

## The Dilemma of Islamic Scholars in Responding to the COVID-19 Outbreak in Manado City

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### ABSTRACT

The study explores the evolving perceptions of Muslim communities in Manado City regarding religious scholars, particularly in light of the Indonesian Ulema Council's directives on home worship during the COVID-19 pandemic. Using a social jurisprudence philosophy-based approach, the research aims to discern whether the resistance exhibited signifies normalized behavior or poses a threat to religious existence. Spanning from April to November 2020, the study employed field investigations, including observations, interviews with five key informants, and documentation analysis within an interactive model. The findings highlight a sense of hesitation among Manado's clerical bodies, leading to discord and inconsistencies in societal practices, consequently redirecting followers' attention towards mosque imams. However, interpreting this resistance through a social jurisprudence lens suggests positive developments that may not jeopardize the religious foundations of Manado Muslims. Rather, their defiance could be seen as constructive feedback aimed at reinstating the prominence and authority of scholars among Islamic devotees. This shift in focus should be acknowledged as a means to strengthen the relationship between scholars and their followers within the religious landscape.

**Keywords:** Clerical authority; COVID-19; Manado City; Religious scholars; Social jurisprudence.

## INTRODUCTION

In March 2020, the Indonesian city of Manado, a popular tourist destination amongst Chinese visitors, enforced stringent restrictions on entry in light of the coronavirus outbreak infecting over 1,500 and claiming 136 lives nationwide (Nugroho, 2020).

Early speculation on social media circles implicated consumption of bats (*paniki*) by non-Muslim locals, a forbidden practice in Islam, as divine castigation (Wijaya, 2020; Lesmana, 2020). However, subsequent confirmation that the first COVID-19 case was a returning Muslim pilgrim from Mecca dispelled such premises (Sabu, 2020). Nevertheless, the exponential spread of the virus with identification of new clusters soon eclipsed initial religious posturing. Authorities responded with emergency public health measures including work-from-home arrangements, online schooling and calls for household worship (Purnamasari, 2020; Mukaromah, 2020).

National and regional Islamic scholarly bodies like Manado City's Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) aligned with government policies by advising against congregational prayers in mosques for infected individuals (Fajrian, 2020) and suspension of communal Ramadan and Eid festivities (Taher, 2020; Mudassir, 2020). However, field evidence indicates mosques defied orders for physical distancing during mandatory worship like the Friday noon congregation. This paper investigates the shifts in public compliance to scholars against the backdrop of global health anxieties. Preliminary findings hint at diminishing clerical influence due to internal discordance and inconsistencies in religious policy applications, consequently weakening social cohesion.

Authorities expressed grave concerns regarding mass gatherings for Friday, Ramadan and Eid prayers in Manado City mosques, given the ethnically and religiously diverse demographics alongside categorization as a COVID-19 red zone. Prohibitions on such non-essential congregations requiring close physical proximity were deemed necessary to mitigate virus transmission risks and prevent new clusters, especially from houses of worship defying social distancing guidelines.

However, field evidence indicates select religious leaders continued hosting crowded services, implicitly endorsed by segments of Manado Muslims attending customary marriage and bereavement ceremonies with blatant pandemic dismissals. Previous studies found high religiosity among Manado adherents (Rajafi, Hamhij & Ladiki, 2020) and logical premises underlying Indonesian Ulema Council fatwas that eliminated unfavorable perceptions against clerical entities (Sholeh, 2020). Nevertheless, the aforementioned public behaviors necessitated a re-evaluation of shifting societal attitudes towards scholars, particularly regarding compliance to directives on home worship.

This article aims to explore this phenomenon by investigating whether resistance constitutes benign developments or threatens the enduring religious landscape. The interpretations hold relevance given the breadth of political, cultural and economic transformations engendered by the unprecedented pandemic.

The aforementioned is further corroborated in subsequent research by Parluhutan Siregar et al., which explicates that the active role of religious leaders is pivotal in guiding religious communities through difficult times such as the Covid-19 pandemic. Their collaborative efforts in responding to the pandemic reflect the social responsibility and humanity borne by religious leaders in serving and protecting their followers (Siregar & Hsb, 2020). Apart from religious figures, the government has also proven instrumental to the success of pandemic countermeasures (Masruroh, Andrean, & Arifah, 2021). Additionally, at the local level, traditional leaders have played a major role in optimizing Covid-19 pandemic prevention (Sugitanata, 2020). This indicates public awareness of the Covid-19 pandemic facts, resulting in various impacts such as effects on tradition and culture (Azhari & Sugitanata, 2021), education (Abdusshomad, 2020), the economy (Yamali & Putri, 2020), and psychological effects (Hanum, 2020). But, in this context when the pandemic period came, it was as if the ulama did not have a complete place in front of the Muslim community. Everyone seemed to have become new ulama by making decisions that were contrary to the authoritative ulama.

Therefore, this article specifically details research efforts undertaken to analyze shifts in the perceptions of Muslim communities in Manado City towards Muslim scholars due to disregard for the decisions of the Indonesian Ulema Council regarding the implementation of worship at home during the Covid-19 pandemic. This research aims to explore changes in the perspectives of Muslims and provide answers to fundamental questions about whether this situation is considered normal or otherwise. This analysis is carried out taking into account the potential impacts that may endanger the existence of religious communities. As such, this research not only attempts to discover novelties in Muslim resistance to these policies, but also highlights their impact on social cohesion and the existence of religious communities amidst a pandemic that has transformed many aspects of societal life.

## **METHODS**

This research examines the changing dynamics between Islamic scholars and religious followers in Manado City during the COVID-19 outbreak, framed through the philosophical lens of social jurisprudence theory. As espoused by seminal texts, this analytical approach facilitates deeper investigation into the cultural values and religious perspectives guiding the actions and decisions made by clerics, as well as how these are received by their devotees (Mahfudz, 2004; Yafie, 1994; Yulianto, 2017). Field data was gathered between April and November 2020 by leveraging qualitative techniques like observations, interviews and documents (Sugiyono, 2017). Direct monitoring of worship activities across

mosques revealed continued congregations despite calls from governmental and religious agencies appealing for suspension on public health grounds. However, this resilience equally manifested in society defiance towards mandated restrictions by organizing customary ceremonies. Such behaviors reflect the significant attachments of religious followers towards fulfilling their duties amidst adversity, as emphasized by the researcher. Ultimately, appeals from clerical bodies to limit communal rituals remained ineffective as believers upheld traditional religious practices.

Interviews were conducted with five key informants - administrators from the Manado City branch of the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI), imams and mosque leaders, given their intimacy with clerical pandemic deliberations alongside public sentiments (Sugiyono, 2017). Additionally, ordinary citizens partaking in regular activities lent multiple perspectives. Stringent confidentiality protocols protected respondent identities during this sensitive investigation, reflecting rigorous ethics in handling risky personal data. Employing diverse approaches from telephonic to in-person confidential meetings also showcase the methodical diligence underpinning successive revelations.

Thereafter, an interactive four-stage model systematically processed the collated data (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Comprehensive documentation marked the initial compilation phase. Next, the iterative reduction phase filtered information along emerging societal shifts. The third display phase classified themes aligned with the central research inquiry on changing public compliance towards scholars. Finally, evidence-based inferences deduced from critical analysis of the central dilemma and associated findings provided conclusive interpretations on the transforming equation between Islamic scholars and followers against the pandemic backdrop.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Religion correlation with Religious Obedience

Muslims in religion is firmly bound by the signs that have been determined by Religion, namely the Al-Qur'an and Al-Hadith, apart from that they also take advantage of the heirs of the Prophet who fully have the authoritative right to explain the purposes of the Shari'ah. in the Al-Qur'an and Al-Hadith by way of *ijtihad* (al-Azdi, 1955). There are some products named, such as *fiqh*, *fatwa*, *qadha*, and so on, which have a strong function to serve as reading and guidance in religion for the Muslim community.

The very detailed guide above in the context of socio-religious stressed the importance of the professionalism of *ulama* who were really scared and cautious to Allah (Q.S. Fatir: 28). With the basic thought, it was arised a story explaining:

العلماء ثلاثة : عالم بالله عالم بأمر الله، وعالم بالله ليس بعالم بأمر الله، وعالم بأمر الله ليس بعالم بالله . فالعالم بالله وبأمر الله : الذي يخشى الله ويعلم الحدود والفرائض . والعالم بالله ليس بعالم بأمر الله : الذي يخشى الله

ولا يعلم الحدود ولا الفرائض. والعالم بأمر الله ليس بعالم بالله: الذي يعلم الحدود والفرائض، ولا يخشى الله عز وجل

“Three typologies of ulama: understanding the existence of Allah and understanding His commands, understanding the existence of Allah but not understanding His commands, understanding his commands but not understanding Allah. Ulama who understand Allah and His commands are people who fear Allah and know about the rules and obligations (which are imposed on him). Scholars who understand Allah but not His commands are: people who fear Allah but do not know about the rules and obligations (which are imposed on them). As for ulama who understand his command but not Himself, then he is a person who knows about the rules and obligations (which are imposed on him) but is not afraid of Allah swt.” (al-Damsyiqi, 1999)

The typology above reinforces that the ulama are not cultural brokers (Geertz, 1960) or only become the mouthpiece of the rulers (Kuru, 2019), or even transform from religious leader to opinion maker (Ridwan, Syahputra, Tarigan, & Siregar, 2019). This kind of depiction is important considering the authority (*muru'ah*) of the fatwa as a legal product of the ulama will fade in line with the ulama's low authority in front of the community.

In the study of ushul al-fiqh, a review of the figure of the ulama is discussed in several sub-materials, such as the material *al-jarh wa al-ta'dil* in the hadith study (Widodo & Irfanudin, 2020) which specifically selects the personal hadith narrators whether they are fair or defective in ethics and capability, the material on al-mujtahid in the discussion of *al-ijtihad* (Nadawi, 2006) which in detail classifies the competence of reviewers of Islamic law from time to time, and so on. This scientific study is an indication of how Islam draws a strong correlation between religious figures (ulama) and the products of their thoughts. In the conclusion, if the better the public's view of the clerical person, the better the acceptance of his thinking and vice versa.

Yusuf al-Qaradhawi has specifically warned about the importance of maintaining the authority of a fatwa, even for the sake of asserting his opinion, he wrote a book about it with the title *al-Fatwa bain al-Indhibath wa al-Tasayyub* (al-Qaradhawi, 1408), even though its acceptance in society, his opinions also received harsh criticism from other ulamas, such as the presence of the book *al-Qaradhawi fi al-Ara'* (al-Sayyid, 2002).

Essentially, the directions that come out of the ulama can be categorized as religious products, because they come from Allah and the traditions established by His messenger Muhammad to encourage his followers to become better at achieving happiness in this world and the hereafter. Therefore, when it is categorized as a religious product, it must be avoided from all forms of harm and bring benefit.

Strong criticism of the mainstream movement to create *maslahat* values in society so that a complete relationship between the ulama as role models and the ummah as followers can be seen from the great philosophy of social fiqh theory, both initiated by Ali Yafie and Sahal Mahfudz. Social fiqh not only directs all abilities to produce legal products but also directs the legal products to be effective in society.

Imam al-Ghazali explains (Al-Shufi, 2002:

إنَّ الكلامَ إذا خرج من القلب وقع في القلب، وإذا خرج من اللسان حدّه الأذان

*“In fact, if the expression is born from the heart, it will be implanted in the heart, but if it is born from speech alone, it will only reach the ears.”*

### **Confusion of MUI Members in Manado City: Between Regulation and Reality**

The hesitation of MUI members in Manado City can be seen from the implementation of MUI circulars in the community, especially regarding worship in mosques during the pandemic. Based on data from the Islamic Community Guidance Section of the Office of the Ministry of Religion of the City of Manado, it was found that the number of mosques in Manado City was 222 (two hundred twenty-two) mosques and 20 (twenty) mushalla spread across eleven sub-districts (Bachruddin, 2020), but based on the results of the data in the field, it was found that more than two hundred and two mosques in ten sub-districts, outside Bunaken Islands District.

The entire mosque, now due to the impact of Covid-19, has begun to be divided into two classifications based on the zoning for the spread of the coronavirus, namely mosques in the red zone and mosques in the green zone. The area categorized as a red zone in North Sulawesi Province is Manado City (Rafii, 2020), and only one sub-district in Manado City is included in the green zone, namely Bunaken Islands (Budiharso, 2020).

Through observations that have been carried out, a fairly unique data was found, where for the 28 (twenty-eight) mosques in Paal Dua District, there are 17 (seventeen) mosques that continue to perform Friday, tarawih, and Eid prayers after There was an appeal from the MUI, 5 (five) mosques that did not perform the three services, and 6 (six) mosques that were not obtained any information. For Wenang Subdistrict, out of 14 (fourteen) mosques, there are 8 (eight) mosques that did not follow MUI's appeal, 5 (five) who implemented the appeal, and 1 (one) for which no information was obtained.

Mosques in Wanea District, out of a total of 19 (nineteen) mosques, 11 (eleven) mosques did not follow the appeal, 6 (six) followed, and 2 (two) information was not obtained. For Tikala Subdistrict, out of a total of 15 (fifteen) mosques, 9 (nine) mosques did not follow the appeal from MUI, 2 (two) carried out the appeal, and 4 (four) had no information. Mapanget Subdistrict, with a total of

26 (twenty-six) mosques, there are 20 (twenty) mosques that continue to carry out Friday, tarawih, and Eid prayers, while 6 (six) mosques follow the MUI's appeal not to carry out these three services in the congregation at the mosque.

Tuminting sub-district recorded 28 (twenty-eight) mosques, with the classification of 3 (three) mosques implementing the MUI appeal, 17 (seventeen) mosques that did not follow the appeal, and 8 (eight) unconfirmed mosques. Singkil Subdistrict, with a total of 28 (twenty-eight) mosques, there are 24 (twenty-four) mosques that continue to carry out routine Friday, tarawih, and Eid prayers, and 4 (four) mosques follow the appeal not to carry out the three services in the mosque.

Sario sub-district with a total of 8 (eight) mosques is divided into two, 4 (four) mosques that continue to carry out Friday, tarawih, and Eid prayers in congregation, and 4 (four) other mosques close all crowd activities in the mosque including the implementation of the three services. Malalayang sub-district with a total of 15 (fifteen) mosques recorded, it was found that there were 7 (seven) mosques that did not follow MUI's appeal, 2 (two) closed their mosques and 6 (six) which were not confirmed. Meanwhile, in Bunaken Subdistrict, with a total of 21 (twenty-one mosques), there are 19 (nineteen) mosques that continue to carry out these prayers, and 2 (two) mosques that do not.

Based on the above field data, the percentage of the classification of the implementation of the MUI appeal by Muslims in Manado City is; 67.33% confirmed that they did not follow MUI's appeal because they kept opening their mosques to carry out Friday, tarawih, and Eid prayers in congregation during the pandemic; 19.30% who followed MUI's appeal by closing crowd activities in mosques, including the implementation of Friday, tarawih and Eid prayers during the pandemic; and 13.37% of mosques whose data is not completely confirmed.

There are three strong reasons why many mosques continue to carry out these three services after an appeal from MUI, and some have even closed one Friday worship activity at the beginning of the appeal from MUI, and then reopened, namely; (1) the thought that as a Muslim one should only fear Allah who "created" the virus and not fear the virus created by Allah SWT; (2) the belief that worship of Allah in His house (mosque) will surely be guarded by Him; (3) and fear of sin when leaving Friday prayers three times in a row (Neno, 2020). Apart from that, it is also due to religious figures who keep scheduling themselves as Khatib Friday, resulting in a perception in the community that "dorang le sembayang, torang nyanda" they (religious leaders) just pray (Friday in mosques). , why don't we (Friday prayers at the mosque).

As for the mosques that closed crowd activities including Friday, tarawih and Eid al-Fitr services after the MUI appeal, based on observations, because; (1) constituting "red plate" mosques and those located in office environments, such as the Regional Police, Military Regional Command, police dormitories, schools, colleges, and so on; (2) is in a downtown area that is constantly monitored and/or

has received a warning from the security forces; (3) located in a non-Muslim majority area.

When confirmed to the Secretary of the Manado City MUI regarding the implementation of monitoring and evaluation from the Manado MUI after the issuance of the circular, it was explained that since the first circular that came out on March 3 (three), structured monitoring and evaluation has never been carried out, but at least partially it has been done by visiting several mosques and information was obtained that there was the disappointment from the Muslim community so that the government questioned the tightening that only applies in places of worship by the government, while in other crowded places the government has not acted decisively, and the second is the lack of religious knowledge in Muslim communities generally because they are accustomed to being a congregation and unable to become a priest, especially during tarawih and Eid (Liputo, 2020).

The interesting thing is that the appeal decided by a joint meeting, even attended by members of the Manado MUI, was denied by several members, including those who attended the meeting, meaning that there has been inconsistency from MUI members in implementing the appeal because of confusion between regulations and reality in the field, where the Muslim community of Manado City still desperately needs their religious leaders to provide enlightenment.

This indecision continued. Until the peak, there was a reaction of rejection from one of the MUI members for a decision he considered inappropriate so that he took steps to resign from the MUI member in Manado City. When confirmed to the MUI Secretary, it was explained that the differences in the MUI management were very sharp and some members had not yet been able to adopt an example, where unity had to be put forward and the decision was only to bring benefit to the community at large (Kinontoa, 2020; Liputo, 2020).

As a result of the confusion and inconsistency of several MUI members who are also role models for Muslims in Manado City, this has implications for the ineffectiveness of the MUI's appeal in front of the community, and of course also creates structured confusion in the community, because their role models are fragmented in providing instructions for their routine worship. This certainly reinforces the assumption that Covid-19 will not harm them, especially when this assumption is "peppered" with hoax news such as mosques in China that are visited by non-Muslims to participate in worship to avoid Covid-19.

### **Cleric Position as Ulama in Responding to Covid 19 Issue in Society**

Electronic devices and social media in the covid 19 pandemic season indirectly contributed to "clouding" the situation with the strengthening of disinformation about the virus, this indirectly strengthened Nichols' thesis about the death of expertise because everyone seems to have become experts because they

dominate the stage thanks to the internet (Nichols, 2017) is included in explaining the covid 19 virus.

Another problem is that the transmission of information about Covid 19 is also not fully accepted by the public, the impact is that they will innocently reject various forms of information about the dangers of the Covid 19 virus for the public. At least, based on the results of interviews with BTM and priest administrators in the region who continue to carry out normal social and religious activities in Manado City, after the announcement of a new normal by the local government with the issuance of the Governor of North Sulawesi Regulation Number 44 of 2020 concerning Guidelines for Adaptation of Habits Recently Towards a Productive and Safe Covid-19 Society in North Sulawesi Province, the most reasons for community rejection were obtained, namely:

1. The Covid 19 virus is only a conspiracy of the United States and Israel in producing the virus as an agent of biological warfare. This issue is getting stronger in society considering the strength of American president Donald Trump's politics at that time in defending Israel and his rejection of Muslim migrants in America, so that the assumption was born that the Covid 19 virus is their production to kill Muslims, for that as a Muslim it does not need to be afraid of their "trickery" because Allah SWT will always keep His people from their "trickery", as Allah SWT promised in His Word QS. Ali Imran verse 54;
2. Virus Covid 19 came from forbidden animals consumed in China, and it is intended by the Chinese government deployed in Wuhan which is the majority of people are Muslims, then as a Muslim who does not consume animals that are forbidden by the religion will not be affected by the covid 19 virus, this can be seen from the video that was widespread and viral, where non-Muslim people participated in visiting mosques in Wuhan to pray to avoid the Covid 19 virus outbreak;
3. The Covid 19 virus is an ordinary creature that is the same as humans and not God that needs to be feared, if someone is infected with the virus then it is their destiny to feel their bad destiny, a destiny that has been determined by Allah SWT, so that when someone is afraid of his creatures or creations then it can indicate shirk;
4. The peak is in the aspect of biased information on the number of patients infected with the virus, recovered, and died between the center and the regions, with the formation of virus spread zones, namely red for the high spread of the virus, orange high enough, medium yellow, and green without cases. This issue becomes very serious because the origin is a negative stigma where there is a game of the Hospital in giving a positive label to its patients, and even those who died in the hospital, so the public assumes that information about the Covid 19 virus is just a hospital game to get the Covid budget, which is large enough disbursed by the Central Government.

Based on the issues above, several priests of mosques draw a line of demarcation with government regulations and ulama to keep its obligations either

in mosques or in public, and even when the government prohibits conducting the ceremony in April, a few priests remain to carry out the activities of the residents' marriage contracts but in secret (Rajafi & Hamhij, 2020).

The accumulation of all the issues and assumptions in society about Covid 19 above is, the reaction of forcibly picking up the body of a Muslim patient with the status of Patient Under Supervision, PDP, and this was also witnessed by the priest, they even damaged the hospital where the patient was treated because of the family believe that the patient died not because of Covid 19, because there was no history of contact with people who were confirmed positive for Covid 19 and trips outside the area, as well as information that the hospital had bribed the family so that the management of the body could be taken care of as the body of a Covid 19 patient, so the Mayor ordered the Hospital to report the case to the authorities (KompasTv Manado, 2020).

Based on information in the field, in the process of taking care of the corpse at the hospital, Sir Imam (a term for a village religious figure who received a decree from the government in Manado City) became a role model for residents and families carrying out the duties of fardhu kifayah (Manado term) as in the usual corpse (Tim Manado Bacirita, 2020), there is no look on the face of fear from Mr. Imam and his family if they will be infected with Covid 19.

Whereas at the funeral home, residents who came for consolation (Manado's term) were also enthusiastic so that the harmony could not be stopped and the authorities were unable to dissuade them. The effect of the incident of the hospital deception to the forced pickup of the corpse and this is also known by SirImam, psychologically reinforcing the distrust of the Muslim community with the existence of the coronavirus in the city of Manado. Even because the video went viral in just a few hours, it increased the crowd who wanted to witness firsthand the incident.

The attitude and reactions of residents who pick up the body of a Muslim are not completely accepted by all residents, this is evidenced by the presence of a group of residents who are angry with their behavior, so that when the group delivering the body to the burial and passing through a village which happens to be inhabited by the majority of non-Muslims. The group received resistance like being pelted by unscrupulous residents.

Interestingly after the incident, a statement came from Steaven Dandel as the spokesperson for the Covid-19 Task Force for North Sulawesi Province where all parties who had direct contact with the PDP's body, both those who carried and held them directly, would undergo a Swab-PCR examination (Ikanubun, 2020a), However, the facts on the ground are different from the direction of the Covid-19 Task Force spokesperson, not everyone who comes into contact with the patient's corpse is subjected to a Swab-PCR examination, moreover, there is a strong refusal from residents to put up a banner refusing to be examined (Ikanubun, 2020b), only families Just close the inspection, including a priest who had washed the PDP's

body. But the results show a negative status covid 19 so that residents were initially concerned with information about new cluster covid 19 back strong belief that covid 19 is just a mere issue and Allah will always together and retaining the right people, explained one resident met and interviewed (Ulias, 2020).

The social impact, until now social activities in the area are always running normally, such as in the days before the Covid 19 pandemic, only a handful of people are obedient to wearing masks, but what happens most is, masks are used only as accessories and not. Under health protocols that have been directed by the government, as well as orders to carry out social distancing, do not shake hands, do not crowd, are also ignored by the community in their social activities and religious activities.

### **Changes in Public Perception of Ulama: Normal or Danger?**

This section explicates the issues previously delineated. Social jurisprudence analysis is implemented to comprehend the hesitations of members of the Manado City Branch of the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) regarding the application of MUI circulars during the pandemic. As an example, the concept of *maslahah* in the tenets of social jurisprudence emphasizes societal welfare. In this context, the doubts of MUI members can be construed as attempts to achieve *maslahah*, where some mosques persisted in convening congregational prayers in the conviction that this is more beneficial for Muslims. Additionally, the theory of social jurisprudence underscores the role of scholars as moral and social leaders in Islamic society. Through these findings, inconsistencies among Manado MUI members are evident, which can impact public views on compliance with appeals.

Furthermore, one discovery points to the low levels of religious knowledge among Muslims, which may contribute to noncompliance with MUI appeals. In social jurisprudence, religious education is deemed crucial for society to comprehend the interests and benefits underpinning such appeals. Social jurisprudence stresses the importance of unity and consistency when dealing with social issues. From the findings, disagreements between MUI members are apparent, which can undermine overall efforts in responding to the pandemic. In a pandemic, public health and safety are paramount. This necessitates deliberation in highlighting the conflict between the desire to perform congregational prayers against the duty to safeguard public health. This involves considering ethical and social responsibility. Social jurisprudence also takes into account public responses to information. Noncompliance with MUI appeals can have extensive social impacts, including escalated risks of viral transmission and social instability.

Muhammadong and Saharullah in their article explain that currently people's perceptions of ulama are very varied, both those giving positive or negative assessments (Muhammadong & Saharullah, 2019). However, this scientific statement focuses on the meeting of ulama with practical politics, so that changes in perceptions in society can be read from the political choices of each person. It is

different if there is a negative perception in the socio-religious realm, where the ulama and the community are in direct contact in building benefit.

This is the fact that happened during the Covid 19 pandemic in Manado City, as explained in the previous sub-discussion, it is a sad thing when the ulama seem to have not got a complete place in their community and are replaced by mosque priests who also have religious competence varied, because, in the religious tradition, ulama are maraji '(reference) for the community in asking questions and looking for solutions (Fealy, 2011; Alnizar & Munjid, 2020).

Then is this normal or dangerous in the aspects of the Islamic scientific tradition, especially in the realm of Islamic legal studies? Salim and Amin in their introduction as editors of the book *Nuansa Fiqh Sosial* explain that the hierarchy of the system must be accompanied by a hierarchy of authority, so that the integrity of the teaching system is protected from any shocks, including the shocks of the times that have become a source of crises in the system or scientific paradigm (Mahfudz, 2004).

The above argument strengthens the author's hypothesis in which the ulama as role models have complete authority and show their "fangs" of expertise in realizing legal products that are solutive for the people, and synergize with the wisdom that lives in society so that legal views are not solely concerned with the text academic manuscripts but also on the social nuances in society.

But in fact, some ulama are more comfortable working in discussing the socio-religious problems felt by people in air-conditioned rooms with consumption, especially if there is an honorarium to be received after the discussion. So it is natural for Hamid to argue that current science is often only for science, no longer has the dimension of goodness for society (Hamid, 2011), it is considered natural that there is a change in attitudes in society towards ulama.

Even though it is categorized as normal, then is this change good for the Islamic tradition? According to Amin Abdullah, religious people cannot avoid social facts - including the existence of social changes due to differences and others - so if they are not extra careful, religion can become a part of the problem and not a problem solver, if the perpetrator does not realize the importance of criticism (Abdullah, 2020, p. 55).

Criticism is a means of renewal in the Islamic scientific tradition, even the Prophet Muhammad hinted at the birth of reformers every hundred years with the narrative "man yujaddid laha dinaha" (al-Azdi, 1955, p. 512) or in his free translation, namely "he who will criticize (tradition) in religion". Imam Ash-Shafi'i as one of the reformers in Islam is also a wise critic of the thoughts of the Maliki and Hanafi thoughts, a product of the thoughts of his teachers so that *Al-Risalah* was born as a monumental work and a reference for Islamic jurists around the world from time to time. For this reason, to restore the authority of the ulama in front of the community, changes in perceptions that occur in society towards ulama must be

recognized and used as positive criticism, especially in undergoing the impact of the 4.0 era and the Covid 19 pandemic.

Of course, it cannot be denied the arguments of Nuryani and Muslim, whereas a country with a Muslim majority population, every government policy will be synergized with Islam (Nurhayani & Muslim, 2019), but the failure to unify perceptions between the ulama and also the neglect of society in implementing MUI circulars in the Manado during the Covid 19 pandemic, is proof that organized ulama but does not have the same vision and mission of struggle among members, are easily fragile when met with unstable social and political conditions.

Social fiqh which promotes collective ijtihad is neat enough in building a methodological structure in ijtihad, so that the collective thinking of the ulama will be guided through the methodology that has been used as a reference. The differences in legal findings between ulama in the course of the process are prevalent, but the vulnerability of divisions between ulama can be negated. Thus, the ummah will not feel the confusion of the ulama in the social realm, because the ulama is allowed to be different in drawing legal answers at the discussion table, but they always work together in implementing the agreed legal products.

## **CONCLUSION**

Religious leaders play a pivotal role in formulating doctrines and reassuring public trepidations, especially amidst the COVID-19 calamity. However, clerics in Manado City converged under the Indonesian Ulema Council demonstrated discordant visions in directive formulations for home worship, eliciting internal polemics and inconsistent societal applications. Consequently, followers inclined towards the edicts of mosque prayer leaders in persisting communal Ramadan and Eid rituals. Such defiance appears beyond religious domains, manifesting also through forced retrievals of Muslim COVID-19 patient remains from hospital confines. Interpreting these shifts through the lens of social jurisprudence philosophy denotes such developments as socially normalized reactions without existential threats to Islamic foundations. In fact, policymakers must acknowledge public pushbacks as constructive feedback to restore scholastic prominence and community trust through judicious self-appraisals and internal reforms.

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