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**Rejection of Rohingya in Aceh: The Role of Ulama
and Tolerance in Acehese Society**

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REJECTION OF ROHINGYA IN ACEH: THE ROLE OF ULAMA AND TOLERANCE IN ACEHNESE SOCIETY

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Abstract

The displacement of Rohingya refugees remains a pressing humanitarian issue, particularly in Aceh, Indonesia, where initial expressions of solidarity have shifted towards growing resistance. This study examines the factors driving this shift and the role of ulama in mediating social tensions amid economic anxieties and digital misinformation. Using a qualitative approach, primary data were collected through fieldwork conducted in Aceh between November 2023 and March 2024, including in-depth interviews with ulama, community leaders, and government officials, as well as document analysis. The findings reveal that while Aceh's cultural and religious traditions emphasize hospitality, economic instability, resource competition, and misinformation have fueled skepticism toward continued refugee acceptance. Ulama, traditionally influential in shaping public discourse, face increasing challenges from digital narratives that undermine their authority and disrupt established mechanisms for building tolerance. This study highlights the urgent need for structured refugee policies, stronger cross-sectoral collaboration, and digital engagement strategies for ulama to maintain their influence. Without strategic interventions, Aceh's long-standing reputation for tolerance may deteriorate, underscoring the importance of adaptive governance in refugee management.

Keywords: Rohingya; Rejection; Ulama; Tolerance; Acehese Society.



A. Introduction

The global refugee population has reached unprecedented levels, with displacement figures continuing to rise across various regions (Szilágyi, 2021; VOA Indonesia, 2020; Zakir Hossain, 2022). According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), in 2015, the number of forcibly displaced persons worldwide reached 65.3 million, and by 2018, 9.3 people per 1,000 inhabitants were categorized as refugees, asylum seekers, or internally displaced persons (BBC, 2019; UNHCR News, 2016). This escalating crisis has affected Southeast Asia, particularly Indonesia, which has become a transit country for displaced populations, including the Rohingya.

The Rohingya, an ethnic Muslim minority in Myanmar, have faced systemic discrimination, statelessness, and violent persecution, leading to mass displacement (Berty, 2023; Mohajan, 2018). With over 60% of their population forcibly displaced, the Rohingya constitute one of the world's largest stateless groups, leading to the establishment of some of the world's largest refugee camps (Médecins Sans Frontières, 2017). Despite having lived in Myanmar for centuries, the Rohingya remain unrecognized as an official ethnic group. The 1982 Myanmar nationality law excludes them from citizenship, making them the largest stateless population globally (Ahsan Ullah, 2016; Hossain, 2020; Leider, 2018; UNHCR, 2022). Consequently, they have been forced to flee to various countries, including Bangladesh, Australia, Pakistan, India, and Indonesia (Puspapertiwi & Hardiyanto, 2023; Yonada Nancy, 2023).

In Indonesia, Aceh Province has a long-standing tradition of hospitality, encapsulated in the local philosophy *pemulia jamee adat geutanyo* (honoring guests as our tradition) (Hamzah, 2024). When the first group of 77 Rohingya refugees arrived in Sabang, Aceh, on April 24, 2006, they were rescued by local fishermen and the Indonesian Navy, receiving immediate humanitarian assistance (ANTARA News, 2006). Over the years, Rohingya arrivals continued, with Acehnese fishermen frequently rescuing them from stranded boats, reinforcing Aceh's humanitarian identity (Zafri, 2017). However, this initial solidarity has shifted. Since 2023, resistance to Rohingya refugees has intensified in Aceh, with public sentiment influenced by



economic concerns, cultural differences, and digital misinformation (Batubara, 2023; BBC News Indonesia, 2023; Nariswari, 2023).

Previous studies on the interaction between Rohingya refugees and the Acehese community have explored multiple perspectives, primarily focusing on three themes. The first is the integration challenges faced by Rohingya refugees and the Acehese community (Zulkarnain & Kusumawardhana, 2020). The second is the effectiveness of governmental and regional policies in managing refugees, including human rights protection and community responses (Irwanysah & Al Asya'ari, 2022; Primadi, 2019; UNHCR Indonesia, 2023). The third is the influence of *Syariat Islam* (Islamic law) in mobilizing humanitarian responses, particularly in framing philanthropic action (Darnela, 2021; Thaib et al., 2024). While these studies provide valuable insights, none have thoroughly examined how *ulama* (Islamic religious scholars) serve as mediators in shaping public perceptions of Rohingya refugees, particularly in the context of rising digital misinformation. Most existing research focuses on macro-level policies and socio-political responses. For instance, Zulkarnain and Kusumawardhana (2020) focus on cross-sectoral collaboration in refugee management but do not examine the religious dynamics influencing public attitudes. Irwanysah and Al Asya'ari (2022) analyze stigmatization and social narratives but do not fully address how *ulama* shape public discourse and community reactions. Meanwhile, Thaib et al., (2024) emphasize the role of *Syariat Islam* in humanitarian efforts but do not explore the mechanisms through which *ulama* intervene in community conflicts.

Max Weber's (1963, 1964) concept of charismatic authority provides a valuable framework for understanding how religious legitimacy and moral influence are exercised by *ulama* in Acehese society. This perspective is especially relevant given the central role that religious leaders have historically played in shaping public attitudes and mediating social tensions in Aceh (Husin, 2017; Sahlan et al., 2019; Yunus, 2020). By integrating insights from sociology, religious studies, and media studies, this analysis situates Aceh's experience within broader debates on migration, digital transformation, and the evolving dynamics of religious authority. Such an approach clarifies the analytical stance of this study and underlines its contribution to understanding the complex interplay between tradition, social change, and the authority of *ulama*.



This study addresses these gaps by examining how the Acehese community responds to Rohingya refugees and how *ulama* shape public discourse on refugee acceptance and societal tensions. It explores the factors influencing shifts in public attitudes, including economic concerns, cultural differences, and the proliferation of digital misinformation, while assessing the role of *ulama* in mediating these tensions. By applying Max Weber's (1963, 1964) concept of charismatic authority, this study analyzes how religious legitimacy enables *ulama* to influence public perceptions and how contemporary challenges impact their authority. Additionally, this study builds on the historical role of *ulama* as community patrons, emphasizing their influence in maintaining social cohesion and tolerance amid changing societal dynamics (Amiruddin, 2004; Fitriani, 2023; Sahlan, et al., 2019). Hence, this study focuses on three main aspects: the evolving response of the Acehese community to Rohingya refugees, the key factors shaping public attitudes, and the role of *ulama* in navigating these complexities.

B. Method

This study used a descriptive qualitative approach to explore the evolving attitudes of the Acehese community towards Rohingya refugees and the role of *ulama* in mediating social tensions. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with *ulama* from the *Majelis Permusyawaratan Ulama* (MPU, Aceh Ulama Consultative Council) and the *Himpunan Ulama Dayah Aceh* (HUDA, Aceh Association of Dayah Ulama), community leaders, government officials, representatives from the *Panglima Laot* (the Acehese traditional maritime institution), and women's rights activists involved in refugee advocacy. Informants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure that only individuals directly engaged in refugee-related issues were included. All fieldwork and interviews were conducted in Aceh between November 2023 and March 2024. The inclusion criteria for informants were their active involvement, community responses, or humanitarian efforts related to Rohingya refugees, while those without direct involvement were excluded from the study.

The data collection process involved semi-structured interviews conducted in private settings and followed a semi-structured format



covering themes such as community responses, shifts in public perception, and the role of *ulama* in conflict resolution. In addition to interviews, document analysis was conducted on government reports, media coverage, NGO publications, and academic studies to cross-verify findings. Thematic analysis was used following Braun and Clarke's (2019) framework, which involved data familiarization, coding, and categorization of key themes. Methodological triangulation strengthened the validity of the findings by comparing interview insights with documentary evidence. Peer debriefing was also conducted to refine analytical consistency. Ethical considerations were strictly followed, with all participants providing informed consent, and their identities were anonymized for confidentiality. The study adhered to research ethics guidelines to prevent coercion or harm.

C. Results and Discussion

This section presents the study's findings, which examine the Acehese community's evolving response to the arrival of Rohingya refugees. Based on interviews with *ulama*, community leaders, and government officials, as well as document analysis, the results are organized into three main themes. The first theme explores the initial humanitarian reception, which was influenced by Acehese cultural and religious values. The second theme discusses the shift in public attitudes shaped by economic concerns and emerging social tensions. The third theme focuses on the role of *ulama* in mediating conflicts and sustaining humanitarian commitments. These findings offer a nuanced perspective on how tradition, socio-economic realities, and religious leadership shape Aceh's approach to refugee issues.

1. Results

a. The initial reception of Rohingya refugees in Aceh

Since the first arrival of Rohingya refugees in Aceh in 2006, the Acehese community has demonstrated strong humanitarian solidarity. On April 24, 2006, 77 Rohingya refugees, stranded at sea in a wooden boat, were rescued by local fishermen and the Indonesian Navy near Sabang. The local community immediately responded by providing food, shelter, and medical assistance.



The Rohingya refugee crisis intensified in 2017 following military crackdowns in Myanmar, which forced thousands to flee to neighboring countries, including Indonesia. The UNHCR reported that by November 2023, approximately 2,000 Rohingya refugees, mostly women and children, had arrived in Aceh and North Sumatra aboard 13 boats. These arrivals were met with humanitarian assistance from various sectors, including the local government, civil society organizations, and *ulama*. Basic necessities such as food, clothing, clean water, healthcare, and temporary shelter were provided.

Interviews with local leaders reveal that Aceh's geographic position and the values of its people have made it a consistent point of entry and support for Rohingya refugees. Describing these factors, the Secretary of *Panglima Laot* explained:

"Rohingya refugees have landed here many times because of Aceh's location.... They arrived at various locations from Sabang to East and Southwest Aceh. The number and location of arrivals actually depend on their boat capacity and sea conditions. But beyond that, it's the people here, they don't hesitate to help". (Personal Communication, January 2024)

Based on government and media reports, these refugees have landed in multiple locations, including Sabang, Aceh Besar, Pidie, Aceh Utara, and Bireuen. In 2023, Aceh experienced numerous waves of Rohingya arrivals. Government reports indicate that January saw the arrival of 184 refugees in Kuala Gigieng, Aceh Besar. Additional landings continued in February, March, and October in various locations such as Aceh Besar, Abdya, East Aceh, and Bireuen, with numbers varying between 21 and 184 per event. At the end of 2023, more than 1,800 Rohingya refugees arrived between November and December. On November 14, 195 refugees landed in *Gampong Kale*, Muara Tiga, Pidie District. The following day, another 147 refugees arrived in Pasi Meurandeh, Batee, Pidie District. On November 16, 249 refugees reached *Gampong Pulo Pinueng Meunasah Tuha*, Jangka, Bireuen. Despite limited resources, Acehese communities consistently provided humanitarian aid to the newly arrived Rohingya. Highlighting this ongoing commitment, an informant in Banda Aceh described how coastal communities responded:

"We always help Rohingya refugees when they arrive on the coast. People are willing to share food and even open their homes as temporary shelters". (Personal Communication, February 2024)

b. Shifting public attitudes towards Rohingya refugees in Aceh

Initially, the arrival of Rohingya refugees in Aceh was met with widespread humanitarian solidarity, with local communities actively providing food, shelter, and medical assistance. Over time, as the number of refugee arrivals increased, some segments of the Acehese population began to express concerns. Interviews with community leaders and local authorities indicated that this shift in sentiment was linked to doubts about the community's capacity to support incoming refugees continuously. Reflecting these concerns, a community leader from Banda Aceh explained:

"At first, we welcomed them with open arms. But as more boats arrived, people started asking, how much longer can we continue assisting? Moreover, the local economy is unstable, and many people in Aceh are still struggling to find jobs..." (Personal Communication, January 2024).

Concerns about alleged human trafficking also surfaced in several interviews. Informants described cases where police detained individuals for organizing the arrival of refugees, with payments reportedly made for each person transported. Cultural differences have become another source of tension. Community leaders and residents interviewed recounted issues such as refugees discarding food, littering, and poor sanitation practices. These situations led to protests in districts including Aceh Besar, Pidie, Bireuen, North Aceh, and East Aceh. Informants noted that such grievances complicated integration and fueled local frustrations.

Field observations and interviews also indicate that negative narratives about the Rohingya circulated on social media and affected public opinion. Several informants stated that after rejection occurred in one area, other communities began to mirror this response. Amid rising tensions, several prominent ulama in Aceh issued statements urging the public to reject misinformation and uphold hospitality and Islamic solidarity. Describing the



impact of these tensions and drawing on Aceh's historical experience as a place of refuge, the Secretary of *Panglima Laot* offered the following reflection:

"...Yes, there are problems, but does that mean we turn our backs on them? Our ancestors taught us better than that. We have been refugees before. We should not forget our own history". (Personal Communication, January 2024)

c. The role of ulama in mediating social tensions and counteracting resistance

During the Rohingya refugee crisis, ulama in Aceh actively mitigated social tensions and promoted humanitarian responses. One notable initiative was their involvement in organizing community-based fundraisers to support the refugees. *Ulama* contributed not only moral and religious guidance but also practical solutions to address urgent humanitarian needs. Interviews revealed that as opposition to the presence of Rohingya refugees escalated in 2023, *ulama* emerged as prominent advocates for tolerance and compassion. Informants reported that religious leaders utilized various platforms, including public statements, Friday sermons (*khutbah*), and community meetings, to emphasize the Islamic and ethical obligation to assist those in distress. A particularly significant response came from the Chairman of the MPU, who, on November 20, 2023, in Banda Aceh, issued a public appeal urging the Acehese community to resist provocations and misinformation surrounding the arrival of Rohingya refugees. In the same statement, he called on the central government to take a more active and systematic role in addressing the recurring humanitarian challenges faced by Rohingya refugees in Aceh.

The presence of *ulama* at refugee shelters was among the most notable interventions. Several visits were carried out by HUDA, MPU Province, and *Teungku Dayah* (traditional Islamic boarding school) members. Explaining the religious motivation behind such efforts, a leader of HUDA and Head of *Dayah Thalibul Huda* stated:

"As Muslims, we are bound by religious and moral obligations to help those in distress, regardless of their background. The Rohingya refugees have fled persecution and hardship; our duty is not to reject them, but to extend kindness

and uphold humanitarian values in accordance with Islamic teachings".
(Personal Communication, February 2024)

Findings from interviews and observations indicated that before interventions by religious leaders, some districts were experiencing rising resistance and concerns about potential protests or even violence. Several informants said that after public visits and appeals from *ulama*, the level of unrest decreased, and several planned protests were either canceled or conducted more peacefully. Community leaders noted that the involvement of *ulama* opened opportunities for dialogue and encouraged a more balanced community response.

Ulama also worked directly with community leaders and government officials to develop a more structured response to the refugee crisis. Discussing the meaning of tolerance and the collective response of Acehese society, a member of the MPU in Banda Aceh explained:

"This tolerance space entails Aceh's openness in accepting the Rohingya, ranging from providing aid at sea to offering food and shelter on land. The contributions of the community, government, and religious scholars towards the Rohingya exemplify genuine tolerance. As proof of concern from society, government, and religious leaders, protection is extended within a tasamuh (tolerance) framework, adhering to the relevant norms and regulations of the Republic of Indonesia." (Personal Communication, February 2024).

2. Discussion

The results presented above reveal a multi-layered and shifting landscape of community responses to the arrival of Rohingya refugees in Aceh. What initially emerged as spontaneous humanitarian action has, over time, evolved into a much more complicated social reality, marked by the interplay of solidarity, skepticism, and growing public anxiety. These findings invite closer reflection, not only on the underlying causes of this transformation but also on the broader implications for social cohesion, religious leadership, and policy direction in Aceh. By unpacking these complexities, the following discussion will situate Aceh's experience within both local traditions and wider academic debates on refugee management, community resilience, and the changing authority of religious leaders in the digital age.



a. The transition from acceptance to rejection

The findings of this study reveal that the shift in Acehese public attitudes toward Rohingya refugees from initial solidarity to growing resistance reflects a complex interaction among economic anxieties, cultural differences, and the rapid spread of digital misinformation. While Aceh has historically been recognized for its humanitarian ethos, shaped by Islamic teachings and past experiences of conflict and displacement (Al-Asyi, 2019), recent refugee influxes have tested these values against contemporary socio-economic realities.

As highlighted in the findings, many Acehese residents perceive the presence of Rohingya refugees as an economic burden, particularly amid high unemployment rates and limited economic opportunities in Aceh. These anxieties align with broader studies on refugee-hosting regions, where resource competition fosters resistance toward displaced populations (Zulkarnain & Kusumawardhana, 2020). Additionally, allegations of human trafficking networks facilitating Rohingya migration into Aceh have exacerbated fears that Aceh is being used as an illegal entry point rather than a temporary humanitarian stop. The absence of a clear governmental framework for refugee management has further fueled uncertainty about the long-term impact of continued arrivals, leading to fragmented responses from the local government and community organizations.

Beyond economic concerns, the erosion of tolerance within Acehese society has played a crucial role in shifting public sentiment. Historically, Aceh has upheld a strong tradition of cultural and religious tolerance grounded in Islamic values and the principle of *pemulia jamee adat geutanyo*, which emphasizes honoring guests as a cultural norm. Although these shared religious values initially facilitated acceptance of the Rohingya, cultural misalignments related to social behavior and integration expectations have led to rising tensions. Similar to other refugee-hosting contexts where differences in social norms create friction between displaced populations and host communities (Betts et al., 2022; Primadi, 2019), Aceh has experienced challenges in this regard.

The absence of structured refugee policies has intensified these challenges, as both local residents and Rohingya refugees navigate an



uncertain environment without clear guidelines for coexistence (Syarifuddin et al., 2023). Unlike other regions in Indonesia that have formalized refugee settlement programs, Aceh primarily serves as a transit point. This status leaves essential questions unresolved about refugee status, allocation of resources, and local responsibilities (Rahman et al., 2022). While Acehese society has historically had a reputation for harmonious coexistence with diverse groups, our findings indicate that the current challenges in integrating the Rohingya have severely tested this spirit of tolerance.

The humanitarian response has extended beyond basic aid to include efforts supporting the physical and psychological recovery of the refugees. However, these remain challenged by rising public skepticism and resource limitations. The role of digital misinformation has further exacerbated public resistance. Findings show that social media narratives frequently depict Rohingya refugees as economic threats or illegal migrants. Online discourses that emphasize refugees as recipients of disproportionate aid have fueled resentment among host communities and reinforced divisions between locals and displaced populations. This phenomenon aligns with prior studies on digital misinformation in refugee contexts, which demonstrate that viral narratives often intensify xenophobic attitudes in economically vulnerable regions (Tran et al., 2021). In Aceh, younger generations, who primarily consume news via social media, are particularly influenced by anti-Rohingya rhetoric, complicating traditional conflict resolution efforts led by ulama and community leaders.

Importantly, the tolerance within Acehese society is not an automatic or self-sustaining phenomenon. Instead, it requires active social intervention and continuous effort to preserve harmony and prevent polarization. Without the implementation of structured refugee policies, comprehensive government involvement, and sustained community engagement, the ongoing spread of misinformation risks further eroding Aceh's long-standing humanitarian reputation and deepening societal divisions. This study extends previous research by revealing how the interplay between economic pressure and digital misinformation uniquely shapes the erosion of Acehese tolerance



toward refugees. To address these challenges, our findings emphasize the urgent need for a structured and transparent refugee management policy that ensures equitable resource distribution and clear integration strategies, safeguarding Aceh's historic commitment to humanitarianism.

b. Ulama as mediators: Challenges in shaping public attitudes on Rohingya refugees

As public sentiment toward Rohingya refugees in Aceh shifted from initial solidarity to growing resistance, ulama emerged as key mediators striving to counter misinformation, ease social tensions, and uphold humanitarian values. Findings indicate that *ulama*, particularly those affiliated with MPU and HUDA, actively engaged in public appeals, interfaith dialogues, and direct interventions to mitigate hostility. Their strategic efforts included fundraising initiatives, such as those organized through *Serambi Indonesia* daily and BPD Aceh, which initially raised 20 million rupiah for refugee aid (Sudarjad, 2023). Additionally, key figures like the Chairman of MPU Aceh openly opposed public provocations against the Rohingya, urging both the community and the government to uphold humanitarian principles.

These interventions reflect Weber's (1964) concept of charismatic authority, where religious legitimacy enables leaders to influence societal behavior. Unlike prior studies, such as Husin (2017) and Yunus (2020), that describe ulama's uncontested moral leadership in more traditional or stable settings, this study extends the literature by demonstrating how Acehese ulama face the significant erosion of their authority due to contemporary challenges. By framing refugee assistance as an Islamic obligation and a continuation of Aceh's cultural tradition of *pemulia jamee adat geutanyo* (honoring guests as our tradition), *ulama* reinforced Aceh's historical role as a refuge and humanitarian stronghold. However, while their interventions helped reduce tensions and prevent large-scale confrontations, findings suggest that *ulama* now face increasing challenges in shaping public attitudes, particularly due to the rise of digital misinformation and economic insecurities.

A concrete example emerged during fieldwork: protests against new Rohingya arrivals in several districts were organized via social media and *WhatsApp* groups, bypassing traditional ulama-led consultations. In some cases, provocative digital content spread more rapidly than ulama could respond through sermons or public statements, directly undermining their traditional authority and ability to mediate conflict. This reflects a broader decline in their influence in the post-truth era, where social media rapidly disseminates seemingly authoritative information (Ichwan et al., 2024; Kustiawan et al., 2023).

In response to this situation, ulama have started to adapt by launching official social media accounts, producing short educational videos, holding online discussions with local youth, and collaborating with government agencies and civil society organizations to promote digital literacy among their followers. These strategies represent more than just a response to technological change; they are an effort to restore moral leadership and rebuild trust across generational divides. Furthermore, *ulama* had to navigate political and economic tensions in their mediation efforts. While advocating for compassionate treatment of refugees, they also addressed local frustrations regarding economic instability and resource distribution, positioning themselves in a delicate balancing act between religious humanitarianism and socio-political pragmatism (Ja'far et al., 2022).

Historically, the Acehese have greatly respected their ulama, viewing them as *ureung teulubeh* (extraordinary people), which gives them significant moral authority in conflict resolution (Husin, 2017; Yunus, 2020). However, findings suggest that despite this social standing, ulama now face increasing resistance from population segments prioritizing economic concerns over religious guidance. In response to these shifting dynamics, this study recommends that government and religious institutions develop structured digital literacy training for both ulama and grassroots leaders, establish official communication channels between local government, ulama, and humanitarian organizations, and facilitate regular forums for joint problem-solving. These initiatives would enable ulama to leverage digital



platforms more effectively, counter disinformation, and restore the integrity of humanitarian discourse.

Despite these challenges, ulama remained critical in conflict mediation by directly negotiating with local authorities, humanitarian organizations, and community groups to prevent escalating hostilities. Findings show that their visits to refugee shelters and public appeals against provocation played a crucial role in calming demonstrations and reaffirming Aceh's commitment to humanitarian principles. Moreover, ulama consistently worked to safeguard the space for tolerance, ensuring that Aceh's reputation as a humanitarian province was not completely eroded despite rising public skepticism (Nasution et al., 2024).

However, their ability to sustain this influence depends on broader structural reforms, including government-led policies on refugee management, improved digital literacy campaigns, and stronger collaboration between religious institutions and state actors. Without these measures, ulama alone may struggle to counter growing economic anxieties and digital misinformation shaping public perceptions of Rohingya refugees. Moving forward, their role in sustaining tolerance and humanitarian action will depend on their capacity to adapt to shifting socio-political landscapes, leverage digital platforms for outreach, and engage with multi-stakeholder initiatives that address both refugee needs and local concerns.

c. The broader sociopolitical implications of the Rohingya crisis in Aceh

The growing tensions surrounding Rohingya refugees in Aceh extend beyond immediate humanitarian concerns, revealing profound structural weaknesses in Indonesia's refugee management policies, evolving challenges to Aceh's sociopolitical and cultural identity, and the region's pivotal role in Southeast Asia's ongoing refugee crisis (Utama, 2024). Findings indicate that Indonesia's status as a non-signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention has resulted in a fragmented and inconsistent approach to refugee governance, leaving local governments and civil society organizations to manage the situation with limited national support (UNHCR Indonesia, 2023).

In Aceh, this policy vacuum has forced local authorities to balance humanitarian obligations with economic and social realities, often without clear directives from the central government (Atin et al., 2024). Unlike structured refugee programs in other regions, Aceh primarily serves as a transit point, leaving unresolved questions about resource allocation, security, and the long-term status of Rohingya refugees. This lack of a transparent national framework has contributed to growing public skepticism, as many Acehese fear that continued refugee arrivals could overwhelm local resources and social cohesion.

Beyond legal and policy challenges, the Rohingya crisis has sparked debates about Aceh's sociocultural identity and historical commitment to humanitarianism (Alwi et al., 2024). Although Aceh has long positioned itself as a province with strong Islamic values and a deep tradition of hospitality, findings indicate that economic pressures and the rapid spread of digital misinformation are eroding these core values. The initial sense of solidarity gives way to resistance, echoing global trends observed in other refugee-hosting regions where compassion often diminishes as economic anxieties and divisive narratives take hold (Ansar & Md. Khaled, 2021).

Furthermore, the declining authority of ulama, exacerbated by the rise of social media-driven misinformation, has complicated Aceh's ability to maintain a unified humanitarian stance (Syafieh et al., 2022). While religious leaders continue to advocate for tolerance, their ability to reach younger generations, who primarily consume information through digital platforms, is increasingly limited. This dynamic was illustrated during fieldwork by the emergence of protest groups that mobilized via WhatsApp and Facebook, sidestepping traditional ulama guidance and amplifying skepticism through viral content. These developments raise urgent questions about the future resilience of Aceh's cultural and religious values amid ongoing socioeconomic and technological change.

At the regional level, the Rohingya crisis in Aceh underscores Indonesia's broader struggles with migration governance and its diplomatic role in Southeast Asia (Komarudin & Ayuningtyas, 2024). While Indonesia



has historically adopted a humanitarian approach to refugees, the lack of a long-term integration policy has led to recurring tensions and cycles of resistance in frontline regions like Aceh. In the ASEAN context, Indonesia's approach must also be understood within the principle of non-interference, which often limits collective action and places disproportionate pressure on border provinces (Khairi et al., 2024; Oktavian et al., 2023). Rising resistance in Aceh signals a potential shift in Indonesia's domestic and regional policy, where public discontent could drive national decision-makers toward more restrictive approaches that prioritize border security over humanitarian protection (Febriandi, 2023).

To address these issues, this study recommends that the Indonesian government establish an integrated national refugee management system, including a clear and equitable resource-sharing formula between central and regional authorities, structured training on digital literacy for community and religious leaders, and periodic joint forums to synchronize local and national humanitarian responses. At the ASEAN level, creating a regional Refugee Task Force or developing standardized joint protocols for handling refugee arrivals would help ensure that responsibility is shared more fairly and that host communities, such as Aceh, are not left isolated.

The findings from this study offer important insights for the study of refugee responses, religious authority, and digital social transformation. Following host communities' everyday realities, this study shows how humanitarian values and local identities are continuously renegotiated as social and technological pressures evolve. The patterns observed in Aceh also highlight the need for practical policies addressing the vulnerabilities of frontline regions while respecting the social fabric shaped by tradition and innovation. Ultimately, understanding these interconnected dynamics opens up new possibilities for developing more resilient approaches to refugee governance and strengthening the constructive role of religion and civil society in times of rapid change.

The findings of this study hold broader relevance in the global context, particularly in enriching international discourse on refugee management in

regions characterized by strong religious foundations and states lacking comprehensive refugee policies. Aceh's experience in responding to the influx of Rohingya refugees – with all its complexities, from solidarity grounded in Islamic values and local customs to the challenges of economic pressure and digital misinformation – mirrors dynamics observed in various parts of the world. This case highlights the importance of building synergy between religious actors, local governments, and digital platforms to enhance community resilience in addressing humanitarian crises. Accordingly, this study may serve as a reference for policymakers, international organizations, and global communities in designing community-based refugee governance models that are adaptive to ongoing social and technological transformations.

Although this study provides an in-depth understanding of the evolving attitudes of Acehese society toward Rohingya refugees and the role of ulama in mediating social tensions, it is not without limitations. First, data collection was conducted within a relatively short time frame and was limited to specific areas in Aceh, meaning the findings may not fully represent the wider spectrum of public responses across the region. Second, the study primarily relied on qualitative data from interviews and document analysis, without incorporating quantitative exploration of broader public perceptions. Third, although the influence of digital misinformation was a central theme, this study did not directly analyze social media content or networks in a systematic manner.

D. Conclusion

This study demonstrates a significant transformation in the Acehese community's response to Rohingya refugees, shifting from an initial ethos of solidarity rooted in Islamic and local traditions to increasing public resistance. This change is driven by a complex interplay of economic insecurity, cultural tension, and the unchecked proliferation of digital misinformation. These dynamics have gradually constrained the application of *pemulia jamee adat geutanyo*, Aceh's long-standing philosophy of hospitality. The analysis presented in this research reveals how religious



authority, particularly that of the *ulama*, has been instrumental yet increasingly challenged in mitigating social tensions and sustaining humanitarian values amidst a rapidly evolving socio-digital environment.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the discourse on refugee governance by applying Max Weber's framework of charismatic authority to contemporary challenges faced by religious leaders in post-truth societies. It expands existing literature by situating *ulama* not merely as static moral actors but as adaptive agents navigating between traditional authority and digital disruption. Practically, the research offers insights into the urgent need for structured refugee policies in decentralized settings like Aceh, and it highlights the importance of involving religious leaders in cross-sectoral collaborations. The novelty of this study lies in its socio-religious lens combined with an analysis of misinformation, a dimension often overlooked in previous studies focusing on either humanitarian responses or state policy in isolation.

Given the temporal and geographical limitations of the fieldwork – confined to selected districts in Aceh and conducted within a specific timeframe – future research should expand the scope to include comparative case studies across different regions in Indonesia or Southeast Asia. Such studies could explore the varying roles of religious authority in refugee responses, investigate the long-term psychological and socio-economic integration of displaced populations, or apply mixed-method approaches to quantify public attitudes influenced by digital narratives. Additionally, further exploration of digital communication strategies employed by *ulama* could deepen our understanding of how religious legitimacy is renegotiated in contemporary contexts.

Finally, this research underscores that humanitarian solidarity in refugee-hosting communities is not static but contingent on political will, economic stability, and the credibility of local moral authorities. In an era marked by digital fragmentation and rising social polarization, safeguarding tolerance and compassion requires more than policy – it demands a reinvigoration of communal ethics, religious engagement, and



shared governance. Aceh's experience serves as a cautionary yet instructive model for other regions confronting similar challenges, emphasizing the need for integrated, adaptive, and locally rooted approaches to refugee governance in the global south.

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