Fenomena: Journal of the Social Sciences
Vol. 24 No. 2 (2025) : 209-224
Available online at https://fenomena.uinkhas.ac.id/index.php/fenomena/

Disrupting From Within: *Teungku Inong* and The Reconfiguration of Religious Authority in Aceh's *Dayah*

Putri Maulina[1], Irwan Abdullah[2], Wiwik Sushartami[3], Arifah Rahmawati[4]
[1,2,3,4]Universitas Gadjah Mada, Indonesia
Email: putrimaulina@mail.ugm.ac.id[1], irwan.fib@ugm.ac.id[2], sushartami@ugm.ac.id[3], arifahr1213@gmail.com[4]

DOI: https://doi.org/10.35719/fenomena.v24i2.596

Received: August 24, 2025	Revised: September 20, 2025	Accepted: October 21, 2025	Published: December 20, 2025

Abstract

This study examines how *Teungku Inong* (female religious leaders) construct and negotiate religious authority within the patriarchal dayah system in Aceh. While prior scholarship acknowledges women's roles, it insufficiently explains the strategic mechanisms through which piety is converted into institutional recognition. Employing a critical phenomenological approach, qualitative data from three women-led dayah were analyzed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). Findings reveal that authority is cultivated through a hybrid Dayah-university education, mastery of classical texts (turāth), embodied ritual discipline, and strategic sartorial practices. These leaders strategically navigate authority by reframing equality as musāwah, creating alternative female-centric spaces (beut seumeubeut), participating in formal bodies, and building alliances with NGOs and male scholars. The study concludes that women's religious authority in Aceh is contingent and hybrid, emerging from the intersection of pious self-formation and tactical negotiation. It enables incremental change from within but remains vulnerable to co-optation and patriarchal gatekeeping, highlighting a dynamic of subtle resistance rather than overt confrontation.

Keywords: *Pious Critical Agency, Subtle Resistance; Religious Authority, Female Religious Leadership*

Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkaji bagaimana *Teungku Inong* (pemimpin keagamaan perempuan) membangun dan merundingkan otoritas keagamaan dalam sistem dayah yang patriarkis di Aceh. Meskipun kajian terdahulu mengakui peranan perempuan, penjelasan mengenai mekanisme strategis konversi kesalehan menjadi pengakuan kelembagaan masih kurang. Dengan pendekatan fenomenologi kritis, data kualitatif dari tiga dayah yang dipimpin perempuan dianalisis menggunakan Analisis Fenomenologi Interpretatif (IPA). Temuan menunjukkan otoritas dibentuk melalui pendidikan hibrid dayah-perguruan tinggi, penguasaan teks klasik (*turāth*), disiplin ritual yang diwujudkan, serta praktik berbusana yang strategis. Para pemimpin ini secara taktis menavigasi otoritas dengan menyuarakan kesetaraan sebagai musāwah, menciptakan ruang alternatif berpusat perempuan (beut seumeubeut), berpartisipasi dalam lembaga formal, dan membangun aliansi dengan LSM serta ulama laki-laki. Disimpulkan bahwa otoritas keagamaan perempuan di Aceh bersifat kontingen dan hibrid, lahir dari persilangan pembentukan diri yang saleh dan negosiasi taktis. Otoritas ini memungkinkan perubahan bertahap dari dalam, namun tetap rentan terhadap kooptasi dan pembatasan patriarkis, yang menegaskan dinamika resistensi halus alih-alih konfrontasi terbuka.

Kata kunci: *Agensi Kritis yang Saleh, Resistensi Halus, Otoritas Keagamaan, Kepemimpinan Religius Perempuan*

Corresponding Author: putrimaulina@mail.ugm.ac.id (Putri Maulina)

How to cite:	Maulina, P., Abdullah, I., Sushartami, W., & Rahmawati, A. (2025). Disrupting From Within: Teungku Inong and The Reconfiguration of Religious Authority in Aceh's Dayah. Fenomena, 24(2), 209-224. https://doi.org/10.35719/fenomena.v24i2.596
Publisher:	Centre for Research and Community Service (LP2M), Universitas Islam Negeri Kiai Haji Achmad Siddiq Jember

Introduction

Although women play substantive roles in education and institutional management, formal avenues of religious leadership in Aceh's *dayah* remain tightly controlled by men (Blackburn, 2004; Smith-Hefner, 2019; Srimulyani, 2016). Within an institution long regarded as the principal locus of Islamic knowledge and authority in Aceh (Azra, 2004), this exclusion underscores structural barriers rooted in patriarchal norms and masculine religious governance (Blackburn, 2004; Srimulyani, 2016; Van Doorn-Harder, 2006). However, figures such as Teungku Inong demonstrate that marginalization is not absolute. By adjusting their strategies to prevailing social norms, they attain authority and exercise leadership without directly confronting existing structures (Husin, 2013; Riley, 2014; Srimulyani, 2016). Taken together, these dynamics reveal the coexistence of agency and constraint, wherein women's participation expands even as formal recognition remains limited (Blackburn, 2004; Smith-Hefner, 2019).

Teungku inong navigates this patriarchal system not through overt resistance but by negotiating their roles within the existing structure (Husin, 2013; Kloos, 2016; Srimulyani, 2013). One of the key strategies employed is piety. In conservative Muslim societies, piety serves not only as a moral and religious standard but also as a tool for legitimizing leadership (Ong, 1990). Piety enables women to gain recognition within male-dominated authority structures without directly challenging social norms. As such, piety functions as an ambivalent tool: on the one hand, it reinforces patriarchal norms by conforming to social expectations, yet on the other, it serves as a means to redefine women's roles in religious leadership.

The concept of pious critical agency is essential in understanding how *Teungku Inong* establishes their authority. Through pious critical practice, they not only gain legitimacy as spiritual leaders but also negotiate the social constraints that limit women's roles in *dayah*. However, to date, research specifically examining how *Teungku Inong* employs piety as a negotiation strategy within the *dayah* system remains scarce. Further studies are needed to explore the extent to which piety can serve as a vehicle for social transformation within the context of Acehnese *dayah*.

Although numerous studies have examined female leadership in Islam, most research has focused on formal leadership dynamics within modern institutions or Islamic feminist movements (Othman, 2006; Riley, 2014). In Indonesia, studies on women's roles in Islamic education primarily highlight their contributions in religious organizations or Islamic boarding schools (Blackburn, 2004; Rinaldo, 2013, 2014; Smith-Hefner, 2019). Meanwhile, some studies have explored how women use piety as a tool for negotiation within patriarchal structures (Mahmood, 2005; Van Doorn-Harder, 2006). However, a gap remains in understanding how piety is employed as a leadership strategy within the context of Acehnese *dayah*. Therefore, further research is necessary to explore female leadership strategies within traditional Islamic educational systems, particularly in contexts still profoundly influenced by patriarchal norms.

This study offers novelty on two significant levels: initially, it provides a rich empirical analysis of *Teungku Inong*'s leadership strategies in the dayah system in Aceh, a topic that has thus far remained under-analyzed. Secondly, at the conceptual level, this study enriches scholarship on how piety not only functions as a source of legitimacy but also as a strategy of negotiation and contestation in patriarchal spaces.

Based on this phenomenon, this study aims to address a series of key questions: How does *Teungku Inong* construct and secure their authority within the patriarchal *Dayah* environment? What negotiation and resistance strategies do they employ in challenging patriarchal structures? How is piety employed as a strategy of pious critical agency in their leadership? In answering these questions, this study will focus on the primary analysis of Teungku Inong's leadership practices within the *dayah* system, the practice of pious self-formation and pious critical agency in mediating religious authority, and the subtle resistance enacted in patriarchal spaces.

This study not only provides empirical insights into women's leadership strategies within a patriarchal system but also offers a new theoretical perspective in the study of gender and Islamic leadership. It enriches the concept of pious critical agency by demonstrating how this concept is applied in women's leadership within traditional religious institutions. Moreover, the study bridges a gap in current literature concerning women's leadership in *dayah* in Aceh, a region that remains underresearched in the literature. The findings of this study are expected to lay the groundwork for further studies on the intersections of religion, gender, and authority in conservative Muslim settings and open up possibilities for further research on women's leadership tactics in men's religious settings.

Method

This study investigates the lived experiences of Teungku Inong, female Islamic leaders within Aceh's male-dominated dayah system, through a critical phenomenological lens. Critical phenomenology combines classical phenomenology's descriptive attention to meaning with a structural critique of the socio-political forces that shape experience, thereby allowing for analysis of both signification and power (Guenther, 2018). It is therefore well suited to capture the obedience–resistance dialectic that organizes women's religious authority in Aceh's patriarchal institutional and cultural context.

Fieldwork was conducted in Aceh, Indonesia's only province governed by *qanun* (Islamic by-laws), where dayah function as key religious, social, and political arenas. Three women-led dayah—Dayah Diniyah Darussalam, Dayah Darul *Muta'allimin*, and Dayah Ar-Rahmah—served as focal sites. These institutions exemplify hybrid models that integrate modern pedagogies with Salafi-oriented orthodoxy, offering a distinctive setting to observe how female leadership is negotiated amid contentious Islamic discourses (Denzin, 2012; Smith-Hefner, 2019). Three principal informants—Ummi Rahimun, Ummi Zikriati, and Ummi Hanisah—were purposively selected. Each directs a dayah and is active in teaching, public preaching, and intergenerational transmission, representing distinct trajectories through which women consolidate authority and pursue legitimacy in a conservative religious field.

Data were collected from document analysis, participant observation, and in-depth semi-structured interviews, complemented by curriculum, institutional

histories, and digital preaching materials. Analysis employed Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) and its double hermeneutic, proceeding from close reading to theme development, higher-order clustering, and theory-informed interpretation (Smith et al., 2009). This design yields rich descriptions of embodied piety and interactional dynamics while foregrounding the structural and discursive spaces in which women negotiate gendered expectations, construct legitimacy, and incrementally redefine the boundaries of Islamic authority from within

This study obtained informed consent from all participants (written or verbal, depending on the setting). Names are anonymized unless participants explicitly requested to be named as public figures. Images reproduced in the paper were used with the permission of the subjects concerned. Fieldnotes, transcripts, and media files are stored securely and are available in de-identified form upon reasonable request.

Results And Discussion

Result

The Cultivation of Piety

The piety of *Teungku Inong*, as a female ulama in Aceh, is forged through long-term training that combines ah education and higher studies (Basri et al., 2023; Erawadi & Setiadi, 2024; Usman et al., 2021). This trajectory entails mastery of *kitab turāth* (van Bruinessen, 1994), mentorship under senior ulama (Dhofier, 1980), and early socialization in religious communities (Azra, 2004), producing disciplined selves capable of embodying and transmitting Islamic moral authority (Kloos, 2017). Exemplars: Ummi Hanisah studied for nine years at Dayah Darussalam Labuhan Haji, continued at STAI Teungku Dirundeng Meulaboh, and founded her *dayah* in Padang Mancang (2002). Despite limited resources, Ummi Rahimun, trained in Samalanga and Labuhan Haji, earned a degree at IAIN Ar-Raniry, taught privately, and established a women-focused religious center. Ummi Zikriati spent a decade at Dayah MUDI Mesra and Babussalam Panton Labu, advanced to IAIN Ar-Raniry and Universiti Malaysia Terengganu, and strategically navigated Salafi suspicions toward modern education to position herself as both *a ʿālimah and an academic—expanding her* moral and symbolic capital. These navigations reflect tensions between traditional *dayah* and reformist/Salafi currents (Feener, 2013; Permana, 2021). Authority is reinforced by intergenerational, translocal scholarly networks, including ties to Abu MUDI Samalanga, Tu Sop, Abu Panton, and Abuya Amran Waly.

Ritual discipline is central to *Teungku Inong* leadership, shaping ethical self-formation and embodied authority (Kloos, 2017; Mahmood, 2005). In the cases studied, Ummi Hanisah's weekly Thursday-night *tawajjuh*—a guided *dhikr* and self-reflection circle including survivors of violence—functions as ethical self-work and psychosocial recovery, reinforcing religious credibility (Anwar et al., 2024). The routine aligns with locally documented *Naqshbandi* practices, indicating institutional fit in Aceh (Shadiqin, 2023). Similarly, Ummi Rahimun and Ummi Zikriati routinize *the measurement of time and the performance of sunnah prayers. Meanwhile, Ummi Zikriati's Monday–Thursday fasting and sunnah prayers e*mplify ascetic disciplines linked in scholarship to ethical self-cultivation and reputational capital for leadership (Boy et al., 2021; Yusuf et al., 2023). Together, these embodied practices consolidate moral authority and public trust in Indonesian Muslim communities.

Bodily enactments of piety varied across participants. Ummi Hanisah does not treat dress as the principal index of devotion—routinely wearing loose trousers with a long blouse—and foregrounds intention and comportment in everyday practice. By contrast, Ummi Rahimun and Ummi Zikriati encode piety more explicitly through standardized modesty aesthetics (e.g., *gamis* and long headscarves), using attire as legible markers of moral integrity for their audiences. Taken together, these patterns demonstrate that modesty is calibrated through plural moral registers that blend local cultural conventions with Islamic norms, producing distincsemiotic emphases without implying divergent doctrinal commitments (Jones, 2010; Rinaldo, 2013).

Ethical emphases further differentiate orientations to piety. Based on interviews and classroom observations, Ummi Hanisah routinely cautions against *ʿujub* (self-conceit), *riyāʾ* (ostentation), and *takabbur* (arrogance), arguing that such traits dull the heart's receptivity to divine guidance and hinder the lodging of knowledge. This moral vocabulary is made practical through daily accompaniment of students—especially those from marginalized backgrounds—where love and compassion are cultivated as habitual dispositions in interaction and discipline. Taken together, these emphases configure a pedagogical ethic in which character formation and ethical comportment are foregrounded as the precondition of learning, rather than as a mere complement to it (Keshavarzi et al., 2024; Kostadinova, 2023).

By contrast, Ummi Zikriati articulates piety as a strategic response to global pressures, stressing the necessity of profound spiritual strength and rigorous ʿubūdiyah for women in leadership, the importance of remaining anchored in *fitrah* while engaging the contemporary world, and the use of a piety-inflected *habitus* as symbolic capital within the *dayah* community. Meanwhile, Ummi Rahimun advances a holistic synthesis of *ẓāhir* and *bāṭin*, maintaining that authentic religious commitment requires the joint guarding of outward comportment and inward disposition, and situating this stance within a lifelong dedication to *amar maʿrūf nahi munkar* (Alnaimat & Almhameed, 2022).

Between Compliance and Resistance

Teungku Inong advances a contextual reading of gender equality that departs from literalist exegesis in Aceh, reframing the stigmatized term "gender" through Islamic vocabulary and epistemology. Ummi Hanisah articulates equality as *musāwah*, grounded in *dayah* teachings on justice, while noting that everyday preaching often overemphasizes the obedience of wives. Ummi Rahimun anchors gender justice in the Prophet's example and Qur'anic pairings that treat men and women—especially the righteous—as equivalent moral subjects, and she critiques how male-dominated exegetical traditions distort this ideal. In line with Shahin (2020), such patriarchy is read as cultural rather than scriptural. Invoking scriptural authority and historical precedent legitimizes reinterpretation and deflects accusations of importing foreign ideas, thereby echoing inclusive hermeneutics among Indonesian female ulama (Rohmaniyahet al., 2022).

Across domestic and public spheres, Ummi Zikriati foregrounds women's active agency through the shared obligation of *amar maʿrūf nahi munkar*, presenting harmonious marital and communal roles as a practical expression—rather than a suspension—of equality within Islamic legal and ethical norms. Drawing on Islamic history and supportive exegesis, these leaders recast the concept of equality in an Islamic context and expand concrete avenues for women's participation in teaching,

organizational work, and community decision-making. Their visible piety consolidates symbolic credibility and moral authority, making leadership legible as integral to religious practice rather than oppositional; in Werbner's (2018) terms, such piety functions as a form of subtle resistance that works from within to effect change.

Figure 1

Teungku Inong Leads a Women's Beut-Seumeubeut



Note. Author's field documentation (2024).

In *dayah* settings, *teungku inong* make *beut–seumeubeut* (women's devotional–study circles) a women-centered space that translates piety into concrete empowerment in education, gender equality, and religious literacy (Abdul Manan, 2017; Lailatussaadah, 2016). These gatherings routinize text study, peer mentoring, and collective reflection, enabling women to set learning agendas (e.g., *fiqh al-nisāʾ*, family well-being, ethical citizenship). These voice issues seldom surface in male-dominated forums, thereby normalizing women's interpretive authority in Islamic education.

At Ummi Hanisah's *dayah*, *seumeubeut* runs alongside protection services for women and children; routine sessions double as brief workshops on rights, safety pathways, and continuity of schooling—reframing *daʿwah* as social support and institutional care. Ummi Rahimun embeds inclusive hermeneutics: female students read *kitab turāth*, discuss gender justice (notably equitable access to education), and co-lead exegesis—affirming that religious authority is not gender-bound. Ummi Zikriati operationalizes *khairunnās anfaʿuhum linnās* through a structured pedagogy that links ritual discipline to guidance on household economy and social ethics. Collectively, these practices expand *daʿwah* from ritual compliance toward sustained learning, awareness of rights, and community problem-solving, while negotiating patriarchal gatekeeping and widening women's religious authority (Cooke, 2001; Kloos, 2016).

Figure 2

Teungku Inong Participates in Acehnese Women's Networks



Note. Informant's Personal Documentation (2024). Displayed with the Participant's Permission.

Beyond education, *Teungku Inong* engages with formal religious arenas (Muzakarah Ulama; MUDAB; MPU) to advocate for women's interests in Aceh's sharia governance, consolidating moral capital into policy-relevant, institutionally legible leadership (Jalil et al., 2022; Qodir et al., 2022). Ummi Hanisah's and Ummi Rahimun's collaborations with Forest, Nature, and Environment of Aceh (HAkA-*Hutan, Alam dan Lingkungan Aceh*) and Flower Aceh—opposing polygamy and child marriage and framing environmental degradation as a women's rights issue—further extend religious authority into civic advocacy.

Interviews and documentation show that *Teungku Inong* cultivate horizontal networks to reduce isolation and strengthen collective leadership. They coordinate institutional visits, joint trainings, and shared empowerment programs, while affiliating with platforms such as Women's Consultative Council (*Balai Syura Inong Aceh*), the Indonesian Female Ulama Congress (KUPI—*Kongres Ulama Perempuan Indonesia*), the National Commission on Violence Against Women (Komnas Perempuan—*Komisi Nasional Anti Kekerasan terhadap Perempuan*), Islamic Relief, and the Asian Muslim Action Network (AMAN) Indonesia; some, like Ummi Zikriati, also engage in the Indonesian Association of Muslim Intellectuals (ICMI—*Ikatan Cendekiawan Muslim Indonesia*) and the Alumni Corps of the Islamic Students Association (KAHMI—*Korps Alumni Himpunan Mahasiswa Islam*).

These ties consolidate their role as agents of religious and social change, fostering more inclusive Islamic discourse and subtly reshaping gender dynamics in patriarchal institutions (Rohmaniyah et al. 2022). Authority is further reinforced by critical reflection on gender equality and by creating alternative spaces for women's leadership. Increasingly, legitimacy rests not only on traditional credentials or affiliation with male-dominated *dayah*, but on contextual knowledge and embodied spiritual practice. Their agency lies less in rejecting norms than in reinterpreting and negotiating tradition from within, combining textual authority with lived social realities (Mahmood, 2005).

Navigating the Gendered Boundaries of Male-Dominated Authority

In formal religious decision-making, *teungku inong* are heard but rarely decisive; influence is channeled to education and women-focused matters. To navigate this, they (i) assert scriptural credentials and discourse, (ii) forge alliances with husbands, senior *ulama*, and other power holders, and (iii) adapt communicative styles to patriarchal norms without forfeiting authority (Jalil et al., 2022; Kloos, 2016; Rinaldo, 2014). A negotiative–diplomatic practice is evident in Ummi Hanisah's case: active roles in *Muzakarah Ulama* and West Aceh MUDAB, with some views entering formal decisions, and sustained MPU fieldwork that reflects participatory ethics within Aceh's largely consultative sharīʿa governance (Hakim et al., 2023; Harahap & Pally Taran, 2023; Jalil et al., 2022). She foregrounds initiative, sincerity, *mantiq*, and *adab*—tracking analyses of ethical self-cultivation, classical debate etiquette, and logic in Islamic scholarship (Hakim et al., 2023; Harahap & Pally Taran, 2023). Under resource constraints, she occasionally self-funds activities, mirroring patterns of Islamic philanthropy sustaining religious work in Indonesia (Fauzia, 2017). Collectively, these

strategies secure legitimacy while expanding room for action inside patriarchal institutions.

Figure 3
Ummi Hanisah's Engagement in Regional Ulama Forums



Note. Informant's Personal Documentation (2024). Displayed with Participant's Permission.

A conformist and diplomatic orientation anchors Ummi Zikriati's leadership. She deliberately signals gender boundaries in public—sitting with women and often appearing with her husband (also a *teungku*)—to reduce resistance in patriarchal constituencies. This is not deference, but strategic inhabitation: aligning her authority with dayah convention, while backed by a mastery of texts and adab, widening the room to shape programs and decisions from within. Recognition from *Abu* (senior male scholars) follows this calibrated stance. As she noted: "With a *dayah* background, I understand *Abu*'s expectations in forums like Muzakarah or MUDAB. As women, we must observe religious and ethical boundaries—we cannot impose our will. Because I respect these limits and have the requisite knowledge, they respect me and see me as aligned with their perspectives."

Figure 4
Ummi Rahimun's Engagement in the Provincial Ulama Forum



Note. Informant's Personal Documentation (2024). Displayed with Participant's Permission.

By contrast, a reformist–assertive stance is displayed by Ummi Rahimun, who advances textually grounded critiques—for instance, during MPU deliberations on the legalization of polygamy—despite recurrent marginalization stemming from norms that restrict women's speech. Taken together, these strategies demonstrate the negotiation of authority from within: the former safeguards access and acceptance, while the latter shifts the agenda through decisive hermeneutic interventions (Chandrakirana & Kodir, 2025).

Durable structural constraints still limit decisional influence: male authorities resist women's leadership, critical interventions are dismissed as "complicating matters," and initiatives risk being perceived as norm-breaking, thereby eroding legitimacy. In MPU deliberations, Ummi Rahimun's text-based critiques were rejected or sidelined; Ummi Hanisah's attempts to recalibrate gender segregation in professional *ulama* settings provoked suspicion and potential allegations. Consequently, *teungku inong* authority is contingent—bolstered by credentials, alliances, and boundary-work yet vulnerable to institutional gatekeeping and social backlash. To widen room for action, they assert scriptural legitimacy, cultivate alliances with male authorities, and calibrate conformity to context. Participation thus exceeds status quo affirmation, enabling incremental change and positioning piety as a strategic repertoire for negotiating power within patriarchal institutions (Cooke, 2001).

Discussion

Findings indicate that women's religious authority in Aceh's *dayah* emerges through a long educational trajectory that combines *dayah* tradition with university training, underpinned by mastery of the *kitab turāth* and *sanad* networks. Visible devotional discipline—Thursday-night *tawajjuh*, *dhikr* (*meuratep*), Monday–Thursday voluntary fasting, and *salat dhuha*—functions both as a performative model of piety and as a mechanism of public validation. Embodied expressions of piety vary, from an emphasis on modesty (loose attire) to stricter aesthetics (*gamis*, long *jilbab*). Discourses of equality are articulated in Islamic vocabulary (*musāwah*), alongside the creation of alternative spaces (*beut-seumeubeut* and protection services) and participation in formal forums (*Muzakarah Ulama*/MUDAB/MPU). Scholarly networks and partnerships with civil-society organizations further extend leadership reach. The strategies of the *teungku inong* exhibit three patterns: diplomatic negotiation, assertive reformism, and conformist diplomacy.

The institutionalization of sharīʿa in Aceh—through the promulgation of *Qanun* and the bureaucratization of *daʿwa*—centralizes authority within formal *ulama* structures and a governance mode that emphasizes *adab* and spatial segregation; consequently, female *ulama*'s access to decision-making arenas is filtered by institutional credentials and genealogies of learning (*sanad*), while practical legitimacy shifts to the length of study, the caliber of teachers, and the reputation of institutions (Feener, 2013; Syafieh et al., 2022). At the same time, the regulatory climate and public moral sensibilities sustain resistance to the term "gender," prompting the translation of equality into the lexicon of *musāwah* and its accompaniment by inclusive hermeneutics to align with the *fiqh–tasawwuf* corpus—a trajectory evident in the consolidation of women's collective authority (Chandrakirana & Kodir, 2025; Fitriyah & Rahman, 2024). The limitations of formal channels, in turn, catalyze the emergence of parallel arenas—*beut-seumeubeut*, women-led *dayah*, and collaborations with NGOs

and women's networks at local to international scales—that broaden women's social influence while linking education, character formation, and community work (Afrianty, 2015; Basri et al., 2023). Public controversies surrounding the implementation of *Qanun Jināyat* further shape the bounds of permissible speech and the calculus of social risk for women's interventions; as a result, a "pious–critical" strategy becomes a rational, low-sanction option: maintaining symbolic conformity to preserve access while inserting textual–ethical interventions to shift agendas (Fuad et al., 2022; Nurrahmi, 2022).

As a consequence, the consolidation of symbolic capital—religious knowledge, ritual discipline, and an ethos of service—practiced by *teungku inong* extends their mandate from textual instruction to public advocacy (e.g., women-friendly facilities, protection from violence and economic precarity) while strengthening inter-institutional networks; this pattern accords with the production of symbolic legitimacy as an effect of *habitus* and social recognition (Bourdieu, 1990) within Aceh's sharīʿa institutional architecture (Feener, 2013; Srimulyani, 2016). The shift toward *musāwah* then operates as a tradition-compatible strategy of legitimation, while alternative spaces function as structural buffers for vulnerable groups (Rohmaniyah, Kotele, & Widiastuti, 2022). Nevertheless, legitimacy remains contingent: interventions on sensitive issues (polygamy, child marriage) are prone to delegitimation and backlash against *teungku inong* and add emotional and material costs when institutional support is limited. Consequences also depend on their strategic repertoire: a negotiative–diplomatic style increases acceptance yet is susceptible to co-optation; a reformist–assertive style accelerates change but provokes elite resistance; and a conformist–diplomatic style preserves communitarian legitimacy while narrowing the space for critique. The outcome is a hybrid authority—rooted in *dayah* tradition yet responsive to egalitarian demands—in which each gain in legitimacy must be weighed against the risks of delegitimation and its social costs.

This study extends the framework of embodied piety by showing piety as a relational agency that reconfigures power from within Islamic institutions (Rinaldo, 2013, 2014). It also refines *pious-critical agency* by specifying concrete mechanisms—boundary-work, alliances with male authorities, and the creation of alternative arenas—that render women's voices legible without frontal confrontation (Rinaldo, 2013, 2014). Moving beyond the obedience–resistance binary and the "hidden transcripts" thesis, adherence to *adab* operates as a tactic of visibility that converts moral capital into policy access, yet remains vulnerable to co-optation where procedural channels are weak (Abu-Lughod, 1990; Cooke, 2001; Scott, 1990; Werbner, 2018). Regionally, the findings complement scholarship on women's negotiation within Islamic education and sharīʿa architectures (Kloos, 2017), while contrasting Aceh's model of sharīʿa governance with more state-managed arrangements in Singapore and with Southern Thailand's emphasis on institutional leadership (Assalihee et al., 2024; Chehdimae & Mohd Ali, 2022; Jamil, 2016). They also resonate with KUPI-linked gender-justice hermeneutics, which translate classroom authority into public influence (Rohmaniyah et l., 2022). Overall, the transformation–co-optation tension hinges on three variables: sources of legitimacy (textual and embodied), arenas of practice (education and policy), and alliance/procedural capacity. When these align, *Teungku Inong*'s moral capital is more likely to yield stable, institutionalized recognition than stall at symbolic compliance.

Findings show that *Teungku Inong* extends leadership beyond *kitab* instruction into public advocacy and inter-institutional coordination, translating piety into community-recognized hybrid authority; yet, legitimacy remains contingent within Aceh's sharīʿa institutions. Authority is sustained by moral visibility (devotional discipline, service ethos), *sanad* networks that circulate authority, and boundary work that renders women's voices legible; it is constrained by patriarchal gatekeeping, the labeling of critique as "complicating matters," and weak procedures that enable co-optation and backlash. To address these dynamics, an operational piety–recognition model of interstitial agency is needed, with clear indicators for moral visibility, *sanad*-based circulation of authority, and affective, juridical, and social recognition, tested through longitudinal, multi-site designs using network mapping and process tracing. Policy priorities follow from this analysis: institutionalize women *ulama*'s representation in decision-making bodies (mandates, agenda slots, and follow-up mechanisms); build formal mentor–*sanad* pathways; adopt platform-sensitive ethical guidelines for preaching; and conduct curriculum/exegesis audits to mitigate gender bias—each backed by adequate funding and robust monitoring and evaluation. Taken together, these measures aim to translate moral capital into stable institutional recognition while sustaining women's leadership within the *Dayah* milieu.

Conclusion

Teungku Inong in Aceh's *Dayah* cultivates authority through a long-term formation process that links *dayah* training with university study, sustained ritual discipline, ethical–charismatic leadership, and intergenerational sanad networks. They mobilize these assets in women-centered spaces—especially *beut–seumeubeut*—through protection services for minorities and survivors, curated public preaching, and selective participation in male-dominated forums. The lexicon of *musāwah* offers norm-compatible equality claims while defusing stigma around "gender," widening constituencies for women's leadership. The result is a hybrid leadership—conservative in creed yet reformist in institutional effect—that converts moral capital into policy-relevant engagement. Recognition remains contingent on patriarchal gatekeeping and male endorsement, making authority expandable yet revocable. Change thus proceeds primarily from within, through incremental boundary shifts anchored in everyday ritual and ethical performance.

Conceptually, the study extends embodied-piety debates by integrating recognition dynamics to specify when piety converts into durable authority, and refines the concept of "pious critical agency" for an institution-centered Acehnese setting. The analysis also operationalizes an interstitial-agency model that links credentials, ritual–ethical performativity, and boundary-work to contingent legitimacy. Practically, the findings support governance reforms that institutionalize women's representation and formal mentorship pipelines, adopt platform-aware preaching ethics and protections against reputational attacks, and implement curriculum/exegesis audits to mitigate gender bias and consolidate recognition.

Limits include time-bounded fieldwork, a small sample of women-led *dayah*, and reliance on self-reported experience that may bias narratives. Future research should compare mixed-gender versus women-only *dayah*, track longitudinal shifts in recognition across forums (e.g., MPU/Muzakarah), and assess policy outcomes tied to women's authority using mixed methods. Comparisons across provinces or in

Southeast Asia, and network analyses of sanad–CSO linkages, would clarify the conditions under which contingent legitimacy becomes durable.

Acknowledgement

We gratefully acknowledge the *Teungku Inong* , who generously shared their time and insights, and our colleagues in the Doctoral Program in Cultural and Media Studies, Graduate School, Universitas Gadjah Mada, for their incisive feedback. This research was supported by *the Beasiswa Pendidikan Indonesia (BPI)*, Ministry of Research, Technology, and Higher Education (Kemenristekdikti).

References

Manan, H. (2021). Teungku Inong & Tradisi Pengajian di Aceh Penulis. *Indonesia: Lembaga Naskah Aceh*.

Abu-Lughod, L. (1990). The romance of resistance: Tracing transformations of power through Bedouin women. *American Ethnologist, 17*(1), 41–55. https://doi.org/10.1525/ae.1990.17.1.02a00030

Afrianty, D. (2015). *Women and sharia law in northern Indonesia: Local women's NGOs and the reform of Islamic law in Aceh*. Routledge.

Alnaimat, M., & Almhameed, A. (2022). The duality of al-Zahir and al-Batin (the esoteric interpretation): A reading of the diwani messages in Egypt during the Fatimid era. *Dirasat: Human and Social Sciences, 49*(2). https://doi.org/10.35516/hum.v49i2.1795

Anwar, S., Siregar, S. M. F., Alamsyah, T., Muliadi, T., Marniati, M., & Khairunnas, K. (2024). The dhikr and the mental health of the elderly in Aceh, Indonesia. *Health SA Gesondheid, 29*. https://doi.org/10.4102/hsag.v29i0.2456

Assalihee, M., Bakoh, N., Boonsuk, Y., & Songmuang, J. (2024). Transforming Islamic education through lesson study (LS): A classroom-based approach to professional development in Southern Thailand. *Education Sciences, 14*(9). https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci14091029

Azra, A. (2004). *The origins of Islamic reformism in Southeast Asia: Networks of Malay-Indonesian and Middle Eastern 'ulama' in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries*. Allen & Unwin/University of Hawai'i Press.

Basri, B., Putra, A. J., Zulfikar, T., & Wahidah, W. (2023). Dayah On the Move: Social Engineering Through Islamic Education Reformation In Post-Conflict Aceh, Indonesia. *Jurnal Ilmiah Islam Futura*, *23*(1), 60-87. https://doi.org/10.22373/jiif.v23i1.15695

Blackburn, S. (2004). *Women and the state in modern Indonesia*. Cambridge University Press.

Bourdieu, P. (1990). *The logic of practice*. Stanford University Press.

Boy, E., Lelo, A., Tarigan, A. P., Machrina, Y., Yusni, Y., Harahap, J., ... & Freeman, C. A. (2021). Salat dhuha improves haemodynamic: A randomized controlled study. *Open Access Macedonian Journal of Medical Sciences*, *9*(B), 1695-1700. https://doi.org/10.3889/oamjms.2021.7666

Chandrakirana, K., & Kodir, F. A. (2025). Chronicles of a Collective Claim to Religious Authority: KUPI's Women Ulama. *African Journal of Gender and Religion*, *31*(1), 17-40. https://doi.org/10.36615/t0726023

Chehdimae, H., & Mohd Ali, H. (2022). Leadership practices among Islamic private secondary school principals in Southern Thailand: Validating a model of strategic educational leadership. *IIUM Journal of Educational Studies, 10*(2), 81–105. https://doi.org/10.31436/ijes.v10i2.430

Cooke, M. (2001). *Women claiming Islam: Creating Islamic feminism through literature*. Routledge.

Denzin, N. K. (2012). Triangulation 2.0. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research, 6*(2), 80–88. https://doi.org/10.1177/15586898124371

Dhofier, Z. (1980). *The pesantren tradition: a study of the role of the kyai in the maintenance of the traditional ideology of Islam in Java*. The Australian National University (Australia).

Erawadi, E., & Setiadi, F. M. (2024). Transformation of traditional Islamic education: Dayah as a modern educational institution in post-conflict Aceh. *FITRAH: Jurnal Kajian Ilmu-Ilmu Keislaman*, *9*(2), 225-246. https://doi.org/10.24952/fitrah.v9i2.10110

Fauzia, A. (2017). Islamic philanthropy in Indonesia: Modernization, Islamization, and social justice. *ASEAS-Austrian Journal of South-East Asian Studies*, *10*(2), 223-236. https://doi.org/10.14764/10.ASEAS-2017.2-6

Feener, R. M. (2013). *Shari'a and social engineering: The implementation of Islamic law in contemporary Aceh, Indonesia*. Oxford University Press.

Fitriyah, A., & Rahman, G. (2024). Reinterpreting gender in the Qur'an: Realizing inclusive interpretation in the modern era. *An-Nisa: Jurnal Kajian Perempuan dan Keislaman, 17*(2), 117–132. https://doi.org/10.35719/annisa.v17i2.303

Fuad, Z., Darma, S., & Muhibbuthabry, M. (2022). Wither Qanun Jinayat? The legal and social developments of Islamic criminal law in Indonesia. *Cogent Social Sciences*, *8*(1), 2053269. https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2022.2053269

Guenther, L. (2020). Critical phenomenology. *50 concepts for a critical phenomenology*, 11-16.

Hakim, A., Ahmad, R., & Jaafar, S. M. J. S. (2023). The methodology of reforming Islamic law fatwa Bahthul Masail Nahdlatul Ulama in family planning (KB) in Indonesia by the maqasid shari'ah approach. *Al-Manhaj: Jurnal Hukum dan Pranata Sosial Islam, 5*(1), 939–952. https://doi.org/10.37680/almanhaj.v5i1.2934

Harahap, L. R., & Taran, J. P. (2023). Hubungan ilmu mantiq dalam pengembangan ilmu-ilmu Islam. *Jurnal Ekshis*, *1*(1), 32-42. https://doi.org/10.59548/je.v1i1.19

Husin, A. (2013). Leadership and authority: Women leading dayah in Aceh. In B. J. Smith & M. Woodward (Eds.), *Gender and power in Indonesian Islam* (pp. 49–65). Routledge.

Permana, Y. S. (2021). Subnational sectarianisation: clientelism, religious authority, and intra-religious rivalry in Aceh. *Religion, State & Society*, *49*(2), 142-156. https://doi.org/10.1080/09637494.2021.1881392

Jalil, H., Yani, T. A., & Kurniawan, A. (2022). Public Participation Model in the Preparation of Sharia-Based Aceh Qanun: Special Focus on the Role of the Ulama. *IIUMLJ*, *30*, 280. https://doi.org/10.31436/iiumlj.v30i2.672

Jamil, N. (2016). "You are my garment": Muslim women, religious education, and self-transformation in contemporary Singapore. *Asian Studies Review, 40*(4), 545–563. https://doi.org/10.1080/10357823.2016.1228044

Jones, C. (2010). Materializing piety: Gendered anxieties about faithful consumption in contemporary urban Indonesia. *American Ethnologist*, *37*(4), 617-637. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-1425.2010.01275.x

Keshavarzi, H., Yanık, M., Keçeci, E. & Furkan Cinisli, M., (2024) "A Reclassification of al-Ījī's Akhlāq al-ʿAḍudiyya into a Model of Traditional Islamic Virtues (TIV)", *Journal of Muslim Mental Health* 18(1): 5. https://doi.org/10.3998/jmmh.6028

Kloos, D. (2016). The salience of gender: Female Islamic authority in Aceh, Indonesia. *Asian Studies Review, 40*(4), 527–544. https://doi.org/10.1080/10357823.2016.1225669

Kloos, D. (2017). *Becoming better Muslims: Religious authority and ethical improvement in Aceh, Indonesia*. Princeton University Press.

Kostadinova, Z. (2024). Edep: ethical imagination and the Sunna of the Prophet Muhammed. *Contemporary Islam*, *18*(1), 87-109. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11562-023-00548-3

Lailatussaadah. (2016). Pengembangan bale beut dalam kepemimpinan teungku inong di Kecamatan Delima, Pidie. *ARICIS, 1*, 126–133.

Mahmood, S. (2005). *Politics of piety: The Islamic revival and the feminist subject*. Princeton University Press.

Nurrahmi, F. (2022). Mediated representation of sharia in Aceh: A hybrid approach to media frames. *Religions*, *13*(9), 857. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13090857

Ong, A. (1990). State versus Islam: Malay families, women's bodies, and the body politic in Malaysia. *American Ethnologist, 17*, 258–276. https://doi.org/10.1525/ae.1990.17.2.02a00040

Othman, N. (2006). Muslim women and the challenge of Islamic fundamentalism/extremism. *Women's Studies International Forum, 29*(4), 339–353. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2006.05.008

Qodir, Z., Jubba, H., Hidayati, M., & Mutiarin, D. (2022). The formalization of sharia in Aceh to discipline the female body. *Al-Jami'ah, 60*(1), 63–90. https://doi.org/10.14421/ajis.2022.601.63-90

Riley, K. (2014). Women, leadership, and mosques: Changes in contemporary Islamic authority. In M. Bano & H. Kalmbach (Eds.), *American Journal of Islam and Society* (2nd ed., Vol. 31, pp. 118–121). Brill.

Rinaldo, R. (2013). *Mobilizing piety: Islam and feminism in Indonesia*. Oxford University Press.

Rinaldo, R. (2014). Pious and critical: Muslim women activists and the question of agency. *Gender & Society, 28*(6), 824–846. https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243214549352

Rohmaniyah, I., Kotele, S., Pabbajah, M., & Rasyidah, H. S. (2022). Female ulama's authority: Deconstructing masculine domination in Islamic norms and practices. *International Journal of Islamic Thought, 21*, 54–61. https://doi.org/10.24035/ijit.21.2022.225

Rohmaniyah, I., Kotele, S., & Widiastuti, R. S. K. (2022). Reclaiming an authority: Women's Ulama Congress Network (KUPI) and a new trend of religious discourse in Indonesia. *Academic Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies*, *11*(3), 60-70. https://doi.org/10.36941/ajis-2022-0068

Scott, J. C. (1990). *Domination and the arts of resistance: Hidden transcripts*. Yale University Press.

Shadiqin, S. I. (2023). "Dang-dang tawoe bak Tuhan": Suluk, tawajuh, dan rural sufism dalam masyarakat Aceh. *Sosial Budaya, 20*(2), 113. https://doi.org/10.24014/sb.v20i2.22660

Shahin, F. (2020). Islamic feminism and hegemonic discourses on faith and gender in Islam. *International Journal of Islam in Asia, 1*(1), 27–48. https://doi.org/10.1163/25899996-01010003

Smith, J. A., Flowers, P., & Larkin, M. (2009). *Interpretative phenomenological analysis: Theory, method and research*. SAGE Publications.

Smith-Hefner, N. J. (2019). *Islamic education and social change: Gender, class and the formation of youth in contemporary Indonesia*. Routledge.

Srimulyani, E. (2013). Gender in contemporary Acehnese dayah: Moving beyond docile agency? In R. M. Feener, D. Kloos, & A. Samuels (Eds.), *Islam and the limits of the state* (pp. 141–165). Brill.

Srimulyani, E. (2016). Teungku inong dayah: Female religious leaders in contemporary Aceh. In R. M. Feener, D. Kloos, & A. Samuels (Eds.), *Islam and the limits of the state* (pp. 141–165). Brill.

Syafieh, S., Muhaini, M., & Syufyan, S. (2022). Authority and ulama in Aceh: The role of dayah ulama in contemporary Aceh religious practices. *Jurnal Theologia*, *33*(2), 151-178. https://doi.org/10.21580/teo.2022.33.2.13455

Usman, J., Syabuddin, S., & Zakaria, F. (2021). Teungku identity development: the role of dayah community of practice. *Sage Open*, *11*(3), 21582440211031532. https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440211031532

Van Bruinessen, M. (1994). Pesantren and kitab kuning: Maintenance and change in a tradition of religious learning. In *Texts from the islands: Oral and written traditions of Indonesia and the Malay world*.

Van Doorn-Harder, P. (2006). *Women shaping Islam: Reading the Qur'an in Indonesia*. University of Illinois Press.

Werbner, P. (2018). Between Islamic piety, agency, and ethical leadership: Paradoxes of self-transformation. *Contemporary Levant, 3*(1), 79–90. https://doi.org/10.1080/20581831.2018.1449934

Yusuf, Y., Yusuf, Y. Q., & Usman, J. (2023). The Acehnese and "Ratéb Dôda Idi": Instilling compassion based on religious values in lullabies. *Kemanusiaan: The Asian Journal of Humanities*, *30*(2), 57-80. https://doi.org/10.21315/kajh2023.30.2.4