Religious Radicalism and Islamic Universities in Aceh: Between Campus, Environment and Family

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Abstract: This paper discusses how Islam is understood, taught, and practiced at the State Islamic Religious Higher Education Institution (PTKIN) in Aceh, whether the contextual approach and tolerance towards difference approach are used, whether there is any indication of the development of religious radicalism, how PTKIN in Aceh positions itself towards this problem, and also, how the environment and family play their roles on this issue. This qualitative study collected data by means of observation, in-depth interview, documentation, and focus group discussion. The data were then analyzed in the following steps: data reduction, data display, verification, and conclusion drawing. The PTKIN selected as research sites consisted of Universitas Islam Negeri Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh, Institut Agama Islam Negeri Zawiyah Cot Kala Langsa, and Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam Negeri Gajah Putih Takengon. In general, the findings revealed that PTKIN in Aceh has been relatively free from religious radicalism. The teaching of Islamic studies at PTKIN in Aceh still adheres to the Qur'an, Hadith and authoritative references from various sources and time periods, from classical to contemporary books, and from moderate to contextual approaches that respect differences in understanding. The small potential and threat of religious radicalism at PTKIN in Aceh, in addition to the academic system built within PTKIN itself, are influenced by the socio-cultural and political environment in Aceh which is quite accommodating to the aspirations of Islamic law. Islam in Aceh today is relatively compatible with the state because the state has given the

Acehnese people the right to exercise Islamic law, not only in the private sphere, but also in the public sphere. However, there is one potential threat that needs to be aware of, which is the way to commute between home and campus; and, this particular space needs to be bridged properly so that students will not be recruited by exclusive Islamic groups without the knowledge of the campus and their families.

Keywords: religious radicalism, Islamic higher education, religious practice, Islamic education, intolerance

Abstract: Artikel ini membahas bagaimana Islam dipahami, diajarkan dan dipraktekkan pada Perguruan Tinggi Keagamaan Islam Negeri (PTKIN) di Aceh, apakah menggunakan pendekatan yang kontekstual dan toleran terhadap perbedaan. Apakah ada indikasi berkembangnya radikalisme keagamaan dan bagaimana PTKIN di Aceh memposisikan diri terhadap permasalahan ini. Selanjutnya, bagaimana peran lingkungan dan keluarga terkait isu tersebut. Artikel ini merupakan hasil penelitian yang menggunakan metode kualitatif. Pengumpulan data dilakukan dengan observasi, wawancara mendalam, dokumentasi dan focus group discussion. Sementara analisis data menggunakan alur reduksi, verifikasi, display dan penarikan kesimpulan. PTKIN yang dipilih sebagai lokasi penelitian adalah Universitas Islam Negeri Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh, Institut Agama Islam Negeri Zawiyah Cot Kala Langsa dan Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam Negeri Gajah Putih Takengon. Secara umum dapat disimpulkan bahwa PTKIN di Aceh relatif bebas dari radikalisme agama. Pengajaran studi keislaman di PTKIN di Aceh masih berpegang teguh pada al-Qur'an, Hadits dan rujukan-rujukan yang otoritatif dari berbagai sumber dan kurun waktu, dari klasik sampai kontemporer serta cukup moderat dengan menggunakan pendekatan kontekstual yang menghargai perbedaan pemahaman. Kecilnya potensi dan ancaman radikalisme keagamaan pada PTKIN di Aceh, disamping sistem akademik yang dibangun di lingkungan PTKIN sendiri juga di dukung oleh lingkungan sosio-kultural dan politik di Aceh yang cukup akomodatif terhadap aspirasi pelaksanaan syariat Islam. Di Aceh saat ini Islam relatif tidak dapat dibenturkan dengan negara karena negara sudah memberi ruang kepada masyarakat Aceh untuk menjalankan syariat Islam, tidak hanya dalam lingkup privat tetapi juga public. Akan tetapi, ada satu potensi ancaman yang perlu di waspadai, yaitu jalan pergi dan pulang antara rumah dan kampus, ruang tersebut perlu dijembatani dengan baik agar mahasiswa tidak direkrut oleh kelompok Islam eksklusif tanpa sepengetahuan pihak kampus dan keluarga.

Keywords: radikalisme agama, Perguruan Tinggi Islam, praktek beragama, Pendidikan Islam, intoleransi

Introduction

Aceh has been known for hundreds of years as a region with fanatical[1] and militant[2] followers of Islam who are not afraid to die in wars in the name of religion, such as in the Aceh War against the Dutch.[3] However, deep fanaticism towards religion coupled with the influence of external ideologies in this global era has made Aceh today a region at a high risk of being exposed to religious radicalism, which leads to conflicts in Acehnese society, both on a small, medium and large scale.

Small-scale conflicts are generally portrayed through a lack of respect towards differences in religious understanding, such as believing those outside their group as heretics and having an attitude of isolating themselves or ostracizing other groups as opposing parties or enemies that must be avoided. Medium-scale conflicts are characterized by crystallization at the conceptual level and also hostile attitudes and actions that have the potential to cause physical clashes, or any clash in a limited size which does not involve massive people. In the last decade, there have been several times of medium-scale conflicts in Aceh, e.g., the assassination of Teungku Ayyub[4] and the prohibition of the construction of the Muhammadiyah Mosque[5], both of which occurred in Bireuen District. Further, large-scale conflicts are shown by massive direct clashes, such as burning books, expulsions, persecution, and even murders. The large-scale conflicts had occurred in the 17th century during the reign of Sultan Iskandar Tsani, such as the persecution and burning of books of the Wujudiah, the followers of Hamzah Fansuri and Syamsuddin As-Sumatrani, by the orthodox group, the followers of Nuruddin Ar-Raniry.[6]

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[1] Panitia Kerja Penerbitan Buku Lukisan Sejarah Aceh (Aceh History Painting Book Publishing Working Committee), *Perang Kolonial Belanda Di Aceh*, Banda Aceh: Pusat Dokumentasi dan Informasi Aceh, 1977, p. 42.

[2] Mohd. Harun, *Memahami Orang Aceh*, Bandung: Citapustaka Media Perintis, 2009, 28.

[3] C Snouck Hurgronje and A W S O'Sullivan, *The Achehnese*, vol. 1, Leyden: EJ Brill, 1906, p. xv.

[4] "Bentrokan Berdarah Di Bireuen, 3 Tewas 9 Luka," accessed December 15, 2021, https://megapolitan.kompas.com/read/2012/11/17/10253244/Bentrokan.Berdarah.di.Bireuen.3.Tewas.9.Luka.

[5] "Ini Kronologi Larangan Pembangunan Masjid Muhammadiyah Di Aceh | Republika Online," accessed December 15, 2021, https://www.republika.co.id/berita/dunia-islam/islam-nusantara/16/06/09/o8he68361-ini-kronologi-larangan-pembangunan-masjid-muhammadiyah-di-aceh.

[6] Hermansyah, "Naskah Tibyan Fi Ma'rifat Al-Adyan: Interpretasi Aliran Sesat Di Aceh Menurut Nuruddin Ar-Raniry," *Jumantara: Jurnal Manuskrip Nusantara* 5, no. 1 (2014), p. 41–60.

In the history of Islam, various powers had used religion politically as a tool to justify fighting against each other.[7] Although there are those who claim that during the time of the Prophet Muhammad saw there was an act of terrorism, it was, however, a mere myth because historical facts have shown that the Prophet saw never ordered such an act.[8] A number of conflicts occurred mostly as a result of religious radicalism triggered by intolerance in responding to differences in understanding, appreciation, and practice of Islamic teachings. This issue might also arise when a group cannot or does not wisely distinguish between normative Islam and historical Islam. Even though differences in views are a necessity that emerges in the dialectic of community groups at different times and places in understanding the same normative sources, the Qur'an and Sunnah, such groups, however, still regard their religious understanding as the only true way of practicing Islam.

Many studies have been conducted on religious radicalism and preventive measures from actions that can lead to physical conflicts and acts of terrorism. Zora Sukabdi examined the collaboration between academics and national security practitioners in counter-terrorism efforts in Indonesia. He also carried out a qualitative analysis of the CVE (Counter Violent Extremism) document. Sukabdi found that efforts to prevent religious radicalism and counter-terrorism could be carried out collaboratively between academics and the national security forces although there were differences in contributions from both parties.[9] Tobias Ide analyzed the role of educational institutions and political socialization in preventing religious radicalism by focusing the discussion on textbooks used in schools. Through a comparative analytical study of practices in 12 countries from different regions of the world, he found that the discourse on anti-religious radicalism formed by the United States was rarely used. The countries in the study of Tobias Ide emphasized their control over the internal education system, and thus, the efforts to prevent religious radicalism were very heterogeneous.[10]

Prevention of religious radicalism no longer only occurs in the physical space as the radicalization process has utilized various technology platforms;

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[7] Sabah Mofidi, "Studying The Impact Of Religio-Political Confrontations Of Islamic Empires In Kurdistan (From The Beginning Until The End Of The Islamic Caliphate)," *Indonesian Journal of Islamic History and Culture* 2, no. 1 (2021), p. 1–49.

[8] Javad Fakhkhar Toosi, "Revisiting A Fragment of The Early History of Islam: The Myth of The Order to Assassinate Enemies by The Prophet," *Indonesian Journal of Islamic History and Culture* 2, no. 1 (2021), p. 167–83.

[9] Zora A. Sukabdi, "Bridging the Gap: Contributions of Academics and National Security Practitioners to Counterterrorism in Indonesia," *International Journal of Law, Crime and Justice* 65, no. February (2021), p. 1–14, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijlcj.2021.100467.

[10] Tobias Ide, "Teaching Terrorism, Saving the State? Education and Geopolitical Imaginations of Terrorism in 12 Violently Challenged States," *Political Geography* 77, no. May 2019 (2020), p. 1–10, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2019.102125.

therefore, it requires the ability to classify information that involves multidisciplinary technology. According to Malek Al-Zewairia and Ghazi Naymata, the profiles of radical Islamists and their ideological motives are unique, and so they can be identified using four machine learning algorithms.[11] Muslims who show high levels of religiosity are thought to be associated with a risk of religious radicalism. As such, this causes discrimination against devout and non-practicing Muslims in getting jobs in France. Marie-Anne Valfort found in her study that religious observance (religiosity) is a punishment for Muslims, making it twice as difficult for them to find work compared to non-practicing Muslims and Christians.[12] Vicente Llorent-Bedmar et al. analyzed the perspective of Islamic religion teachers in Spain regarding violence based on religious radicalism in the classroom. Their study revealed that the teachers had not been trained to deal with the issue of religious radicalism in the classroom, and thus, it is necessary to implement procedures for preventing Islamic radicalism through dialogue with the stakeholders.[13]

Khoiruddin Nasution highlighted the urgency of revitalizing the role of the family in preventing religious radicalism that led to acts of terrorism. Using Berger's theory of social construction, Nasution argued that religious radicalism is a social problem in Indonesia that requires sustainable handling. The study indicated that the role of the family was still lacking or not well-performed due to the lack of competence of parents in understanding the harms of religious radicalism itself.[14] In line with Nasution, Emmanuel Drouin stated that the phenomenon of religious radicalism is a consequence of social changes that have occurred in recent decades, especially with the collapse of the family structure and the devaluation of parental authority. According to Drouin, Islamic radicalism is considered to be able to provide an alternative identity protection to fill the gap between self-representation and idealism that occurs due to the dysfunctional family structure.[15]

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[11] Malek Al-Zewairi and Ghazi Naymat, "Spotting the Islamist Radical within: Religious Extremists Profiling in the United State," *Procedia Computer Science* 113 (2017), p. 162–69, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.procs.2017.08.336.

[12] Marie Anne Valfort, "Anti-Muslim Discrimination in France: Evidence from a Field Experiment," *World Development* 135 (2020), p. 1–15, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2020.105022.

[13] Vicente Llorent-Bedmar, Verónica C. Cobano-Delgado Palma, and María Navarro-Granados, "Islamic Religion Teacher Training in Spain: Implications for Preventing Islamic-Inspired Violent Radicalism," *Teaching and Teacher Education* 95 (2020), p. 1–12, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2020.103138.

[14] Khoiruddin Nasution, "The Roles of Families in Combating Drugs Uses, Violence and Terrorism," *Samarah* 5, no. 1 (2021), p. 23–46, https://doi.org/10.22373/sjhk.v5i1.9512.

[15] Emmanuel Drouin, "Radicalization and 'Self-Image,'" *Annales Medico-Psychologiques* 178, no. 10 (2020), p. 977–79, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.amp.2020.01.011.

In contrast to previous studies, the phenomenon of religious radicalism and intolerance happening in Indonesia, particularly in Aceh, has been strongly influenced by religious learning and practices carried out by the dominant Islamic educational institutions in Aceh. The Islamic educational institutions in Aceh are divided into two groups, Traditional Dayah (Islamic traditional boarding school) and Islamic Higher Education.

This present study concerns with several issues in regard to Islamic radicalism. The first is examining education and learning of Islamic studies courses at Islamic Religious Higher Education Institutions, such as *Tawhid* (Islamic monotheism)/*Kalam* (Islamic theology) Sciences, *Fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) Science, Qur'anic and *Tafsir* (Exegesis) Sciences, Hadith Science, and Islamic Economics, whether the religious understanding taught in these courses is moderate or radical, contextual or textual. The second is investigating whether there are any individual or group activities that introduce radical ideas and lead to acts of terrorism in the name of religion, and examining how Islam is understood, taught, and practiced on a certain scale, both by design by the campus and by infiltration from outside into the campus environment by recruiting and fostering the academic community as their cadres. The third is examining the interconnection of the role and influence of campus, external environment, and family in religious practices among students. The ultimate purpose of the study is to map religious understanding, interconnection of the influence of various institutions on religious practices, and indications and potentials of religious radicalism in Islamic universities in Aceh.

This study is motivated from various global, national, and local phenomena, as well as the developing notions that accompany them, both those that had occurred in the past and are currently emerging. On the one hand, these phenomena should not be ignored in relation to the education and teaching of Islamic studies, whereas on the other hand, they should not be taken for granted, but rather they need to be observed and addressed wisely. Stagnancy, fanaticism, and radicalism of religious understanding shall be avoided by any Islamic campuses. In the world of Islamic higher education in Indonesia today, fanaticism, stagnancy, and radicalism have become challenges and threats. Questions arise as to what kinds of problems are faced and prospects are expected by Islamic universities in Aceh in realizing Islam that is *rahmatan lil alamin* (a mercy to all creation), and whether the universities have a roadmap for manifesting a moderate and tolerant Islam that adheres to the Qur'an and Sunnah at the same time.

This qualitative study collected the data by means of observation, in-depth interview, document study, and focus group discussion. The study took place at three state Islamic universities (State Islamic Religious Higher Education Institutions/PTKIN) in Aceh, namely: UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh, STAIN Gajah Putih Takengon, and IAIN Zawiyah Cot Kala Langsa. The data analysis was

conducted in the following phases: data reduction, data display, verification, and conclusion drawing.

Radicalism and Violence in the Name of Religion

The term "radical", along with its various derivatives such as radicalism, radicalization, and de-radicalization, is a term that is highly familiar with the recent discourse on religious activities in Indonesia and international world. Radicalism is often associated with varied acts of violence in the name of religion. Violence can be in individual and small-scale forms, but it can also take a massive form and attracts the attention of many groups, especially because of the intensive media exposure. Groups that spread terror in the name of religion are sometimes also called terrorists due to the enormity of the threats they pose to security and public order. However, violence in the name of religion does not always take the form of bomb threats or murders. Violence can take the form of forcing other religious groups to follow their understanding, behavior, or practice.

To get a good understanding of this term, we shall describe some definitions of the term "radical" or "radicalization", which is a process to form a radical attitude. Harris-Hogan of the Global Terrorism Research Centre, Monash University, Melbourne, as quoted by El-Said, wrote:

> "Radicalization is a process in which individuals develop, adopt and embrace political attitudes and modes of behaviour which diverge substantially from those of any or all of the established and legitimate political, social, economic, cultural, and religious values, attitudes, institutions and behaviours which exist in a given society."[16]

In addition, El-Said also defines radicalization as follows:

> "Radicalization is ... a process whereby groups or individuals undergo a psychological transformation that leads them to depart from tradition and increase their advocacy to an extreme political, social or religious ideology."[17]

Nevertheless, a radical attitude, in fact, does not always correspond to a negative connotation. Scientifically and philosophically, radical means to explore or adhere to a concept or theory as deeply as possible, or referring to the meaning of the word, deep down to its roots. Therefore, epistemologically, radical is a good attitude. Even in developed countries, such as the United States, radical is seen as a good attitude. They themselves are proud of their radicalism in the American

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[16] Hamed El-Said, *New Approaches to Countering Terrorism : Designing and Evaluating Counter Radicalization and de-Radicalization Programs*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015, p. 6–7.

[17] El-Said, 9.

spirit, the original spirit that brought America into an independent nation built on diversity. Thus, ethically, it is incorrect to say that having radical attitudes is a crime. Radicalism seen as bad is when one's strict attitude in adhering to a certain ideology/understanding is accompanied by coercive efforts against other groups to follow one's ideology/understanding. Mentioning "radical" with a negative connotation generally occurs to describe a situation where there is coercion or violence that accompanies the establishment of a belief, understanding or ideology by one party to another party.[18]

Radicalism within Islam itself, such as the issues that have surfaced in recent years, usually arises when groups within Islamic society feel that other groups or entities, both internally and externally to the Islamic society, are a threat and must be faced with violence. This is noted by Olcott in the Carnegie Paper:

> "Radical Islam represents both a battle between Islam and outside forces that seek to transform Islam' sociopolitical role and doctrinal disputes within Islam that have been characteristic of the practice and teaching of the faith for more than five hundred years."[19]

From Olcott's explanation, it can be understood that radicalism in Islam has occurred not only when Islam deals with entities/powers outside of Islam, but also with internal radicalism of Muslims that has emerged due to differences in understanding and practice of Islam since centuries ago.

Syaiful Arif stated that the emergence of Islamic radicalism today is caused by the inability of some Muslims to integrate their life system which is built on religious doctrines and values with modern systems, such as in education, family structure, economy, and especially Islamic political aspirations into the life of the nation and state. This disapproval and dissatisfaction they manifest later into a radical attitude in order to retrieve the forms of the ideal system that they desire. The characteristics of a radical movement are as follows:

1. Rejecting the national government;
2. Rejecting the mainstream Islamic understanding (orthodoxy) in a country;
3. Rejecting the national political ideology;
4. Rejecting Muslim majority political participation in a democratic system.[20]

The peak of radicalism will trigger terrorism. Extreme radicals will use destructive means of violence to realize the ideology they believe in. They will not even hesitate to sacrifice their own lives to achieve the ideal picture of society they expect. History of the mankind has shown that terror is a classic

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[18] El-Said, p. 9.

[19] Martha Brill Olcott, "Roots of Radical Islam in Central Asia," 2007, p.3.

[20] Syaiful Arif, *Islam, Pancasila, Dan Deradikalisasi: Meneguhkan Nilai Keindonesiaan* Jakarta: PT Elex Media Komputindo, 2018, p. 173–74.

phenomenon. Manullang notes, "Scaring, threatening, shocking violence, or killing with the intention of spreading fear is an inherent tactic to seize power, long before it was called terror or terrorism."[21]

The influence and impact of terrorism is enormous. Terrorism not only creates great fear among the people, but it also impacts the state system. Terrorism will impact defense and security, politics, economics, religion, and ideology of a country. Acts of terror will be followed by various policies in regard to defense and security on a national and international scale. Certain political decisions and policies are usually also made after an act of terror, such as a foreign policy to support the eradication of transnational terrorism. The impact of terrorism is also felt in the economic sector, such as falling stock prices, dampening the enthusiasm and investment plans of investors, and the destruction of trading centers. Acts of terrorism are also often associated with religion, which certainly cause the adherents of the same religion to be tainted as the religion adopted by terrorists. The impact is more pronounced if the adherents of this religion are a minority in a country directly affected by terror, and they can be antagonized or ostracized from their social relationship and environment. Terrorism also has an impact on ideology since the acts of terror are often linked as part of an ideological struggle, such as the struggle between neo-colonialism and radical Islam.[22]

Radicalism is closely related to certain ideologies held by a group. Ideology that contains radical teachings and values will help yield radical behavior in its adherents. The ideological position of a group needs to be considered in this study of radicalism. There are many definitions of ideology, and one of the very good definitions in describing ideology is the one put forward by Soerjanto Poespowardojo as quoted below. He defined ideology as:

> "complex knowledge and values, which as a whole becomes the basis for a person (or society) to understand the universe and the earth in its entirety and determine the basic attitude to cultivate them. Based on the understanding he/she lives in, a person captures what is seen as right and wrong, as well as what is considered good and not good."[23]

In the context of Aceh, the potential for radicalism to emerge, according to Kamaruzzaman Bustamam Ahmad (KBA), can arise from three sources of conflict, namely Christianization, deviant sects, and clashes of thought on the issue of formalizing Islamic sharia, especially between traditional Dayah circles

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[21] A.C Manullang, *Terorisme & Perang Intelijen Behauptung Ohne Beweis (Dugaan Tanpa Bukti)*, Jakarta: Manna Zaitun, 2006, p. 98.

[22] Manullang, p. 102–3.

[23] Soerjanto Poespowardojo, "Pancasila Sebagai Ideologi Ditinjau Dari Segi Pandangan Hidup Bersama," in *Pancasila Sebagai Ideologi Dalam Berbagai Bidang Kehidupan Bermasyarakat, Berbangsa Dan Bernegara*, ed. Oetojo Oesman and Alfian, Jakarta: BP-7 Pusat, 1992, p. 47.

and Salafi/Wahhabi circles. The conflict that is potential for the emergence of this radicalism is mostly local-based. To some extent, the three sources of problems have shown examples of radical behavior in society, such as the incidents occurring in various districts/cities in Aceh, e.g., in Singkil and Bireuen.[24]

The clashes between fellow Muslims in Aceh due to the Wahhabi issue have been described by a study conducted by Al Chaidar. According to Al Chaidar, the progress of the Wahhabis has been clearly visible in coloring the social life in Aceh today. Their presence is evident in mosques and *meunasahs* (small mosques), and in accordance with the main teachings they hold, they are very active in carrying out the ritual of praying five times a day in congregation. As a result, Al Chaidar pointed out that the mosques or *meunasahs* are then seen as a place of contestation to show who is the most Islamic or who is the most symbolically influential among the people. This contestation then hardens, triggers various conflicts, and has the potential to cause religious radicalism in the Acehnese community.[25]

Teaching and Understanding of Islam at Islamic Higher Education in Aceh

Even though the Islamic universities in Aceh have different views/understandings/schools in religion, there has been no indication of radicalism to date. Although debates occur among fellow lecturers due to differences in views on various religious aspects, the lecturers still respect each other's opinions and maintain friendship and communication among themselves. Similar situations are also reflected during lectures. There have been no lecturers found to impose a certain type of understanding on students. Differences of opinion are appreciated in the learning process. The teaching of Islamic courses is based on the syllabi and the lecture program units/lesson plans under the supervision of the faculties and study programs. The references used are varied, and do not only focus on a particular trend or sect. It can be said that the references are written by experts from varied backgrounds, and are not affiliated to a certain group. The faculties and study programs also monitor the lectures by checking students if there are lecturers who are not disciplined or present teaching materials that are not relevant.[26]

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[24] Kamaruzzaman Bustamam-Ahmad, *Memahami Potensi Radikalisme DanTerorisme Di Aceh*, ed. Mukhlisuddin Ilyas, Banda Aceh: Bandar Publishing, 2016, p. 107–33.

[25] Al Chaidar, "Benturan Antar Mazhab Di Aceh : Studi Tentang Konflik Internal Antara Penganut Aliran Keagamaan Islam Mazhab Syafii Dan Wahabi," 2018, 1–24, https://steemit.com/mazhab/@alchaidar/benturan-antar-mazhab-di-aceh-studi-tentang-konflik-internal-antara-penganut-aliran-keagamaan-islam-mazhab-syafii-dan-wahabi.

[26]Interview with Maizuddin, Vice Dean of Academic Affairs of Faculty of Ushuluddin and Philosophy, Universitas Islam Negeri Ar-Raniry, in Banda Aceh, June 12, 2018; Ridwan

The study of the curriculum used is very important in analyzing the religious model to be instilled in students. The spread of radical Islam utilizes the curriculum by systematically designing educational models according to their needs.[27] As such, the curriculum is highly likely to be a medium to sow the seeds of radicalism, as evidenced by the interest emerged among researchers in the country and abroad, especially after the Bali Bombing case in 2002, to research Islamic education curricula in universities and colleges, as well as in *madrasas* (Islamic schools) and *pesantrens* (Islamic boarding schools).[28]

Nevertheless, there is a positive phenomenon in which the understanding of religious teachings at Islamic universities in Aceh has been linked to the current context. Developments of social, politics, culture, science, and technology are used as case examples in solving contemporary religious problems related to the subjects taught. Thus, Islamic universities in Aceh have contextualized Islam according to the spirit of the times, without distancing themselves from the spirit and basic values of Islam as outlined in the Qur'an and Sunnah. Simply put, in terms of teaching Islamic courses in classrooms, there has been no indication of the development of radicalism in Islamic universities in Aceh. Students are taught to be rational and tolerant of differences of opinion as long as they still refer to the main sources of Islamic teachings.[29]

Nurdin, Vice Dean of Academic and Institutional Affairs of Faculty of Sharia and Law, Universitas Islam Negeri Ar-Raniry, in Banda Aceh, June 13, 2018; Agustin Hanafi, Vice Dean of Student and Alumni Affairs of Faculty of Sharia and Law, Universitas Islam Negeri Ar-Raniry, in Banda Aceh, June 13, 2018; Zulkarnain, Chair of Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam Gajah Putih, in Takengon, July 11, 2018; Head of Department of Sharia, Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam Gajah Putih, in Takengon, July 12, 2018; Ramli Yusuf, Dean of Faculty of Ushuluddin, Adab and Da'wah, Institut Agama Islam Negeri Cot Kala, in Langsa, September 18, 2018; and Mawardi, Head of Study Program of Hadith Science, Institut Agama Islam Negeri Cot Kala, in Langsa, September 18, 2018.

[27] Husniyatus Salamah Zainiyati, "Curriculum, Islamic Understanding and Radical Islamic Movements in Indonesia," *Journal of Indonesian Islam* 10, no. 2 (2016), p. 289–90, https://doi.org/10.15642/JIIS.2016.10.2.285-308.

[28] Dina Afrianty, "Islamic Education and Youth Extremism in Indonesia," *Journal of Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism* 7, no. 2 (2012), p. 138–39, https://doi.org/10.1080/18335330.2012.719095.

[29] Interview with Farid Wajdi, Rector of Universitas Islam Negeri Ar-Raniry, in Banda Aceh, June 10, 2018; Khairuddin, Dean of Faculty of Sharia and Law, Universitas Islam Negeri Ar-Raniry, in Banda Aceh, June 13, 2018; Lukman Hakim, Dean of Faculty of Ushuluddin and Philosophy, Universitas Islam Negeri Ar-Raniry, in Banda Aceh, June 12, 2018; Zulkarnain, Chair of Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam Gajah Putih, in Takengon, July 11, 2018; Zulkarnaini, Rector of Institut Agama Islam Negeri Cot Kala, in Langsa, September 20, 2018; Basri Ibrahim, , Vice Rector of Academic and Institutional Affairs of Institut Agama Islam Negeri Cot Kala, in Langsa, September 18, 2018; Iskandar Budiman, Dean of Faculty of Islamic Economics and Business, Institut Agama Islam Negeri Cot Kala, in Langsa, September 19 2018.

Potentials and Indications of Radicalism in Islamic Universities in Aceh

a. Understanding and Perceptions of Radicalism among Academics

Academics at Islamic universities in Aceh have contrasting views regarding the use of the term radical and the meaning of radical Islam. Some academics disagree with the use of the term "radical" for Islamic groups who are intolerant and impose their understanding on other parties by means of violence. They believe that radical is a positive attitude in science and religious behavior.[30] On the other hand, others agree with the mainstream opinion, including the official perspective used by the state apparatus, that radicals are a label for Islamic splinter groups that are intolerant, anti-democratic, against governments elected through a democratic system, and sometimes use acts of terror to realize their goals.[31] Those who think that radicals in religion are positive base their argument on the etymological notion of radicalism and also a trait of philosophy. Radical in philosophy is a must and its connotation is positive. Radical means root, and as in philosophy, a Muslim shall be radical. This suggests that a Muslim shall explore Islamic knowledge to its roots and then practice Islam in its entirety. For a radical Muslim, his/her life attitude will be peace-loving, moderate, and tolerant since authentic Islam teaches peace.

Muslims who promote and practice violence against their beliefs should not be called "radical Islamists". This fact is, however, in stark contrast to radical Islam as has been widely discussed. Terrorist Muslims or those who promote violence are not adherents of "radical Islam" because Islam does not teach terrorism. Terrorism and violence are not rooted in Islamic teachings. Therefore, in light of these considerations, it is necessary to search another term for perpetrators of terror and acts of violence in the name of Islam. One alternative is to replace the term "radical" with the term "extreme". Another objection to the term "radical Islam" is the fact that the one being radical or not radical is not Islam, but rather, the adherents of Islam (Muslims). Therefore, it is better to call them "radical Muslims" or "extreme Muslims" instead of "radical Islam" or "extreme Islam".

Further, there are also academics who view the issue of radicalism as highly political and closely related to the relationship between power (the government in power) and (the people of) Islam in the current political constellation of Indonesia. They argue that the current government is not sufficiently appreciative and accommodating to devout Muslims and tends to be

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[30] Maizuddin, Vice Dean of Academic and Institutional Affairs of Faculty of Ushuluddin and Philosophy, Universitas Islam Negeri Ar-Raniry, in Banda Aceh, June 12, 2018.

[31] Farid Wajdi, Rector of Universitas Islam Negeri Ar-Raniry, in Banda Aceh, June 10, 2018.

hostile to *ulemas* (Islamic scholars) who adhere to religion. This regime is considered to be very close to non-Muslim groups and non-practicing Muslim groups. The issue of radicalism, which is generally directed at Islamic groups, is very artificial and will disappear once the power at the national level shifts to other circles.[32]

Some other academics agree that people generally accept the relatively official notion as intended by "the Government". Farid Wajdi, Rector of IAIN/UIN Ar-Raniry and Chair of KOPERTAIS Aceh from 2009-2018, said that radical Islam is a group of Muslims who oppose the ideology of the state and government by departing from a rigid religious understanding and then justifying violent means to replace the current ideology or government. As far as Farid observed, there is no radical Islam in Islamic universities in Aceh, both in public and private. According to Farid, Muslims who are intolerant of differences of opinion and tend to declare others as apostate or to accuse *bid'ah* (innovation) towards other groups within the Muslim society should not be labeled as radical Islam; radical Islam is more related to the understanding and practice of religion which clashes with the state. However, Farid's view here does not reflect the views of all Muslim academics in Aceh. Some academics from Islamic campuses in Aceh believe that being intolerant, declaring other Muslims as infidel, and/or accusing other people's practices of *bid'ah* in religion can also be radical attitudes.

b.   Potentials of Radicalism in Islamic Universities in Aceh

In the views of university leaders, lecturers, and leaders of student organizations at Islamic universities in Aceh, there is no evidence of religious radicalism within their campuses. This claim was affirmed by the Rector and Vice Rector of UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh, the Rector and Vice Rector of IAIN Zawiyah Cot Kala Langsa, the Chair and Deputy Chair of STAIN Gajah Putih Takengon, the Dean and Vice Dean of UIN Ar-Raniry, the Dean and Vice Dean of IAIN Zawiyah Cot Kala Langsa, the Head of the Department, and Head of Study Program of STAIN Gajah Putih, Takengon, as well as the student leaders and student activists at UIN Ar-Raniry,[33] the student leaders and student activists

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[32] Interview with several lecturers at PTKIN in Aceh, July - September 2018.
[33] Interview with Zainuddin, Vice Rector of Student and Alumni Affairs of Institut Agama Islam Negeri Cot Kala, in Langsa, September 18, 2018; Interview with Ali Hasjmi, Vice Chair of Academic Affairs of Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam Gajah Putih, in Takengon, July 10, 2018; Interview with Fuad Ramli, Vice Dean of Student and Alumni Affairs of Faculty of Ushuluddin and Philosophy, Universitas Islam Negeri Ar-Raniry, di Banda Aceh, June 12, 2018; Interview with Dedi Syahputra, President of Student Council of Universitas Islam Negeri Ar-Raniry, in Banda Aceh, August 10 2018; and Focus Group Discussion on August 25, 2018.

at STAIN Gajah Putih Takengon,[34] and the student leaders and student activists at IAIN Cot Kala Langsa.[35]

The Rector of UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh for the 2009-2018 period stated that radicalism did not develop at UIN Ar-Raniry. In a similar vein, Zulkarnaini, Rector of IAIN Zawiyah Cot Kala Langsa also said that radicalism did not develop within IAIN Langsa, adding that even though the issue has been quite a stir at the national level, it is however not a worrying issue among Islamic higher education institutions in Aceh, especially at IAIN Langsa. On that basis, Zulkarnaini remarked that there was no special strategy or measure prepared to anticipate the development of radicalism on campus as it was unnecessary.

In line with that, the Chair of STAIN Gajah Putih, Zulkarnain described that there were no signs of the development of dangerous radicals within the university. However, Zulkarnain mentioned that there was once a student who argued about Islam and the state ideology of Pancasila in the university around 2017 which surfaced during a dialogue session in a Public Lecture whose resource person was from the Indonesian National Police Headquarters. In his view, this was the failure of the civics lecturers who could not fully explain the relationship between the State Ideology of Pancasila and Islam. If the civics lecturers had understood this topic well and explained it properly, this matter would have not arisen. Nevertheless, as such cases have been small and manageable, they do not develop towards a destructive direction. Further, the lack of development of radical understanding on campus is also corroborated by the statements of a number of interviewed lecturers.

According to several resource persons, the lack of radical understanding among the academic community of Islamic higher education in Aceh can be mapped into several reasons, as follows:

1. Islam is studied scientifically and thoroughly in Islamic universities, and thus, it does not lead to erroneous interpretations. Radicalism easily arises in public universities because the lesson hours of religious courses are very limited, around two to four credits, and then the needs of some of these students for religious studies and development are taken over by religious study groups which are outside the control of the campus authorities. From there, the radical groups recruit and train the students.

2. There is disclosure of information and communication. In Islamic campuses in Aceh, matters relating to teaching, discussion, and religious development take place in a fairly dialogical atmosphere, respecting diversity of opinion, and emphasizing rationality in understanding religious teachings. The university leaders, especially at the Study

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[34] Focus Group Discussion, Takengon, July 12, 2018.
[35] Focus Group Discussion, Langsa, September 19, 2018.

Program level, are aware of the progress of lectures that take place in classrooms. The lecturers also interact and communicate actively with each other. The vice deans or vice chairs in charge of student affairs and the heads of student organizations have sufficient insight and control within certain limits regarding the group maps and student dynamics in their environment. Academically, the university leadership, especially the heads and secretaries of the study programs, generally conducts intense communication with students, especially with the class coordinators and student unit coordinators, to monitor the lecture process. If there are complaints from students, the study programs will directly communicate with the lecturers concerned. With such a situation, there is little possibility of strange and closed matters, such as religious radicalism, to occur.

3. There is supervision from the Vice Deans for Academic Affairs and the Heads of Study Programs on the syllabi, lesson plans, and the lecture process. Every lecturer is required to submit a syllabus and lesson plans to the study programs. Study programs can oversee the materials being taught and the references used to by the lecturers for the courses they teach. The leadership also pays attention to the smoothness and comfort of the learning process in lecture rooms.

4. The study programs employs students as supervisors and assessors of the lecture material and process. A questionnaire is circulated regularly every semester for the students.

5. The social, cultural, and political environment in Aceh accommodates religion in the constitutional system and positive law that apply in Aceh. Religious radicalism can emerge when the freedom to practice Islamic law is limited or repressed. In the context of Aceh, such an issue is irrelevant because the state has granted Special Autonomy to Aceh with one of its powers being to implement Islamic Sharia thoroughly, including in the criminal field, where lawbreakers will be tried with the Sharia Qanun (regional bylaws) stipulated by the Aceh Government, in exchange for the Criminal Code (KUHP) that applies nationally within the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia.

In addition, the leadership of student organizations, both from intra- and extra-campus student organizations also asserted the lack of development of religious radicalism in Islamic Universities in Aceh. Within intra-campus student organizations of the three PTKIN studied, such as the Student Senates, Student Councils, and Study Program Student Associations, the religious activities are quite dynamic and there are various groups with their respective colors, all of which seem to be well-controlled and safe. Likewise, the student activists and leaders of extra-campus student institutions, such as the Islamic Student

Association (HMI) and the Islamic Student Action Unit (KAMMI), who have been active in the Districts/Cities where the Islamic campuses are situated also affirmed that no spread of radical ideas existed there.

Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) once entered the campuses of UIN Ar-Raniry, IAIN Cot Kala Langsa and STAIN Gajah Putih Takengon and tried to exert influence; however, they had not yet developed. The entry of HTI to campus was confirmed by the leadership of student organizations and student activists at the three campuses. In their opinions, there are currently very few HTI followers in each of these three campuses. After HTI was banned, they no longer have activities on campus, but are indicated to form groups with new names and carry out activities outside campus. In Aceh, however, the interviewees stated that HTI is not seen as a dangerous radical group. HTI and its followers are seen as an acceptable movement of Islam because they do not impose their understanding on other parties, do not commit violence, and also do not declare other groups outside theirs as apostate.

The absence of radical religious ideas and movements in the three Islamic higher education institutions sampled in this study was also acknowledged by parties outside the campus in the districts/cities where these campuses are located. The Deputy Mayor of Langsa, Marzuki Hamid, ensured that IAIN Zawiyah Cot Kala Langsa is free from radicalism and its existence has been seen as constructive in religious development and activities in the city of Langsa.[36] *Keuchik* (Village Head) of Sidodadi of Langsa City, whose village is directly adjacent to the campus fence and rooms/rental houses are rented by many IAIN Langsa students, also stated that there were no suspicious movements which caused unrest among the community. In terms of the diversity of students and lecturers on this campus, the *Keuchik* said the relationship between the community in the village and the campus has been quite good.[37] The chair of the Ulema Consultative Assembly and head of security forces in Central Aceh also asserted that there were no radical ideas and movements at STAIN Gajah Putih Takengon.[38]

1. Interconnection between Campus, Environment, and Family

There is a new trend in Islamic universities in Aceh wherein more and more students are wearing face veils. Among the universities studied, STAIN Gajah Putih Takengon in the Gayo Highlands, Central Aceh is a campus with an interesting phenomenon in terms of the presence of face-veiled female students.

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[36] Interview with Marzuki Hamid, Deputy Mayor of Langsa, in Langsa, on September 19, 2018.

[37] Interview with Village Head of Sidodadi, Langsa, September 18, 2018.

[38] Interview with Chair of Ulema Consultative Assembly, Central Aceh, Takengon, July 13, 2018.

Compared to other Islamic universities in Aceh, the proportion of face-veiled female students is relatively high in this university, and generally they wear face veils after undergoing several semesters of life as students. However, the process that leads them to a significant conversion in religion and to wearing face veils has not been through the lectures on campus. They have become more religious and wear face veils through a mentoring process from campus *da'wah* (Islamic propagation) organizations and also through the guidance of groups that operate outside the campus.[39]

In this regard, the leaders and lecturers at Islamic universities in Aceh believed that the existence of face-veiled female students needs to be respected as a form of one's religious belief and practice. They appreciated the presence of face-veiled female students as a form of freedom of expression in religion and requested that the students should not be suspected. Nevertheless, there were one or two cases where some lecturers were not very happy with the presence of face-veiled students in their classes and asked the students to remove their veils during their classes. However, the face-veiled students rejected the request. In another case at IAIN Zawiyah Cot Kala in Langsa City, the parents of the students even met with the university leadership and protested the attitude of the lecturers who objected to their children wearing the veils in attending lectures. With mediation from the university leadership, the case could be resolved as the students could still attend lectures while still wearing the face veils. At IAIN Langsa, the case can then become a precedent that lecturers should not discriminate against any face-veiled female student and shall respect her right to express her belief.

Some of the face-veiled female students at Islamic universities have worn face veils long before becoming students, whereas others wear face veils within a certain time after studying at university. Even though many students wear face veils during their studies, the choice of wearing face veils is more influenced by factors outside the campus, and not due to religious education obtained from lecturers during classes. At STAIN Gajah Putih Takengon, for example, most students begin to wear face veils in the fourth semester and above of their studies. Religious beliefs and practices is the reason that makes them choose to wear face veils, which is obtained through religious guidance outside of (official) academic lectures.

Some of the face-veiled students at Islamic universities in Aceh are alumni of the Traditional Dayah in Aceh and they have been wearing veils since studying at the Aliyah/Dayah (secondary education) level and continued to do so when they are in college. On the other hand, others are the followers of the Campus Da'wah Institute (LDK) group, some are the followers of Hizbut Tahrir (even though the

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[39] Focus Group Discussion with students of Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam Gajah Putih, Takengon, July 12, 2018.

government had disbanded HTI, this group still exists and operates under a new identity), and some are "unidentified groups." Female students from these various groups generally begin to wear face veils during their studies at university. There are even those who wear face veils without the knowledge of their parents as they start using face veils after leaving their houses. The influence of the study groups, information, and persuasion of close friends have a high impact on the changes of the behavior of students. The study conducted by Mun'im Sirri, for example, found that 35% of students were influenced by radical groups through study groups, and 46% were influenced by information from friends.[40]

There were two female students from one of the Islamic universities in Aceh who started wearing face veils in the fourth semester and had since shown radical signs. Both were from the Islamic Economics Study Program, and they attended an off-campus study group. After joining the group, they began to criticize the lecturers and have negative views on various matters, especially lecture materials. For example, when a lecturer explained about Islamic banking, the student said that the banking system was a *bid'ah* because it did not exist at the time of the Prophet. Several times they left the class and did not came back again until the class was over because they did not agree with the material taught in the lecture. The two of them eventually stopped their studies in the middle of semester four. The parents of one of the face-veiled students did not even know that their child had already worn a face veil and had also stopped studying before they came to campus and inquired about the progress of their child's studies at the university. Their child came out of the house wearing a usual veil; however, she would wore a face veil after she was no longer around her parents and family.

One of the two students came from an underprivileged family and her parents were immigrants from the island of Java. The reason for dropping out of college as conveyed to her friends who are still in college was because she has been more concerned with the affairs of the hereafter. Another student, according to a friend from the same study program, has been a smart student and often expressed opinions or asked questions about lessons during lectures. Her attitude/behavior had changed since attending a religious study group and she then started using a face veil in the fourth semester. She also became quieter and tended to be passive in lectures before finally choosing to drop out completely. There has been a rumor, though unconfirmed yet, that she got married to a religious teacher from a study group she attended outside the campus. The possibility that students may be exposed to radical Islam and undergo a relatively extreme change in

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[40] Mun'im Sirry, "Muslim Student Radicalism and Self-Deradicalization in Indonesia," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 31, no. 2 (2020), p. 7, https://doi.org/10.1080/09596410.2020.1770665.

attitude and behavior has been confirmed by other studies conducted on the development of radical Islam in various major universities in Indonesia.[41]

The behavior shown by the two face-veiled female students above, nonetheless, shows the contradiction between devout religious practices and honest personalities. On the one hand, female students become more pious and obedient after attending religious lectures, but on the other hand, they lie to their parents concealing the fact that they are no longer in college. This suggests that there are other "religious matters" that are more urgent, making lying to parents is permissible for that reason. There is a possibility that indoctrination/brainwashing is carried out at the study group so that the students are willing to sacrifice college and lie to their parents under the pretext of religion. The Ulema Consultative Assmebly and security forces in the area where the incident occurred said they did not suspect any particular party spreading radical ideas in their area. However, we consider this phenomenon needs to be explored further so that no particular party can instill a dangerous ideology that is too late to anticipate.

This study found that the way to commute, between home and campus, is an open space for the recruitment and cadre of students to join an exclusive Islamic group. On the road between home and campus, supervision from the campus and family is lost, and so students are open to being drawn to other places to be nurtured and become cadres. In such a place, students are trained according to the religious understanding and practice of the group that recruits them. With the exclusive pattern of indoctrination of understanding and practice of the sharia and the absence of the campus and family to accompany, the risk of students being affected by radicalism is high. Furthermore, the students who have been recruited will also recruit new cadres on campus and be brought to the exclusive sharia coaching place. In this case, the campus generally considers the students to have returned home and the family at home assumes that their children are still on campus. Both parties lose monitor and control over the students. This path is a return route between home and campus. Therefore, the campus and family need to pay close attention to this gap in countering student radicalization by external parties whose influence will give an impact on campus and family in particular, as well as on the society, nation and state on a wider scale. The role of state institutions, especially the intelligence, as well as civil groups is deemed necessary in closing the gap that exists between the family and the campus.

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[41] Bagong Suyanto, Mun'im Sirry, and Rahma Sugihartati, "Pseudo-Radicalism and the De-Radicalization of Educated Youth in Indonesia," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 0, no. 0 (2019), p. 9, https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2019.1654726.

Conclusion

This study concludes that, in general, religious radicalism has not developed within Islamic universities in Aceh, as evidenced from the proper teaching and implementation of Islamic teachings by the universities and from the lack of possibility of radical groups infiltrating and recruiting cadres on campus. In addition, there is also no indication of the development of radical ideas in the teaching of Islamic studies academically/formally at Islamic universities in Aceh, be it in the curriculum, syllabi, lesson plans, and teaching process in classrooms. Islamic teachings are quite moderate and still adhere to the Qur'an, Hadith and authoritative references from various sources and time periods, from classical to contemporary eras using a contextual approach. Lecturers of Islamic courses have also directed their students to consider the harmony of the texts and contexts in studying a religious theme. The lecturers are also quite tolerant of differences in understanding, both towards fellow lecturers and students. The lecturers and students of Islamic universities in Aceh come from diverse backgrounds, and thus, their understanding and religious practices also vary.

In particular, however, the study reveals that Islamic universities in Aceh have no specific strategy to anticipate, prevent, or deal with radicalism on their campuses. The leaders of Islamic universities in Aceh generally think that the issue of Islamic radicalism is not worrying for their campuses. They rely on the system that has been running to date to control and prevent their universities from being infiltrated by and developed towards radicalism. Nonetheless, as there had been the case of two female students indicated to be radical at one of the Islamic universities in Aceh, although unconfirmed properly yet, Islamic universities in Aceh need to prepare strategic steps to anticipate and prevent the entry of radicalism and de-radicalization if there is anyone among the academic community, whether lecturers, students or employees, who is exposed and affected by radical understanding.

Further, learning from the case of the recruitment of the two female students, the families whose children/family members are studying should not neglect their children once they leave their houses to go to campus, believing that the children/family members will stay on campus and under the authority of the campus. On the way to campus and on the way home, students can be attracted by radical groups without the knowledge of the campus and their families. On their way to commute, when the control of the family and campus is loosen, the role of the state (security/intelligence) and civil society groups is needed, so that the students in particular and the academic community in general are free from the threat of recruitment by radical Islamic groups. The families should also occasionally keep an eye on the whereabouts of the children/family members

between campus and home, whether the route they take is straight or circular, or whether they disappear in the alleys of mystery, before finally arriving back home.

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