textual content. By analyzing the content of the book, I responded to the questions related to interactional control of the texts, such as the structure of the text, its mode of introducing its topics, how its agenda was set, and the position of the audience in the text. I also investigated the issues of cohesion, politeness, and transitivity within the content of the book. By the method, this study demonstrates the role of Abbas' book in formulating and essentialising traditionalist ideology, which is rooted in both a textual basis, as seen in Sirajuddin Abbas' book *Iʿtiqad Ahlussunnah Wal-Jamaah*, and social actions in contemporary Aceh (Burhanudin 2014; Mizaj 2015).

Abbas' book (1995) is not only regarded as the standard theology by Acehnese traditionalist Muslims, but it is also the basis of justification for traditionalist young Muslims to degrade many different groups of Islamic communities. The book has a central role in formulating traditionalist ideology and justifying their hatred for Salafi Muslims.

Many labels and concepts are used in stereotyping Salafis in the book, such as astray (*sesat*), infidel (*kāfir*) and prodigal deceiver (*ḍāllun muḍillun*).[8] In line with Fairclough's method of Critical Discourse Analysis (1995, 2003), this work will question the way the book is produced and interpreted and the role of the book to maintain traditionalist identity and ideology. This work has at least two core contributions to understanding the discourse on *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah* within the Ash'arist school of thought and the debate between traditionalist and Wahhabi Muslims. Firstly, adding to Bowen's work (Bowen 1993), this study will portray the present debate between traditionalist Muslims and Wahhabi Muslims. The study will preent the basis of their argumentations and their framing to impose Ash'arist theology on readers. The work also significantly portrays the most up-to-date development of Ash'arist theology. In addition, it adds an explanation about the construction of traditionalist theology, showing its ways of justifying and uncovering the political intervention in interpretation of Ash'arist principles.

My study has similarities and differences with Bowen's work (Bowen 1993). Both Bowen's work and mine rely on textual role in understanding the discourse between traditionalist Muslims and Wahhabis. My investigation puts, however, more emphasis on the significance of the concept *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah* and how this interpretation influences traditionalist Muslim social actions, whereas Bowen attempted to find how their cultural practices informed their understanding of religious texts. The article will begin with Sirajuddin Abbas' biography and his education in the Middle East. Following the elaboration of method and theories of the analysis, the article will then discuss the book's production, textual analysis and its role in reproduction and radicalisation of traditionalist identity and ideology.

Sirajuddin Abbas and His Book: A Brief History

Several references about Sirajuddin Abbas' biography were found, such as Abbas (1995, 422; 2010, 387–391), Kahin (1984, 45–46), Abdullah (2007), and Aini (2004, 36–42). As noted in the last page of his book, Abbas was from Padang, he was born in a pious family, on 20 May 1905 at Bengkawas, Bukit Tinggi, West Sumatra. Regarding his educational and intellectual background, Abbas did not receive a formal education, however, his informal education brought him great fame as

one of the greatest Ash'arist scholars of that time. His parents were concerned about his education and taught him religious knowledge from his childhood to his very early adulthood, 16 years. From his father, he learnt literacy, Arabic, and read much Arabic literature. Six years later, he successfully studied many branches of Islamic knowledge from local Islamic scholars, such as Shaykh Husen from Pekan Senayan, Shaykh Qasem of Batu Sangkar, and Shaykh Abdul Malik from Gobah (Aini 2004).

A significant analysis and discussion on the social development of West Sumatra during the era of Abbas was presented by Abdullah (2007). In his seminal article entitled "Modernization in the Minangkabau World: West Sumatra in the Early Decades of the Twentieth Century", Adullah reported that West Sumatra was influenced by two important mainstream ideas of modernisation in the early decade of 20th. The first one was the dissemination of the purification idea of modernist Muslims and the second was the modernisation that was introduced by the West. Undergoing the influences, traditionalists experienced hard time. Abbas seemed to be emotionally influenced by the difficult situation of traditionalist Muslims.

The period between 1927 and 1933 was the most important time for his intellectual development. In that period, he moved to Mecca to learn Islamic scholarship from many famous resources and scholars of many different schools of Islamic jurisprudence and various branches of Islamic knowledge in the Holy Land. He learned Syafi'ite Islamic law from Shaykh Muḥammad Saʿīd Yamānī, and Hanafite jurisprudence from Shaykh Husen. Also he learned Malikite jurisprudence and *al-Muwaṭṭāʾ*[9] from Shaykh Ali (Aini 2004). Surprisingly, Abbas' experiences in Mecca during that time did not turn him into a leading reformist/ Wahhabi Muslim, as commonly argued in much literature (Azra 2002, 2004b). His experiences while living in Mecca, instead, led him to become one of the leading proponents of traditionalist Muslims, who went against Masjumi as a Wahhabi Muslim organisation, during a later time.

Near the end of his stay in Mecca, Abbas became involved in political activities. Commencing with working as a staff in the Netherlands consulate, he widened his political interests by responding to political activities that supported the independence movements of Indonesia (Aini 2004). In 1933, he returned to Indonesia (Abbas 1995, 422)

and continued to study many branches of Islamic knowledge from local Islamic scholars like Shaykh Sulaiman Ar-Rasuli of Bukit Tinggi. In the meantime, he was involved in many *da'wah* activities, which developed him to become one of the most famous young, eloquent orators in that time. He was, therefore, recruited as a member of the Islamic traditionalist political organisation, the Indonesian Educational Union (*Persatuan Tarbiyah Indonesia*), commonly called by its abbreviation, "PERTI". In 1936, he was successfully promoted as the general executive of the organisation (Aini 2004). By 1940, under his leadership, the organisation became seriously involved in supporting Indonesian independence (Noer 1987, 44–97).

According to the traditionalist informants of this research, surprisingly, they believe that Abbas was one of Indonesia's greatest political leaders, at that time,[10] since he was often successfully elected as a member of parliament. During the First Ali Satroamidjojo Cabinet, he was promoted as the Minister for State Welfare.[11] In spite of his great fame in political activities, he was also noted for his alliance with Indonesian Communist party, as PERTI was involved in many conferences organized by Peking and Moscow (Noer 1988, 191). The accusation was based on the Cianjur document and revolutionist army uniforms found in his son's house, which was an idicaton of his cooperation with D.N. Aidit, the leader of the Indonesian Communist Party. As a result, Sirajuddin Abbas from 1965 to 1980 abandoned any political activity and dedicated himself full-time to Islamic scholarship. He published many Islamic books on Ash'arist theology, including the three main books; *The Creed of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah* (*I'tiqad Ahlussunnah Wal-Jamaah*), *The Greatness of Shafi'ite School* (*Keagungan Mazhab Syafii*), and *40 Queries on Islamic Religion* (*40 Masalah Agama*).

The book *I'tiqad Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah* is one of Abbas' greatest publications. He wrote this masterpiece as a response to many requests from his colleagues and followers of Ash'arist adherents. The book was massively welcomed by the Islamic traditionalist community, which has kept the book in continuious demand, until the present time, in Aceh. The book has been printed nineteen times, and is spread throughout the community of traditionalist Muslims in South East Asia, including Indonesia, Singapore, Patani and Malaysia (Abbas 1995, v).

Abbas' book on *I'tiqad Ahlussunnah Wal-Jamaah* is crucial for understanding the nature of traditionalism in present Aceh. This book

includes some unusual content that was not common in the field of *'Ilm al-Kalām*.[12] One of its odd features is an independent chapter of only one–and-a-half pages. The chapter explains about the length of time spent for completing the book, his apology and his prayers for the Prophet Muhammad, which is in the last chapter of the book *I`tiqad Ahlussunnah Wal-Jamaah*. Abbas wrote that he spent two years and five months writing the book, from June 1966 to December 1968. In this chapter, Abbas also offers an apology for any mistakes in writing the book.

Despite nine printings, the content of the book has hardly changed. A recent edition has 422 pages for the 30 chapters. Interviewing local booksellers, I was told that the book is one of the most demanded books in Aceh and is extremely popular. According to local traditionalist bookkeepers, the book is greatly popular. Madun, for instance, informed me that, "all bookshops sell this book and the book is usually *sold out* (Madun, personal communication, August 26, 2014). The book is also read by almost all of Acehnese Muslims (Aliya, personal communication personal communication, June 26, 2014).[13] Abbas' book contains many aspects of Islamic theology, including representations of Wahhabi Muslim identity, power relations and intertextuality. Abbas advances earlier arguments of Ash'arist *ulama* by positioning the concept of *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah* as not only the principles with which any Muslim must comply, but also as the standard sect of the Muslim community—the only acceptable and properly-guided sect. Despite its importance in the traditionalist Muslim community in Aceh and elsewhere, the book has received only little attention from scholars.

Earlier Dispute on the Interpretations of *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah*

It is almost a consensus among different groups of Islamic theologians [14] that the term *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah* is derived from hadith/the prophet's traditions, which are narrated from many of his companions.[15] Interestingly, there was, however, a heated debated between Salafi and Ash'arist adherents on the signification of *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah*. By analysing the different phases of Islamic theology development, the notion *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah* was initially interpreted as the practices and characters that belonged to *ahl al-ḥadīth* in the earlier era of Islam until the time of Ash'arism. Later,

the term was redefined, and now is known as the second construction of the meaning during the emergence of Ash'arist sect in the beginning of 14th century to modern era.

The first interpretation originated from the earliest Islamic theologian publications such as Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal in *al-Sunnah*, Ṭahawīyah in *'Aqīdah Ṭahawīyah*, al-Lalikai (Al-Lalikai) in "The Description of the principles of *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah* from Qur'an, *al-Sunnah*, *Ijmā'* and the Prophet's companions" (*Sharḥ al-Uṣūl Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah min al-Kitāb wa al-Sunnah wa Ijmā' al-Ṣaḥābah*), "Guiding Book on the Principles of *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah*" (*Kitāb al-Hidāyah min I'tiqād al-Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah*). Based on those Salafi earliest and contemporary references on the interpretation of the term, they postulate that the term *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah* emerged from the earliest time of Islam, which was narrated in the prophetic traditions, as the code of conduct of his companions (*ṣaḥābah*) and the third generations of Islam (*tābi'īn*). The Salafi sect rejects the Ash'arist adherents' claim that the concept *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah* was first introduced during the time of Imām Abū Ḥasan Ash'arī, as argued by Mustafa Al-Syuk'ah (1996) in Islam without any school of jurisprudence (*Al-Islām bi la Madhhab)*, and Abbas' (1995) *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah*.

On the other hand, the second group of Ash'arist adherents argue that *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah* was interpreted as a manifestation of the Ash'arist school. Faudah (2000), Abbas (1995), Al-Syuk'ah (1996) are some of the contemporary proponents of this interpretation. According to Abbas, *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah* is defined as a set of beliefs that existed during the time of the Prophet and his followers. The beliefs already exist in the Qur'an and hadith. However, Imam Ash'ari was the first who systematised those ideas into a set worldview. He is, therefore, claimed as the founder of *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah*, and that set of ideas carries his name. According to Abbas, regardless of the many claims on the signification of *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah*, Ash'arist followers are the truest *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah*, and every time he used the term *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah* he only meant Ash'arist adherents (Abbas 1995, 3, 24–25).

In response to that claim, the authors of 'the Encyclopaedia of Sects Related to Islam' (*Al-Mawsū'at al-Firāq al-Muntasab ilá al-Islām*) refutes Ash'ārīst arguments. Representing the Salafi group, the authors

argue that the signification of Ash'arist as *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah* is misleading for several reasons. Firstly the term *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah* was introduced during the time of the prophet and his companions, such as what Al-Lalika'i (131 H) wrote in his book. Secondly the Salafi group came into existence earlier than the Ash'arist school. Salafi theology is, therefore, the true theology of *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah* (Al-Saqaf 2014).

In modern times, Ash'arist theology has become predominant in the Muslim world and is known as the majority Islamic theology in Indonesia (Azra 2002, 2004b, 2006a, 2006b). In the Acehnese context, Ash'arist theology is taught and adhered to by the Dayah community.[16] They strongly hold to the Ash'arist theology and promote that theology in the region, whereas, Salafi theology is also widespread in the world, including Aceh. As a result, there is a vehement dispute between both sides in Aceh, where Abbas' books are considered traditionalist Muslims' primary resources for arguing against Wahhabi Muslims. Underpinning the different interpretations of the concept of *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah*, it is likely to be an endless dispute since both sides claim that they are the truest *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah*, which is recommended by the prophet based on the same narrated hadiths mentioned previously.

Currently, the term has become the most important label to justify one's group existence among majority Muslims in Aceh. Despite (or because of) its crucial role, there is still widespread disagreement over the standard meaning about the term *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah*. Almost every different group of Islamic sects claim themselves as the true ASWAJA, particularly traditionalist Muslims and Salafi followers. Interestingly, as demonstrated by Bowen (1993) and Reid (1979), in the frequent contests in Aceh between both sides; Salafi Muslim are represented by Wahhabis[17] and Ash'arist Muslims are represented by the Dayah community.

Historical Background of the Dispute

Prior studies noted a heated and a continuious dispute between traditionalist Muslims and Wahhabis (Azra 2002, 2004b, 2006a, 2006b; Barton and Feally 1996; Bowen 1993; Fealy 2004). Traditionalist Muslims tend to approach Islam by the way of "syncretic practice" (Bruinessen 2008, 218), and through the method of '"indigenization",

or "contextualization"' (Azra 2006b, 8). Wahhabi Muslims take a different approach. They uphold the textual basis for approaching Islam, which is strongly against local culture.

Preliminary work on Wahhabi and traditionalist Muslims was undertaken by Deliar Noer (Noer 1987, 1988). Interestingly, Noer (1987) explained that both traditionalists and Wahhabis are *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah* as they were united under the umbrella of Masjumi[18]. He demonstrated:

> An Islamic organization can be joined as a member of Masjumi if it is approved by the majority of the existing special members (*anggota istimewa*). There is no difficulty to become the member of Masjumi since every group is in need of joining and enhancing Islamic line. Except for Ahmadiyah Lahore, they are truly unaccepted to become Masjumi member, since they are considered not as *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah* (Noer 1987, 50)

Noer (1988) reported that all Muslim political parties and communities, including PERTI, NU, and Al-Jami'yatul Wasliyah representing traditionalists, and PSII and Muhammadiyah representing Wahhabis, sought an agreement to re-approach this difference during Masjumi's era. This agreement sidelined the dispute between them. In this respect, Noer argued that the split of Muslim political parties had no relation to textual basis rather was motivated by political interests. He stated:

> Does this mean that competition between traditionalists and Wahhabis ideas has affected the unity of Indonesian Muslims? One might come to this conclusion if one thinks of the fact that NU and PERTI are traditionalist in character. However, within the Masjumi, other Muslims traditionalist organizations, including Al-Jami'yatul Washliyah…., remained affiliated with the party. ….on the other hand, PSII which has in general been consider Wahhabi Muslim organization, very soon came in competition with Masjumi, thus nullifying the view that the split of the Muslim organization with Masjumi was caused by differences based on traditionalist and Wahhabi ideas. The reasons for the split, therefore, derive from the political rather than the religious level (1988, 186).

Noer further argued that the unity was a result of the fear of the Dutch return to Indonesia. Later when the danger had vanished, this unity was weakened and "bickerings cropped up again" (Noer 1988, 185). This view was supported by Burhanuddin Daya (2013); during this time, the visions of Islamic political parties had become too "pragmatic" (Efendi 2013, 60).

Unlike Noer, Alaiddin Koto argued that the disagreement between traditionalist and Wahhabi Muslims occurred just about the agenda of Masjumi and did not represent a traditionalist worldview, that Abbas, therefore, established PI-PERTI to become the instrument to counter Wahhabi Muslims agenda, which is of Masjumi Wahhabi visions (Efendi 2013). This view has been vividly supported by Efendi (2013), who portrayed the serious contest between PERTI and Masjumi in Padang for winning the general election of 1955. Both parties used "black campaign" to win the election. One issue was the accusation against Masjumi that they used violent instruments for political purposes. Abbas established:

> …if there is any Muslim or *'ulamā'* who takes a violent way, like what Daud Beureuh did in Aceh, this way will never accomplish his goal. Before Beureuh's rebellion had broken, PERTI had instructed to every member in Atjeh to support the state against the rebels, re-stabilize the state security in accordance with Islamic teaching and parliamentary democracy (Efendi 2013, 66–67).

Abbas' claim on PUSA, which is affiliated with Masjumi, was supported by Azra's studies (Azra 2002, 2004b, 2006a, 2006b) regarding the emergence of radical Muslim groups in Southeast Asia. He further established that although motivated by political interests, textual basis and interpretation have, to some extent, made important contributions in the existence and the emergence of radical groups of Islam. The groups used religious texts and prescribed "the meaning and interpretation of Islam" (Azra 2006b, 6). They also "adopt a literal interpretation and understanding of Islam" (Azra 2006a, 6). Extending Azra's view on Salafis, this article shows how Abbas, representing traditionalist Muslims, resembled Wahhabis in using religious texts and determining the understanding of Islam.

The Content of Abbas' Book and His Contributions

Based on critical discourse analysis (CDA) and field observation, Abbas' *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah* has, at least, four important contributions for Acehnese *'ulamā*'s intellectuality and network. First of all, by providing an ideological platform, the book is a great resource in fueling the debate between traditionalist Muslims and Wahhabi Muslims in Aceh. Secondly, the book has a great role in reformulating traditionalist theology, which becomes their basis of arguments for justification against Wahhabis and other groups of Salafis.

Next, from 1927 to 1933 during his stay in Saudi Arabia and Mecca, Abbas noted in his books (1995, 2009), the *I`tiqad Ahlussunnah Wal-Jamaah* the encapsulation of a traditionalist Muslims response to the emergence of Wahabbism and the traditionalist Muslims' response to the Padri's movement in Padang, which was Abbas' home region. The book successfully conveys those spirits and experiences against Salafi movements. Finally, the book is crucial for being a political platform for the PERTI political party to go against Wahhabi Muslims in contemporary Aceh.

The Book as a Primary Intellectual Resource for Dayah *'Ulamā'* Contemporary Network

Preliminary work on the networks of Acehnese intellectuality was undertaken by Azyumardi Azra. In his masterpiece; "The Origin of Islamic Reformism in Southeast Asia", Azra (2004b) demonstrated that the Acehnese *'ulamā'* in seventeenth and eighteenth centuries had global connections and mobility. In those times, the *'ulamā'*, in particular, Acehnese *'ulamā'* had global networks, where Medina, Mecca, Persia, Mughal India and Turkey were the concentration of their cultural and educational backgrounds. This is confirmed by Riddel (2006).

There is, however, little literature reporting the networks of the Acehnese *'ulamā'* in the nineteenth century and the twentieth. Without disparaging work about the Acehnese *'ulamā'* (Amiruddin and Bustamam-Ahmad 2013; Ichwan 2011; Nur 2011), there is almost no study that identifies the development of the most current phase of the Acehnese *'ulamā'* network. Dhuhri's work (2014): "*Dayah Menapaki Jejak Pendidikan Warisan Endatu,* Aceh" (Dayah Following the Footsteps of Ancestors' Tradition, Aceh) provided some information on the latest network of Acehnese *'ulamā'*. From Dhuhri's work on the historical development of Dayah and *'ulamā'*, it can be concluded that from the 19th century to the present time, the Acehnese *'ulamā'* networks can be classified into three concentrations, namely the Padang, Darussalam, and Labuhan Haji networks (Dhuhri 2006, 50–55; Nur 2011).

As indicated by Nur (2011), during the fall of Acehnese Sultanate, with the presence of the Dutch in the area, the Dutch restricted Acehnese travel overseas and hindered the prevalence of a global network. As a result, the disadvantage motivated the development of localised networks, as many local students did not have a chance

to study in the centre of Islamic civilisation like Mecca and Egypt. Gradually, the Acehnese-Padang networks developed and became the dominant influence on the Acehnese intellectuals and *'ulamā'* network in the modern Aceh.

The results of the Dutch presence, which led to the development of new Acehnese *'ulamā'* networks, is consistent with other studies, which suggest that European powers contributed to create new dimensions of *'ulamā'* networks of Southeast Asia in the nineteenth century (Azra 2004a, 127). It shows that the Acehnese underwent oppression and colonisation by the Dutch policy and led to narrowing their global networks down to the Padang concentration. The global network of Acehnese *'ulamā'* of the seventieth and eighteenth centuries had deteriorated and declined under the Dutch.

In the nineteenth century, Dayah Abuya Muda Waly located in Darussalam, Tapak Tuan, and was known as the second concentration of traditionalist intellectuality and a network node. The network became more localised and secluded. Abuya Muda Waly himself learned Islam and his thought started to flourish in Padang, before he selected Tapak Tuan, Aceh, as a base to spread his thought. In keeping with the nature of Dayah traditions, many leading students of Abuya Muda Waly established new Dayah in their hometowns after their graduation from Dayah Darussalam. Later, the new Dayah become predominant in Aceh and are known as Abuya Muda Waly's network. Here, Abbas' thoughts were learned and circulated (Dhuhri 2006, 2008, 2009, 2014). After Abuya Muda Waly died, his Dayah declined. Then three new concentrations of Islamic traditionalist networks emerged. Dayah MUDI Mesra located at Samalanga, Dayah BUDI at Lamno and Dayah Tanoh Mirah at Matang are the new nodes of Acehnese Ash'arite network. MUDI Mesra is known as the most successful Dayah in present-day Aceh. Mudi's students have spread all over Aceh. During this period of transition from Abuya Muda Waly to the three Dayahs, the position of Sirajuddin Abbas and his masterpiece became central to the Acehnese intellectuality and *'ulamā'*.

Many Acehnese traditionalist Muslims consider Sirajuddin Abbas to have as much prestige as Abuya Muda Waly. If Abuya Muda Waly represents a grand teacher, who taught many Acehnese *'ulamā'* in that time, Sirajuddin Abbas, who is from Padang, represents the single *'ulamā'* that formulated traditionalist political ideology, which was

densely narrated in his *I'tiqad Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamāʿah.* Abuya Muda Waly played a great role in spreading and developing such ideology throughout his network. The texts *I'tiqad Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamāʿah* is, therefore, central among the traditionalist Muslims and Dayah in Aceh, in which their identity and ideology are grounded.

It particularly embodies traditionalist identity and ideology related to the Islamic party PERTI. Presently in Aceh, Sirajuddin Abbas' books, *Iʿtiqad Ahlussunnah Wal-Jamaah* and *40 Masalah Agama*, have a strong hold on Ash'arist Muslims. As required by CDA methodology, I interviewed several informants during the fieldwork of this study. I found that Sirajuddin Abbas holds the most respectful place among traditionalists, and his book is regarded as a premier resource for teaching Islamic theology. Accordingly, Muhammad Kaoi confirms his prestige among traditionalists. He explained:

> Sirajuddin Abbas has the same level of prestige as Abuya Muda Waly. He is regarded as a highly intellectual person. He was vehemently against Wahhabis and Muhammadiyah's teachings (Muhammad Kaoi, personal communication August 27, 2014).

The book is considered as one of the most important texts for learning valid Islamic theology. Compared to other theological books, Dayah-based *'ulamā'* views those books as not valid since the books contain Wahhabi's teaching. For instance, Muhammad Kaoi, responded that

> I am enthusiastic to collect every publication of Sirajuddin Abbas. I believe that the book *Iʿtiqad Ahlussunnah Wal-Jamaah* is the utmost important book. It is very helpful to guide common people and is recommended and validated by the *'ulamā'* from Dayah (personal communication August 27, 2014).

According to Muhammad Kaoi, the book *Iʿtiqad Ahlussunnah Wal-Jamaah* is regarded as the decisive reference on Islamic theology. The books are seen as very useful for refuting Wahhabi school. Correspondingly, on many occasions, I witnessed many debates regarding Islamic theology between both Wahhabi Muslims and traditionalist Muslims, Sirajuddin Abbas' *Iʿtiqad Ahlussunnah Wal-Jamaah* has always been seen as the greatest reference to refute Wahhabi arguments.[19] Accordingly, one of my informants told me that "If we could memorise the book [*Iʿtiqad Ahlussunnah Wal-Jamaah*] and go to argue against Wahhabism, they would scamper away" (Abdul Shaleh, personal communication, May 02, 2015).

Apa Ali's case is another good illustration of a persistent hold to Sirajuddin Abbas' writing. He is of the opinion that Abbas' book is a standard reference for Islamic theology. His analysis shows that this book is confirming the *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah* group theology. He sees that it is a primary book for studying Islamic creed and recommended by dayah-based *'ulamā'*. This view is supported by Alimuddin, in his interview, he added:

> "the book is not prescribed by Dayah *'ulamā'*, but this Dayah's tradition is to hold the book and use it as the manual for Islamic theology. He, however, sees that many young students/santri do not hold that extreme due to many similar publications launched in the present time" (Aliuddin, personal communication, May 02, 2015).

In short, Abbas' book is central and regarded as the primary resource to study Islamic theology in Aceh. The book has become the model for traditionalist ideology and identity.

Demeaning Wahhabi and Exaggerating Ash'arist Sects

Analysing the content of the book critically, I found that Abbas many times stereotyped Wahhabis and their leading theologians, in particular Ibn Taymīyah. He labeled Ibn Taymīyah as an errant maker (*ḍāllun muḍillun*), infidel (*kāfir*) and heretic (*sesat*). Abbas (1995) wrote:

> *"Karena itu, tidak salah kalau banyak dari ulama-ulama Islam sejak abad IX H. itu mengarang buku menolak paham Ibnu Taymīyah dan mengatakan bahwa Ibnu Taymīyah itu "*ḍāllun muḍillun*" (sesat lagi menyesatkan).*

> Therefore, it is not mistaken that there are many muslim scholars since the 9th century Hijrīyah, who wrote books rejecting Ibn Taymīyah thought and claim him as "*ḍāllun muḍillun*" (heretical and leading people astray). (p. 315)

> *"Memang benar-benar Ibnu Taymīyah ini seorang ulama yang tersesat yang tidak patut diambil jalan ikutan."*

> Ibn Taymīyah is truly a heretical scholar who does not deserved to be followed. (p. 300)

Ḍāllun muḍillun is an extreme label, which means the errant who brings error for others. The term is problematic in many respects; by labelling Ibn Taymīyah with that term, Abbas has justified hatred and violence against his followers. In addition, by this stereotyping, Abbas also claims that his is the absolute truthful ideology. Abbas also

accused Ibn Taymīyah of being an infidel. This label can be found in many pages of his *I`tiqad Ahlussunnah Wal-Jamaah* and his *40 Masalah Agama*. He stated:

> *Sebagai ajaran Ibnu Taymīyah, maka kita tidak diragukan lagi menjadi kafir* dahrīyīn, *yaitu kafir yang mengatakan dan mengi'tiqadkan bahwa yang menjadikan alam ini hanyalah masa, …* na'ūdhu billāh*!*

> Considering Ibn Taymīyah's teachings, thus it is no doubt that he is turning to a *dahrīyīn* infidel, that is, an infidel who says and believes that this world has been created only by time, …I take refuge in God! (Abbas 2009, 195).

In the same vein, on page 194 of his *I`tiqad Ahlussunnah Wal-Jamaah*, he wrote:

> *"Kalau fatwa fatwa Ibnu Taymīyah ini dipegang secara konsekwen, yaitu mesti mengartikan ayat-ayat Alquran dan hadis-hadis Nabi sesuai dengan lafalnya yang lahir saja,* na'ūdhu billāh, *kita bisa menjadi KAFIR."*

> If one holds substantially to Ibn Taymīyah's *fatwā*s, that is to say that every verse of the Qur'an and every hadith of the Prophet should be interpreted literally, *na'ūdhu billāh* [I take refuge in God], we could turn to infidels (1995, 194).

Borrowing Arkoon's explanation on *'Ilm al-Kalām*, the writing style of the book is clearly approached by using the 'truth claim' (*taqlīdīyah ṭā'ifīyah*) method. *Taqlīdīyah ṭā'ifīyah* is a term commonly used in Islamic theological literature. According to Abdullah, *taqlīdīyah ṭā'ifīyah* refers to the *a priori*, truth-claimed and anti-dialogic approach in writing Islamic theology, whereas the opposite of this approach is called *"Tārīkhīyah 'Ilmīyah"* (M. A. Abdullah 2004, 24–27). This latter is the *a posteriori* approach which is dialogic, open-ended and tolerant. The approach is indicated from the structure of the book and its presentation of the content. Abbas' book was written to justify his position (Ash'arism) as the truest Islamic sect. In doing so, he simplified the thoughts of the other parties, which were not given enough space for argumentation and refutation.

In addition, Abbas misrepresented Wahhabi and Salafi theology. He wrote chapters for discussion of Ibn Taymīyah and another chapter about Wahhabism. He, however, did not include Salafism as a sect of Islamic theology. One serious weakness with this book is that his presentation of the Islamic sects, in particular in absence of Salafism, cannot be epistemologically justified. From the organizational structure, he posited that Ibn Taimiyyah thought stands the same

level to Islamic sects. He, however, did not write a chapter about Ash'arism. Instead of discussing Ash'ārīst theology, he introduced a new group, which is the so-called *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah* to represent Ash'arite theology.

In presenting Ash'arist theology, Abbas discussed *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah* as the thought of Ash'arist theology in his first chapter of the book. His elucidation of Ash'arism was clearly simplified and was not given enough space to dialog between the Ash'arist thought and many other different sects of Islamic theology. In other words, this book does not provide fair proportion to refute or counter the ideas of opponents, as was done in the earlier Ash'arist tradition of *Ilm al-Kalam*. More interestingly, he denied the existence of the earliest generation of Islam, the *salaf* generation, since both Salaf and Khalaf are Ash'arism (Abbas 2009, 149–212). In the book *I`tiqad Ahlussunnah Wal-Jamaah*, he demonstrated the denial of the existence of Salafi sect. Instead, he included new sects, which were not common in earlier ilm al-Kalam tradition: namely, Ibn Taimiyyah thought and Wahhabism. In his book, *40 Masalah Agama*, he explained clearly his denial in chapter five. Abbas (2009) demonstrated:

> *Kalau dibalik lembaran sejarah Islam dari zaman Nabi sampai zaman Sahabat, sampai zaman* Tābi'īn *dan* Tābi' al-Tābi'īn, *tegasnya sampai tahun 300 hijriyah, tidak dijumpai adanya satu mazhab yang bernama "Mazhab Salaf".*

> If one investigates the historical development of Islam since the time of the prophet, his companions, to the next generation and the one following, it is clearly noted that to the first 300 years of Hijriyah, there was no school of jurisprudence called the "Salafi School" (p. 153).

> *Juga kalau dibalik Alquran yang 30 juz dan hadits-hadits Nabi yang tertulis dalam kitab-kitab Bukhārī, Muslim, Tirmidhī, Abū Dāwud, Nasā'i, Ibn Mājah,* Muwaṭṭā, *Musnad Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, dan lainnya, tidak pernah dijumpai tentang adanya satu mazhab dalam Islam yang bernama Mazhab Salaf.*

> Also, if one investigates all thirty portions of the Qur'an and the hadith of the Prophet that have been recorded by Bukhārī, Muslim, Tirmidhī, Abū Dāwud, Nasā'i, Ibn Mājah, [and in] the *Muwaṭṭā* and the *Musnad* of Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, one will not find that there has not ever been a school in Islam called the Salafi school (p.154).

As narrated above, he neglected the existence of Salafism in the historical development of Islamic theological schools. Overemphasising

Ash'arist theology, Abbas considered the call to follow Salafism as pointless. Abass (2009) stated:

> *Jadi, kalau ada orang yang menyerukan supaya kita ramai-ramai mengikut Mazhab Salaf, maka itu berarti ia menyuruh kita mengikuti Imam yang tidak ada, dan Mazhab yang tidak ada. (p. 155)*

> Therefore, if there are people urge us all to follow the Salafi school, it means that they call us to follow a non-existent *Imām*, and a non-existent school.

Abbas regarded the companions of the Prophet, the immediately following generation, and the four founders of the mainstream schools of Islamic jurisprudence as Ash'arists (Abbas 1995). Therefore, to his mind they are *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah*.

Another major criticism regarding Abbas is that, he added Ilm al-Kalam with the new sect and named it the *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah* school. In order to support his interests, he broadened the meaning of *'Ilm al-Kālam* school, which encompasses creeds/beliefs, schools of jurisprudence and traditionalist rituals. His conceptualisation of *'Ilm al-Kālam* school and the structuring of his book did not comply with the standards of *'Ilm al-Kālam*. The key problem with his conceptualisation is that he considers Ibn Taymiyyah's thought as a school of *'Ilm al-Kālam*. Secondly, he regarded Islamic schools of jurisprudence as a part of the *'Ilm al-Kālam* school. He, interestingly, considered many cultural practices, such as grave visitation, as part of *'Ilm al-Kālam*. The oddest of all is that Abbas believed that smoking was also part of *'Ilm al-Kālam* (Abbas 1995, 410).

Essentialising Issues in Abbas' *I'tiqad Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah*

Returning to the questions posed at the beginning of this paper, I argue that Abbas' *I'tiqad Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah* has greatly contributed to essentialise the view of traditionalist Muslims against Wahhabis in contemporary Aceh. It has been shown that Abbas' book has interpreted the term *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah* to be more local, more political and less academic. This new interpretation is rooted in local ritual practices, e.g., *Seuneujoh*,[20] *Peusijeuk*, and *Meuled*,[21] for the sake of preserving Ash'arist religious and political interests. In additions, Abbas' *I'tiqad Ahlussunnah Wal-Jamaah* represents an example of the intellectual basis and justification for the new interpretation, which is the catalyst for the development of the Ash'arist theology in Aceh.

As discussed above, both Salafi and earlier Ash'arist theologians do not essentialise the meaning of the term *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamāʿah*. They signify the term as characters and practices, which are recommended by the prophet. Likewise, they did not signify the term *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamāʿah* as any given sect, which independently exists from the companions of the prophet and the following two generations. Those are a set of beliefs and characters, which are recommended by the prophets and his followers. This way of interpreting the term was advocated by many companions of the prophet and members of the following two generations. For instance, Ahmad ibn Hanbal explained the meaning of *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamāʿah* as being highly intellectual and loyal to the prophet traditions (al-Lalikai; Atjeh 1969; al-Khalaq 2000). Correspondingly, Imam Thabri also interpreted the term *Ahl al-Sunnah* as the characters and the beliefs that have an ability to physically look at Allah in the hereafter (Al-Khamis 1999, 99).

In contrast to his previous interpretations as discussed above, Abbas essentialised the meaning of *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamāʿah*. He interpreted the term as the integral constituent of individual Ash'arist figures, that are Ash'arist leaders' personalities and cultural practices. To do so, he used a framing method to interpret the meaning of *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamāʿah*, in particular in his writing the *Iʿtiqad Ahlussunnah Wal-Jamaah* book. For instance, on pages 3 and 25, he cited Imam Muhammad bin Muhammad al Husni Az Zabidi's book, entitled *Itḥāf Sādāt al-Muttaqīn*,[22] to prove his argument.
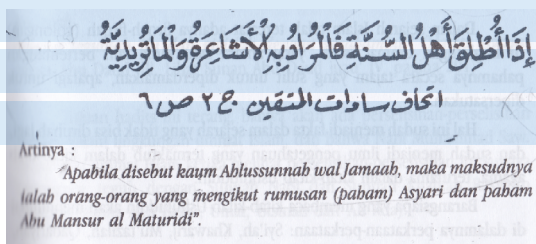

إِذَا أُطْلِقَ أَهْلُ السُّنَّةِ فَالْمُرَادُ بِهِ الْأَشَاعِرَةُ وَالْمَاتُرِيدِيَّةُ

اتحاف سادات المتقين ج ٢ ص ٦

Artinya :

"Apabila disebut kaum Ahlussunnah wal Jamaah, maka maksudnya ialah orang-orang yang mengikut rumusan (paham) Asyari dan paham Abu Mansur al Maturidi".

Figure 1: It spells "*idhā uṭliqa ahl al-sunnah fa al-murād bihi al-Ashāʿirah wa al-Māturīdīyah*"; *Itḥāf Sādāt al-Muttaqīn*, Vol. 1 p. 6".

As shown above, Abbas translated the term *"ahl al-sunnah"* of the Arabic text above by adding "*wa al-jamāʿah*" as bellow:

"If one speaks of "*ahl al-sunnah wa al-jamāʿah*", it means the followers of (the formulations) Ash'arite and Abu Mansur (Abbas 1995, 3 and 25).

Even more, he overemphasised the citation by repeating the claim twice (on page 2 and 25) and enlarged it by using the Arabic original. He also used the label "Imām" before the name of Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Ḥusnī, and wrote his book's title in Arabic script, to show that Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Ḥusnī had adequate authority for interpreting the term in Ash'arism.

Secondly, Abbas misrepresented both Ash'rist and Salafi identities in the book. In chapters 12 and 13, Abbas discussed Wahhabi theology. He described Wahhabi theology in chapter 12 and falsified Wahhabi theology as an errant theology since it was against *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah* in chapter 13. He also presented traditionalist theology, which he called *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah*. In contrast to the chapters on Wahhabism, the discussion of *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah* appeared in every consecutive chapter of the book, with a total focus on the term in chapters 2 and 3.

In additions, Abbas explained that Ash'ārīsm is not only signified as *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah*, but it also means "Sunni". The author disagrees with the widely held view that the term *"Sunni"* is known as *ahl ḥadīth* or Salafi, which were posed to differentiate Salafi from Mu'tazilah sect. The key problem with this explanation is that Abbas privileges Ash'arism and misrepresents Salafi theology to favour traditionalist theology.

As noted earlier, Abbas' book provided the greatest contribution to encapsulated traditionalist theology in the term *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah*. Even more, the book developed the meaning of *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah*, which maintains traditionalist ideology, encompassing fiqh, such as the four schools of jurisprudence, local ritual practices, such as visiting graves, and traditionalist political interests.[23] Another crucial position of Abbas' book is it is the catalyst for radicalising traditionalist ideology. The book is the primary resource for justifying a movement against Wahhabi schools. It is evident that on many occasions the book is used to justify the actions to control Wahhabi mosques and to ban their teaching activities. The case of the Salafis at Gampong Pulo Raya, Titeu, illustrated this point (fatwa no. 9 year 2014).[24]

Judging by using CDA's procedure, this new development of interpreting the term *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah*[25] is problematic for several reasons. First of all, the term is interpreted exclusively from the academic procedures and as a result of political intervention. The

gubernatorial election of 2017 impacted the nature of this dispute, i.e., political figures used the dispute as the vehicle for winning the general election like the case of PI-PERTI as mentioned earlier (see section: Historical Background of the Dispute). Secondly, the interpretation has become essentialised and lost its fluidity. Finally, the interpretation is very local and justifies oppression and domination. The book neither complies with the standards of Ilm al-Kalam, nor fulfils scientific standards. As one of the participants commented:

> He has too deep knowledge [in ironic means], so he has mixed-up *uṣūlīyah* [theology] and *furū'īyah* [Islamic law] (Farhan Hasan, personal communication, June, 20, 2015).

Accordingly, as showed by the analysis above, the book has not responded to scientific procedure in presenting arguments and citations from any references. The presentation of his arguments entails labelling and stereotyping, such as using the term *sesat, ḍāllun muḍillun* and *kāfir* (Abbas 1995, 2009). One of the limitations with this explanation is that it did not sufficiently explain the historical development of *'Ilm al-Kālam*. Abbas' interpretation of *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah* overlooked much of the historical facts of great Salafi *'ulamā'*, such the four founders of *madhhab* and many other *'ulamā'* before Imam Abu Bakr Al Qaffal (Abbas 1995, 35).

Another major drawback of Abbas' interpretation is that the book is greatly political, in that it is used to justify violence against Wahhabi people. Zam Zien, one of my participants, views the Abbas' book as bad because it provokes hatred against Salafi schools. He described: "The book has no use. It contains provocation and spreads hatred and conflict" (Zam Zien, personal communication, June, 23, 2015). It seems that Abbas' understanding of the Ilmu Kalam framework is questionable. From my interview, there are many students and Wahhabis who have similar views with Zam Ziem and Farhan Hasan.

These findings further support the idea of Azra's view of the tendency of radical groups in contemporary Indonesia, to likely be motivated by political interests (Azra 2006b, 6). In the Acehnese context, *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah* served Acehnese traditionalist Muslims counter PUSA's arguments against Acehnese traditionalist rituals, which are the pride and identity of most Acehnese. Although, the results differ from some published studies (Azra 2002, 2004a, 2004b, 2006a, 2006b; Bustamam-Ahmad 2015), this result may be explained by the fact

that many traditionalist Muslims are involved in attacking Wahhabi individuals, as shown by many current attacks in Aceh. It is evident that both Salafi and traditionalist Muslims have the same possibilities for getting involved in violent actions motivated by many factors, such as political and economic motives, as in the recent case of Baiturrahman Mosque in Banda Aceh.

Concluding Remarks

All in all, this article presented Abbas' interpretation on the concept *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah*. The concept of *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah* is very central in Muslim society. The concept is considered as acceptable justification for the standard belief. Therefore, almost every sect of Muslim society claims that they belong to *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah*. Interestingly, Abbas' book has central significance for developing political interpretations of the concept. Based on critical analysis, Abbas' *I'tiqad Ahlussunnah Wal-Jamaah* developed a new interpretation of the concept, which totally contrasts with earlier Salafi and Ash'arist interpretations. The book is one of the most popular books among traditionalist Muslims in Aceh. Abbas has, interestingly, essentialised the meaning of *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah* in presenting Ash'arist identity. The approach of the book has at least been dominated by the *Taqlīdīyah Ṭā'ifīyah* approach, in which the text is presented by using truth-claimed and anti-dialogic method. Another epistemological problem of the book is its consistency between the content of *'Ilm al-Kalām* to Fiqh, and the obscurity of using concepts *firqah*, *madhhab* and *taiyar fikrīyah*.

The author of the book misrepresents the other groups of *'Ilm al-Kalām*, in particular Ibn Taymīyah and Wahhabism. Many times Abbas claimed the truth of *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah* by condemning its opponents. For instance, he accused Ibn Taymīyah of being ignorant, error and infidel. Another problem of the book is that he misrepresented Wahhabi theology and Ilm Kalam schools. The most important of these criticisms is that Abbas failed to note that there were Salafi and Ash'arist schools of Islamic theology. He reduced Salafism to Wahhabism and Ash'arism to *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah*. Even more, he established an argument that *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah* was first introduced by Abū Mūsá Ḥasan Al-Ash'ārī. The text has been used for maintaining Ash'arist identity and ideology. The book also functions to

justify their argument against other groups of Muslim theology, such as Wahhabism, Shia and Ibn Taymīyah and retains Ash'arist domination upon religious discourse in Aceh.

Another important finding of this study is that the result shows both traditional Muslims and Wahhabi Muslims have the same tendency to get involved in radical thoughts and actions for political and economic interests. It indicates that this finding further confirms Azra's argument about the use of textual justification and manipulation, and social actions for the advantages of their political and economic interests.

Endnotes

1. The term traditionalist and conservatism Muslim used in the article refers to Dayah community in Aceh, which has similar meaning to Pesantren in Java and Indonesia in general. Martin van Bruinessen also refers to similar institution in his elaboration of Indonesian traditionalist. For detail, see Martin van Bruinessen (2008).

2. The concept *ASWAJA* derived from the Prophet tradition, in which the Muslim society is foretold to be classified into 73 groups. Only the *ASWAJA* is accepted and guided. Abbas lists 9 hadith regarding this concept. For instance, the following hadith illustrates the point:

    "By my soul on the God's hand, indeed, it will split my ummah into seventy three sects. Only one is in the heaven (accepted) and the rest are in the hell. It is asked, who are they [in the heaven]?, the Prophet said: Ahlu sunnah waljamaah, narrated by al-Thabbarie.

    "Narrated by Abu Hurairah, the prophet Muhammad said: Abu Hurayrah relates that the Prophet, peace be upon him, told us: 'The Jews split-up into seventy-one or seventy-two sects. The Christians split-up into seventy-one or seventy-two sects. And my ummah will split into seventy-three sects.' [Al-Tirmidhi, no. 2640.]

3. It is reported in many newspapers that there are several attacks on Salafi groups and other minority groups in Aceh, like the action against Al-Izzah's Imam of Krueng Mane, North Aceh, 20th May 2016, see: http://www.ajnn.net/news/shalat-jumat-di-masjid-al-izzah-aceh-utara-ricuh/index.html?1462458060000, and the 2014 ban on the Salafi community in Gampong Pulo Raya, Kecamatan Titeu, Kab. Pidie, see: http://m.bisnisaceh.com/umum/mpu-aceh-minta-pemerintah-tutup-pengajian-kelompok-salafi/index.php. This link also report the attack on a religious leader in Plimbang, Kab. Bireuen, on Monday 10 December 2012: http://regional.kompas.com/read/2012/12/10/19035220/Darurat.Kemanusiaan.Mengancam.Aceh. Significant discussion on recent violence in Aceh has been reported by Jajat Buhanudin (2014). In the article, Burhanudin reported current religious issues regarding the deviant tenet of Tgk Aiyub at Plimbang and traditionalist ideology of Dayah. Burhanuddin mentions several times the term *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah* and was used to justify violence against Teungku Aiyub. See number 118, 122 and 133 of Burhanuddin's article. Another example is Mizaj's article (2015). He also reports the emergence of radicalism among traditionalist Muslims in current Aceh. Although traditionalist Muslims dominated the activities of the attack, the presence of Front Pembela Islam (FPI) in Aceh is also another possible to trigger this violence.

4. In the literature of Islamic Studies, a generally accepted definition of radicalism is lacking, as many scholars have not sought an agreement upon defining the term

radicalism. Greg Fealy has, for instance, attempted to define the term "radical", which refers the following two characteristics. Firstly, it denotes with the group of people who demand for implementation of the totality of Qur'an and Sunnah teachings. Secondly, it refers to reactionary actions and violence against ideas and language related to secularism. Other scholars disagree with him. Ismail Adam Patel (2007) uses the term radicalism to refer to the political reactions to the policies of US and other western countries' upon Islamic communities, such Israel's policies against Palestinians, US and allies' intervention to the Middle East affairs. According to Patel, radicalism is not inherently meant negative position. My article does not refer to those definitions of radicalism that is associated with Dayah community. I particularly refer to the discourse and dispute between Modernists and traditionalists, which is greatly the concern of Bruinessen (2008) and Bowen (1993). I refer the radicalism here as reactionary actions and violence against the ideas and teachings of modernist Muslims, including Wahhabism and Muhammadiyah. For details see, Fealy (2004), Bruinessen (2008), and Bowen (1993).

5.   It is an Arabic term, used frequently among Muslims, which is meant a deed against Islamic teaching and is forbidden.

6.   Marzi Afriko (2010) reported that many traditionalist Muslims caused radical acts for application Sharia in Aceh. Their reports support my argument on traditionalists' actions againts Wahhabi in current Aceh.

7.   A number of studies on Acehnese religiousity have been undertaken by many scholars, such as Hurgronje (1906), Bowen (1993), and Feener (2012). Anthropological approach is used by majority scholars. The main weakness with this approach, as strongly put by Asad, is that it does not able to find the holistic phenomena of the human nature. To overcome this disadvantage, Asad offers both contextual and textual approach as means to holistically depict human nature. In response to the increasing critiques to conventional anthropological approach, I use critical discourse analysis approach to study Acehnese religiousity since it surpasses the mentioned limitation for the sense of conflict analysis, and textual and contextual basis of measurement. For detailed reference, see: Lukens-Bull (2015) and Asad (1986).

8.   The term is derived from Arabic; *ḍāllun muḍillun*. It is a misleading person who deludes others to embrace false belief.

9.   *Al-Muwaṭṭā* is one of the greatest books of Imām Mālik, the eponymous founder of the school, in which Fiqh and Hadith are conjoined to explain his school of jurisprudence.

10.   This traditionalist claim, unfortunately, is not supported by much literature regarding the role of Abbas and his political party for Indonesian independence.

11.   Inspite of the fact that he served in this role as a Minister for less than nine months, from 6 November 1954 until 25 July 1955. See Herbert Feith (2007, 338).

12.   *'Ilm al-Kalām* is a study of Islamic theology, i.e., the study of *ilāhīyah* (divinity), *nubūwah* (prophethood) and *samawīyah* (supernatural matters, such as heaven, hell, angels, devils, and resurrection).

13.   Verifying Madun's information, I visited many local bookshops in Lhokseumawe, Bireun and Banda Aceh and I chatted about Abbas' book. I found similar information about the popularity of the book. Following the information further, I interviewed several Teungku (teachers) of local Dayah about the use of the book in Dayah, they also confirmed the great value of the book for them.

14.   There was no dispute on the authenticity of the term among earlier generations of Muslim society in the history of Muslim thoughts. In the contemporary time, some Muslims consider the term was engineered and spread over the Muslim community for

political interests, such as to justify a dominant group's domination and to maintain their status quo, for further references, see: al-Ghazali (1983).

15. There are more than 8 hadiths positing that Ahl al-Sunnah Wa al-Jama`ah is the only true and accepted theology. However, Ash`ariite, Mu`tazili, Syiah, and Salafis have different interpretation of the meaning of the term.

16. Dayah, an Islamic traditionalist educational institution, had been introduced since the beginning of Acehnese cultural emergence in Southeast Asia. When travellers or preachers from Arabia, Gujarat, and India came to Aceh, they established an Islamic education institution, later called Dayah, in order to Islamise the region and to maintain the implementation of Islamic teachings. Although there is little hard evidence, the Acehnese believe that Islamic traditionalist education in the Southeast Asia region started in Aceh. It began in the 10th century and reached its peak of development in the 16th century. This was believed to be the golden age of Islamic education. For example, it is believed that Dayah Baiturrahman was a university with 17 faculties. Dayah Cot Kala was the first centre of Islamic higher education in Southeast Asia. It made a massive contribution to the spread of Islam throughout the archipelago. It produced many scholars, who became preachers in the regions. Although education was conducted merely by sitting in a semi-circle around the teacher, this Dayah laid an important foundation in Acehnese history because the alumni of the Dayah would go on to establish their own Dayah in another area, where Islam was not yet the dominant religion. This process was central to the Islamisation of the Acehnese community. For detailed information, please refer to Dhuhri (2008).

17. Wahhabi is a group of Islamic community which is founded by Muhammad bin Wahhab and named the group after his name. He is also known as the founder of Neo-Salafism in Arabic territories. It is a common belief among the Acehnese that Muhammadiyah is regarded as one of organisations called under his name and concerned with spreading his thoughts and ideology in Indonesia. See Azra (2006a). Regarding the local belief, see: http://archives.portalsatu.com/news/ini-penjelasan-alumni-dayah-tanoh-mirah-soal-wahabi-di-aceh/.

18. Efendi (2013, 60) notes that before PI-PERTI was introduced, there was Masjumi political party, which was the umbrella for various groups of Muslims, including Abbas' community. Noer (1988, 185) confirms Efendi's report, and states: "It was in November 1945 that the Indonesian Muslims at a congress in Yogyakarta founded a party called "Masjumi". All the important Muslim social and educational organizations affiliated with the party. They pledged that the Masjumi would be the only political party for Muslims".

19. On 26 September 2014, one of leading Muhammadiyah activists in Aceh, Aslam Nur, wrote an article in a local newspaper, entitled "Mazhab Syafii atau Syafiiyah", see: http://aceh.tribunnews.com/2014/09/26/mazhab-syafii-atau-syafiiyah. This article has triggered serious debate between Wahhabi and traditionalist Muslims at the present time. There are many formal and informal responses to this article. One remarkable debate happened through social media, where each side has persistently argued for its position. After long posing conflicting arguments, a Wahhabi requested an evidence about Shafi`i' justification for a death ritual. In responding, instead of using Shafi'i references, a traditionalist referred to Sirajuddin Abbas' book as the concluding arguments and he despised wahhabism by accusing them of being as "Yahudi (jews), and infidel. He then urged for closing the debate since Sirajuddin Abbas' references should been seen as the final and absolute argument. This information is derived from my personal involvement in many Facebook discussions and observation on those issues in the local level.

20. Acehnese death ritual.
21. Prophet Muhammad's birthday ceremony.
22. This is a commentary on Ghazali's Ihya Ulumuddin.
23. For instance, Darul Ihsan, one of the legendary Dayahs in Aceh, cited from darulfatwa. org.au (2014), published an article entitled "Ahlussunnah wa al-Jama'ah: Golongan yang Selamat". Against Wahhabist arguments, the article adds to some extent the justification of local rituals as part of *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah* practices, such as Maulid, tawassul, which include peusijuek, and wirid (Abbas 1995; darulfatwa 2014). This interpretation of *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah* is the only accepted group in Islam. This article confirms similar arguments, which are posed by Abbas regarding the signification of *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah*.
24. The headquarter of consultative council of ulama in Banda Aceh issued a fatwa no. 9 year 2014, see the link below: http://mpu.acehprov.go.id/uploads/Fatwa%20MPU%20 Aceh%20Nomor%209%20Tahun%202014%20tentang%20Pemahaman,%20 Pemikiran,%20Pengamalan%20dan%20Penyiaran%20Agama%20Islam%20di%20 Aceh.pdf. The fatwa bans on Salafite teaching activities and forbids them from using the mosques for practicing their belief. The fatwa was rejected by salafi ulema by sending two letters of clarification; a Request letter for reconsidering the fatwa no 9 year 2014 and white book for the justification of Salafi theology.
25. The complete description of the meaning *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah* is described in Fatwa Majelis Permusyawaratan Ulama Aceh Nomor 04 Tahun 2011 Tentang Kriteria Aqidah Ahlussunnah Wal Jamaah, see in this link: http://mpu.acehprov. go.id/uploads/NOMOR%20%2004%20TAHUN%202011%20KRITERIA%20 AQIDAH%20AHLUSSUNNAH%20WAL%20JAMAAH.pdf.

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