

Research article

Revisiting Wujudiyyah and the Politics of Religious Orthodoxy in the Seventeenth-Century Aceh Sultanate

Sangidu^{1*}, Eva Farhah², Imam Wicaksono³, Shawy Shawy Ahmed Abdurrahman⁴

¹³ Universitas Gadjah Mada, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

² Universitas Sebelas Maret, Surakarta, Indonesia

⁴ Benha University, Benha, Al-Qalyubia, Egypt

* sangidu@ugm.ac.id

Abstract

This study examines the theological polemic between Wujudiyyah and the orthodox interpretations of Nuruddin ar-Raniri in the seventeenth-century Aceh Sultanate, which extended beyond differences in Sufi doctrine to exert direct influence on political power through takfir edicts, book burnings, and executions. The novelty of this research lies in its integrative approach, employing Ibn 'Arabi's theory of ontological pluralism to elucidate the dialectic between spiritual diversity and theological exclusion. The research adopts a qualitative-historical case study design, drawing on primary sources such as the Sufi manuscripts of Hamzah Fansuri and Syamsuddin al-Sumatrani, as well as the legal texts of Nuruddin ar-Raniri. Data were collected through document analysis, critical manuscript verification, and historiographical triangulation. The analysis was conducted using thematic classification grounded in the concepts of the transimmanence of the real and the unity of being. The findings demonstrate that the conceptual distinction between wahdat al-wujud and wahdat al-shuhud shaped the epistemological legitimacy of religious authority, while takfir rulings and executions functioned as politico-religious instruments. The principal contribution of this study is the formulation of a contextual ontological pluralism that extends Ibn 'Arabi's theoretical framework, while also revealing how texts, edicts, and repressive practices operated as hegemonic tools in the enforcement of orthodoxy. Its broader implication underscores the significance of Islam Nusantara studies as a model for understanding the dialectics of Sufism, orthodoxy, and political power, offering valuable insights into contemporary religion-politics relations.

Keywords

Aceh Sultanate; Ibn 'Arabi; Orthodoxy; Sufism; Wujudiyyah

Article history

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1. INTRODUCTION

The theological polemic between the Wujudiyyah movement and Nuruddin al-Raniri in seventeenth-century Aceh represents a crucial socio-historical phenomenon that extended beyond differences in Sufi doctrine, influencing political legitimacy through *takfir* rulings and capital punishment (Arfan et al., 2025; M. N. Nasir, 2023a; Rubaidi et al., 2025). This episode illustrates how religious interpretation was deployed as a hegemonic instrument to restrict intellectual plurality while consolidating orthodoxy. Accordingly, this study holds strong urgency for understanding the interconnection between religion and politics in the history of Malay Islam (Masudi & Saepudin, 2025). Historical evidence highlights the roles of Hamzah Fansuri and Syamsuddin al-Sumatrani in disseminating the doctrine of *wahdat al-wujūd* through manuscripts such as *Sharḥ Rubā'ī*, which continue to be studied today (Chuan, 2024; Herdiansyah et al., 2025; Meyer, 2019; Pramono & Sudarmoko, 2021). In social practice, al-Raniri's interpretations legitimized both symbolic and physical violence, including book burnings and executions of Wujudiyyah adherents (Burhanudin, 2021). This controversy thus provides a crucial entry point for examining the nexus of Sufism, orthodoxy, and political power in Aceh (Harun, 2004; Nordin, 2022).

To clarify the theological stakes of this controversy, *wahdat al-wujūd* refers to an ontological framework, rooted in Ibn 'Arabī's metaphysics, which posits the ultimate unity of existence as a manifestation of divine reality, without negating juridical Islam (Halim et al., 2022; Iyer, 2023; Tapp, 2023; Zabidi et al., 2022). In contrast, al-Raniri advanced a corrective epistemology closer to *wahdat al-shuhūd*, emphasizing experiential perception of unity while preserving strict theological transcendence to prevent doctrinal excess (Burhanuddin, 2022; Quddus, 2020). This distinction was not merely abstract but politically consequential. Al-Raniri's polemics, articulated in works such as *Tibyān fī Ma'rifat al-Adyān*, enabled the Acehnese court to redefine orthodoxy and marginalize heterodox Sufi networks (Abdul & Alias, 2020; Ar-Raniri, 1600; Jalil & Alias, 2020). Consequently, *takfir* functioned as a juridico-political mechanism, transforming metaphysical disagreement into state-sanctioned coercion (Kadivar, 2020; Burhanudin, 2021). The Aceh case thus exemplifies how theological classification operated as a technology of governance in the Malay-Islamic world.

The existing literature can be grouped into several thematic tendencies. Some scholars, such as Zuhri et al. (2024) and Tuncer (2021), emphasize philological and aesthetic readings of Hamzah Fansuri's *wahdat al-wujūd*, highlighting its symbolic and

literary dimensions while giving limited attention to its theological and political implications. In a related vein, studies focusing on Nuruddin al-Raniri, including N. Hj Hamzah (2020), tend to examine his interpretations and intellectual contributions, yet often overlook the socio-political consequences of his *takfīr* edicts and the executions of Wujudiyyah followers. In contrast, other scholars, such as M. N. Nasir (2023a), begin to foreground the role of religious authority in the Aceh Sultanate by examining the interaction between mystical doctrines and the enforcement of orthodoxy. Taken together, these differing emphases reveal a significant gap in the literature, namely, the insufficient integration of theological debates with their political ramifications. Against this background, the present study moves beyond earlier paradigms by interrogating the tension between the historical development of Sufism and the normative demands of Islamic orthodoxy, both of which shaped the formation of religious authority in seventeenth-century Aceh.

In this context, the study aims to examine the conceptual distinctions between *wahdat al-wujūd* and *wahdat al-shuhūd*, and to analyze the role of *takfīr* rulings and executions directed against the Wujudiyyah. The objective is to address the limitations of earlier scholarship, which has predominantly emphasized the metaphysical dimensions of Sufism without considering the repressive practices and political mechanisms of orthodoxy in Aceh (Norizam Jamian & Md Radzi, 2013; Pramono & Sudarmoko, 2021; Rozali, 2014). To achieve this, Ibn ‘Arabī’s theory of ontological pluralism is employed, as it provides an explanatory framework for how diverse spiritual experiences were transformed into exclusive truth claims that generated theological exclusion (Iyer, 2023; Yunus, 1995). The first concept of this theory, transimmanence of the real, is applied to explore how the lived doctrine of *wahdat al-wujūd* was suppressed through *takfīr* edicts and executions as politico-theological strategies (Bellver, 2023). The second concept, unity of being, is utilized to interpret Nuruddin al-Raniri’s construction of legitimacy, which negated Sufi plurality to establish an official orthodoxy within the Sultanate (Tapp, 2023; Muawwanah, 2024). Through this analytical framework, the research problem can be addressed comprehensively, as it examines not only the metaphysical aspects but also the dynamics of exclusion, power, and religious interpretation—dimensions often overlooked by normative Sufi theories.

While existing scholarship has significantly enriched our understanding of Wujudiyyah as a metaphysical and epistemological discourse, it remains largely fragmented along disciplinary lines. Studies on Malay Sufism and *wahdat al-wujūd* tend to emphasize mystical experience, textual transmission, and symbolic ontology

without sufficiently situating these ideas within concrete structures of power and authority (Erman et al., 2024; Tuncer, 2021; Iyer, 2023). Conversely, works on Nūr al-Dīn al-Rānīrī predominantly frame his critique of Wujudiyyah within theological orthodoxy, polemics against heresy, or interreligious discourse, often detached from the broader political logic of Aceh's seventeenth-century statecraft (Abdul & Alias, 2020; Burhanudin, 2021; Nasir, 2023a). As a result, the mutual entanglement between theological doctrine and political legitimacy in the Wujudiyyah controversy remains underexplored. This study addresses this gap by integrating theological distinctions—particularly between *wahdat al-wujūd* and its critiques—with their political instrumentalization, demonstrating how metaphysical debates functioned simultaneously as epistemic struggles and mechanisms of governance in the Malay world.

The doctrinal articulation of Wujudiyyah can be traced through its metaphysical orientation, mystical texts, and ontological relations between God and creation. Fahrudin et al., (2024) highlight that Sufi religiosity was expressed in the internalization of *ṭarīqa* practices, which combined ritual devotion with ethical praxis. Mukhia (2020) supports this view by emphasizing the importance of religious rationality in navigating interpretive diversity regarding divine unity. Thus, the accusations of heresy and the death penalties imposed on Wujudiyyah adherents in Aceh demonstrate that this doctrine extended beyond abstract mysticism, functioning directly in the formation of religious orthodoxy.

Previous studies also reveal that the conceptualization of religious orthodoxy has always been debated within theological interpretation and social practice. Within the context of Sufism, the doctrine of *wahdat al-wujūd* was frequently positioned as deviance by groups committed to defining rigid boundaries of faith and unbelief (Şahin, 2020). Kadivar (2020) demonstrates that orthodoxy was historically constructed through binary oppositions between normative truth and deviation, while Saeedimehr (2020) argues that orthodoxy also operated as a power mechanism to determine the legitimacy of belief in Muslim societies. This indicates that orthodoxy is not merely a doctrinal category but simultaneously a political instrument of control.

The dynamics of orthodoxy became visible through fatwas, punishments, and mechanisms of exclusion. Abdul & Alias (2020) show that accusations of unbelief and executions were used as strategies against groups considered deviant, as in the case of the seventeenth-century Wujudiyyah. Similarly, Hamzah & Aziz (2019) assert that *takfīr* functioned not only as a theological doctrine but also as a political tool. These

findings are consistent with Tabur (2023), who identifies orthodoxy as encompassing both symbolic and coercive dimensions in shaping religious authority.

Literature on the Aceh Sultanate further highlights that the polity was not solely a political entity but also a site for the institutionalization of religious authority and the management of discursive plurality. Ahmad (2022) argues that Aceh served as a locus of interaction among Sufism, law, and power, in which religious legitimacy functioned as a political instrument. Nasir (2021) demonstrates that processes of interpretation and exclusion within the Malay-Islamic tradition served to define orthodoxy by restricting plurality, while Okawa (2021) reinforces this by asserting that theological debates over pluralism were often reflections of power struggles rather than purely spiritual disputes.

Further research emphasizes how religious authority in Aceh was institutionalized through fatwas, religious texts, and political practices. Quddus (2020) notes that this dynamic became particularly evident in the case of Nuruddin al-Raniri, whose takfir rulings, book burnings, and executions served as instruments of enforcing orthodoxy. Arif & Siraj (2020) add that the educational and intellectual networks of scholars reinforced Aceh's status as a center of Islamic learning, while Saari et al., (2020) emphasize the genealogical significance of theological thought in linking mystical doctrine, orthodoxy, and political legitimacy. Within this scholarly discourse, the present study positions itself by addressing the gaps in previous research, which largely focused on philological, aesthetic, or metaphysical aspects of *wahdat al-wujūd*, by instead examining how mystical doctrines, orthodoxy, and political authority intersected in shaping religious legitimacy in seventeenth-century Aceh.

A review of previous scholarship reveals a critical gap: most studies on Wujudiyyah in the Aceh Sultanate have tended to neglect the practical dimensions of *takfir* rulings and executions as politico-religious instruments, thereby limiting their analyses to philological or metaphysical aspects. This study positions itself by examining the interrelation between Sufi teachings and the enforcement of orthodoxy through mechanisms of power. Its first distinction lies in the focus not only on conceptual doctrine but also on how takfir edicts and capital punishment functioned as strategies of legitimacy. Its second distinction is the investigation of tensions between the historical reality of Wujudiyyah and the normative orthodoxy imposed upon it—a perspective rarely addressed in earlier scholarship. Accordingly, the novelty of this research lies in its integrative approach, which combines Sufism, orthodoxy, and political power.

The study sets a new direction by analyzing the conceptual differences between *wahdat al-wujūd* and *wahdat al-shuhūd* through the lens of Ibn ‘Arabī’s ontological pluralism, which serves as an analytical framework to connect mystical doctrine with the political enforcement of orthodoxy. This emphasis is of high urgency in the contemporary context, where the entanglement of religion, power, and intellectual exclusion continues to recur in various forms across the Muslim world. Within this framework, the study investigates how the conceptual distinctions drawn by Hamzah Fansuri and Syamsuddin al-Sumatrani, in contrast with the interpretations of Nuruddin ar-Raniri, shaped the epistemological legitimacy of religious authority. Furthermore, it explores how *takfīr* rulings and executions against the Wujudiyyah functioned as politico-religious instruments to enforce orthodoxy and suppress intellectual plurality.

The significance of this research, therefore, extends beyond explicating the intellectual dynamics of Islam in Aceh; it contributes instead to broader international debates on the intersections of Sufism, orthodoxy, and political authority in global Islamic history. By offering a cross-disciplinary perspective that integrates Sufi philosophy, the study of orthodoxy, and political analysis, this research aims to open new horizons in global Islamic studies, which have often remained fragmented.

2. METHODS

The unit of analysis in this study centers on the historical-theological polemic in the seventeenth-century Aceh Sultanate, particularly the conflict between the adherents of Wujūdiyyah and Nuruddin ar-Raniri. This focus is significant because the debate extended beyond mystical doctrine to encompass practices of *takfīr* and capital punishment as politico-religious instruments in the construction of orthodoxy. The research is delimited to the reign of Sultan Iskandar Tsani, during which ar-Raniri was granted full authority to suppress the Wujūdiyyah group, thereby narrowing the socio-political context. The scope is specifically directed toward analyzing the conceptual differences between *wahdat al-wujūd* and *wahdat al-shuhūd* and how both were employed to justify claims of political and religious legitimacy. The selection of this research unit is thus highly relevant, enabling an integrative investigation of Sufism, fatwas, orthodoxy, and political authority, and contributing to the understanding of Islamic dynamics in the Malay-Indonesian world while enriching global discourse on religion and politics.

To support this choice, the study adopts a qualitative historical case study design, as it provides the most suitable framework for exploring the dynamics between the Wujūdiyyah and ar-Raniri in depth. This design allows for a holistic tracing of the social, political, and theological contexts. The analytical framework is grounded in Ibn ‘Arabī’s theory of ontological pluralism, which is particularly relevant to explaining the dialectic between Sufism and orthodoxy. Its strength lies in its capacity to interpret the diversity of spiritual experience in relation to practices of exclusion. Core concepts of this theory—such as the transimmanence of the real and the unity of being—provide critical tools for examining the interplay between doctrinal plurality and the assertion of singular truth. The application of this framework proceeds systematically through the analysis of classical texts, the reconstruction of historical contexts, and the interpretation of power relations as manifested in fatwas and executions. This methodological integration of theology, politics, and history ensures a comprehensive understanding of orthodoxy in seventeenth-century Aceh.

The primary data sources consist of classical Sufi texts and historical documents, including manuscripts and works authored by Nuruddin ar-Raniri and the Wujūdiyyah scholars. These sources were selected because they directly reflect both the original mystical thought and the intellectual responses circulating in the Aceh Sultanate, making them essential for understanding doctrinal polemics and fatwas. Among them are the *Syarḥ Rubā‘ī* of Hamzah Fansuri and the works of Syamsuddin al-Sumatrani, which articulate the framework of *wahdat al-wujūd*, as well as the fatwas of Nuruddin ar-Raniri, accompanied by accounts of *takfir*, book burnings, and executions. The use of these sources provides methodological strength by enabling direct examination of doctrines and practices of orthodoxy through primary intellectual artifacts, thereby ensuring accuracy, depth of analysis, and scholarly contribution to the intellectual history of Islam in the region.

Data collection was conducted through document study and textual analysis of primary sources—classical Sufi manuscripts, theological treatises, and the writings of ar-Raniri and the Wujūdiyyah scholars—supplemented by relevant secondary materials. This technique is appropriate because the research questions require direct engagement with intellectual artifacts, reconstruction of socio-political contexts, and investigation of how mystical doctrines were transformed into instruments of orthodoxy and power. Additional materials, including palace chronicles and local ulama accounts, were also examined. The initial phase involved archival research and cataloging manuscripts of Hamzah Fansuri, Syamsuddin al-Sumatrani, and ar-Raniri; verifying authenticity and chronology through external criticism; and mapping key

issues such as *wahdat al-wujūd/wahdat al-shuhūd*, fatwas, and executions. The next phase included internal criticism, thematic coding, cross-textual comparison, triangulation with secondary historiography, and reconstruction of *takfīr* practices and book burnings to test the interplay of doctrine, orthodoxy, and power. This systematic use of historical documents ensures traceability, minimizes bias from secondary accounts, and enhances interpretive depth consistent with the qualitative case study design.

To address the rigor of document analysis, primary manuscripts were selected using three explicit criteria: (1) attributional reliability to Hamzah Fansuri, Syamsuddin al-Sumatrani, or Nuruddin ar-Raniri; (2) relevance to debates on *wahdat al-wujūd*, *takfīr*, and orthodoxy in seventeenth-century Aceh; and (3) textual completeness and accessibility within the Philological Collection of the Aceh State Museum. Key texts such as *Syarḥ Rubāʿī*, *Syarāb al-ʿĀshiqīn*, *Mirʿāt al-Muḥaqqiqīn*, and ar-Raniri's *Tibyān fī Maʿrifat al-Adyān* were prioritized because they represent doctrinal articulation and juridical response within the same intellectual field. Manuscript verification followed classical philological procedures, combining external criticism—codicology, colophon analysis, provenance tracing, and chronological cross-checking—with internal criticism assessing doctrinal consistency, terminological usage, and intertextual coherence. Texts were then thematically coded and triangulated with secondary historiography to minimize bias and ensure analytical reliability.

Finally, data analysis was conducted through thematic classification using Ibn ʿArabī's ontological pluralism as the guiding framework, aligning with the study's conceptual orientation. This approach is well-suited to explain the dialectic between the plurality of mystical experiences and the practices of exclusion that characterized seventeenth-century Aceh. The first analytical model employs the concept of transimmanence of the real to examine how the doctrine of *wahdat al-wujūd*, as taught by Hamzah Fansuri and Syamsuddin al-Sumatrani, was repressed through *takfīr* edicts and executions, applying thematic coding to textual narratives, and accompanying social practices. The second model applies the concept of the unity of being to interpret the legitimizing strategies of Nuruddin ar-Raniri, achieved through a hermeneutic comparison of his fatwas and writings, revealing the power relations underlying the construction of official orthodoxy. This analytical process ensures high traceability, interpretive depth, and explanatory strength in addressing the interconnectedness of doctrine, orthodoxy, and politics.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Distinction of Wujudiyyah and Ar-Raniri's Interpretation

The findings reveal that the conceptual distinction between the teachings of Hamzah Fansuri and Syamsuddin al-Samatrani, on the one hand, and the interpretation of Nuruddin ar-Raniri, on the other, provided the epistemological foundation for religious authority in the Aceh Sultanate during the seventeenth century. This distinction is significant, as it demonstrates how different understandings of *wahdat al-wujūd* and *wahdat al-shuhūd* directly shaped the boundaries of faith and unbelief and guided the court's religious policies. The first body of evidence derives from the works of Hamzah and Syamsuddin, such as *Mir'ātul-Muhaqqiqīn* (As-Samatrā'ī, 1600), *Sharāb al-'Āshiqīn* and *Al-Muntahī* (Fansuri, 1600), which emphasizes the unity of humankind and God through the concepts of the Four Stages, the Five Levels, and the Seven Grades. Within these frameworks, *wahdat al-wujūd* is understood as the culmination of mystical knowledge (*ma'rifah*). In contrast, Nuruddin's works, including *Mā'ul-Ḥayāt* and *Tibyān*, explicitly reject Wujudiyyah thought, asserting a categorical distinction between the *wājib al-wujūd* (Necessary Being, i.e., God) and the *mumkin al-wujūd* (contingent beings) instead. These texts became the doctrinal foundation for *takfīr*, book burnings, and capital punishment (Ar-Raniri, 1600). Thus, the data underscore the role of this conceptual distinction in establishing epistemological legitimacy for religious authority in Aceh. The comparison is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Comparison of Wujudiyyah and Nuruddin ar-Raniri

Aspect	Hamzah Fansuri & Syamsuddin al-Samatrani (Wujudiyyah)	Nuruddin ar-Raniri (Ahl al-Sunnah)	Epistemological Implications
Core Concept	<i>Wahdat al-Wujūd</i> (unity of being between human and God)	<i>Wahdat al-Shuhūd</i> (unity of witnessing, not of essence)	Basis for claims of correctness in defining the God–human relationship
Textual Basis	<i>Mir'ātul-Muhaqqiqīn</i> , <i>Sharāb al-'Āshiqīn</i> , <i>Al-Muntahī</i>	<i>Mā'ul-Ḥayāt</i> , <i>Tibyān</i>	Texts determine authoritative interpretations and religious legitimacy
Doctrinal Structure	Four Stages (sharī'ah, ṭarīqah, ḥaqīqah, ma'rifah); Five Levels (Prophetic Truth,	Separation of sharī'ah and ḥaqīqah; reason for sharī'ah, purified	Defines the doctrinal line between mystical philosophy and official orthodoxy

	Acts, Names, Attributes, Essence); Seven Grades → existential unity of human and God	heart for ḥaqīqah; no existential unity	
Position on Plurality	Affirms existential unity and embraces philosophical Sufism	Rejects the unity of being as unbelief and heresy	Grounds takfīr, book burning, and executions as politico-religious instruments
Epistemological Legitimacy	Mystical teachings affirm intimate union with God	Rejection enforces state orthodoxy and court ‘ulamā’ authority	Constructs seventeenth-century Acehnese orthodoxy through conceptual distinction

Findings of this study reveal that the central concepts of Wujudiyyah and Nuruddin ar-Raniri’s interpretation represent the starting point of a conceptual distinction that shaped epistemological legitimacy. This distinction is crucial, as *wahdat al-wujūd* and *wahdat asy-syuhūd* became the axis of religious identity in seventeenth-century Aceh. Evidence from the teachings of Hamzah Fansuri and Syamsuddin al-Samatrani underscores the existential union of human beings with God, in which the soul is believed to originate from Allah and ultimately return to Him, as waves return to the sea, as recorded in *Al-Muntahī* and *Syarabul-’āsyiqīn*. By contrast, Nuruddin ar-Raniri rejected this notion, asserting the absolute difference between *wājib al-wujūd* (God) and *mumkin al-wujūd* (creation), which he linked only through a cause-and-effect relationship rather than existential unity, as articulated in *Mā’ul-Ḥayāt*. These data affirm that doctrinal divergence established the epistemological boundary that marked the emergence of official orthodoxy in Aceh.

To strengthen the integration between primary sources and recent scholarship, this study explicitly places classical texts in dialogue with contemporary academic interpretations. The doctrinal formulations of *wahdat al-wujūd* articulated in *Syarāb al-’āshiqīn* and *Mir’āt al-Muḥaqqiqīn* are not only treated as philological artifacts but are also analytically connected to recent discussions of metaphysical unity and ontological pluralism (Iyer, 2023; Tuncer, 2021; Zuhri et al., 2024). Likewise, al-Raniri’s arguments in *Tibyān* and *Mā’ al-Ḥayāt* are examined alongside modern analyses of Qur’anic reinterpretation and the construction of orthodoxy (Abdul & Alias, 2020; M. N. Nasir, 2023). This comparative approach demonstrates how classical doctrines were historically contested and later reinterpreted within evolving scholarly frameworks.

Furthermore, the socio-political implications of takfir are contextualized using contemporary studies on religious authority and exclusion (Kadivar, 2020; Muawwanah, 2024). By combining manuscript-based evidence with current research, this study clarifies how theological debates functioned not only as intellectual discourse but also as instruments shaping epistemological legitimacy and religious authority in seventeenth-century Aceh.

To clarify the conceptual debate for non-specialist readers, it is important to note that *wahdat al-wujūd* (unity of being) is a Sufi metaphysical doctrine, commonly associated with Ibn ‘Arabī, which holds that all existence derives from and ultimately returns to God, while maintaining different levels of manifestation (Bellver, 2023; Tapp, 2023). In seventeenth-century Aceh, this idea was articulated by Hamzah Fansuri and Syamsuddin al-Samatrani in poetic and didactic forms, using metaphors such as waves and the sea to explain the dependence of creation on the Divine (Fansuri, 1600; As-Samatrā’ī, 1600). By contrast, Nuruddin ar-Raniri, influenced by Ash‘arite theology, rejected any language suggesting ontological unity, insisting instead on a strict distinction between God as *wājib al-wujūd* and creation as *mumkin al-wujūd* (Abdul & Alias, 2020; Quddus, 2020). For ar-Raniri, this distinction safeguarded doctrinal clarity and religious authority, helping to define orthodoxy in Aceh (Burhanudin, 2021; Nasir, 2023).

This distinction becomes clearer when examining the textual foundations employed as references. Texts functioned not only as repositories of thought but also as instruments of religious authority and formal debate. Evidence shows that the works of Hamzah and Syamsuddin—such as *Mir’ātul-Muchaqiqīn*, *Syarabul-’āsyiqīn*, and *Al-Muntahī*—present mystical elaborations on existential unity and on the development of the *Martabat Tujuh*, derived from the teachings of Fadhlullah al-Burhanpuri. Conversely, Nuruddin’s writings, including *Tibyān* and *Mā’ul-Ḥayāt*, were explicitly composed to refute Wujudiyyah while simultaneously consolidating orthodoxy. This demonstrates that manuscripts served not only as records of mystical discourse but also as authoritative tools for determining which doctrines were deemed valid and which were condemned as heretical.

The divergence also appears in the structural framework of religious teachings. This is significant as it illustrates how conceptual systems were applied in pedagogy. Evidence indicates that Hamzah and Syamsuddin taught the Four Levels (*sharī’ah*, *ṭarīqah*, *ḥaqīqah*, *ma’rifah*), the Five Levels (*Ṣidqur-Rasūl*, *Af’āl*, *Asmā’*, *Ṣifāt*, *Dhāt*), and the *Martabat Tujuh*, all oriented toward the existential unity of humans with God, as recorded in *Mir’ātul-Muchaqiqīn*. In contrast, Nuruddin emphasized the separation

between *sharī'ah* and *ḥaqīqah*: the former understood through reason and the latter through a purified heart. While complementary, they were never united, as explained in *Tibyān*. These doctrinal differences highlight the sharp boundary between Wujudiyyah and Nuruddin's interpretive framework.

A further conceptual distinction lies in the theological expressions employed. Language functioned as a key instrument in asserting truth claims. Hamzah and Syamsuddin, for instance, used expressions such as "*Anal-Ḥaqq wa anal-Lāh*," "*Huwa huwa... 'abdun rabbun wa rabbun 'abdun*," and "*Mā ra'aitu nafsī illal-Lāhu*," affirming ontological union with God, as noted in *Al-Muntahī*. Nuruddin rejected such expressions, arguing that they implied the inclusion of impurity and corruption within God, which he deemed irrational and inconsistent with *sharī'ah*, as explained in *Tibyān*. These theological-linguistic differences further reinforced the epistemological distance between the two camps.

The social consequences of these doctrinal conflicts provide the most tangible evidence of their impact on religious practice and political decision-making. The polemic extended beyond theoretical debates and directly shaped communal life. The Wujudiyyah perspective reinforced a vision of ontological intimacy between humanity and God, fostering Sufi communities with philosophical inclinations, as seen in *Syarabul-'Āsyiqīn*. In contrast, Nuruddin's interpretation inspired harsh policies, including the issuance of *takfīr* fatwas, the burning of Hamzah and Syamsuddin's manuscripts, and the execution of adherents who refused to repent, as recorded in *Mā'ul-Ḥayāt* and *Tibyān*. These outcomes illustrate how doctrinal distinctions materialized into institutionalized orthodoxy embedded within Aceh's politico-religious policies.

Taken together, these findings affirm that the conceptual distinctions between Wujudiyyah and Nuruddin ar-Raniri's interpretation extended far beyond doctrinal discourse. They manifested in textual authority, pedagogical structures, theological expressions, and social consequences, forming a clear epistemological boundary between orthodoxy and heterodoxy in seventeenth-century Aceh. These fundamental differences played a decisive role in shaping religious legitimacy, where manuscripts and teachings became the basis for determining authentic truth while excluding heterodox ideas. This body of evidence underscores that *takfīr* fatwas, book burnings, and executions of Wujudiyyah adherents were not merely theological outcomes but strategic politico-religious instruments designed to enforce official orthodoxy and suppress intellectual plurality in the Acehnese public sphere.

3.2. *Takfīr Fatwas and Capital Punishment of the Wujudiyyah*

The study further reveals that *takfīr* fatwas and capital punishment were actively applied against the Wujudiyyah during the seventeenth-century Aceh Sultanate. Nuruddin ar-Raniri's *Tibyān fī Ma'rifat al-Adyān* records his pronouncements declaring Hamzah Fansuri, Syamsuddin al-Samatrani, and their followers to be heretics (*zindīq*), alongside explicit orders to execute those who refused to repent. Historical accounts confirm the implementation of these fatwas through the public burning of Hamzah's works (*Sharāb al-ʿĀshiqīn*, *Al-Muntahī*, *Rubāʿī*) and Syamsuddin's (*Mir'ātul-Muhaqqiqīn*, *Khirqah*, *Ḥaqq al-Yaqīn*) before the Great Mosque of Baiturrahman, as well as the execution of their adherents during the reign of Sultan Iskandar Tsani. These actions later provoked critical responses from other scholars, such as Shaykh Ibrahim al-Kūrānī and Abdurrauf al-Singkili, who vehemently opposed Ar-Raniri's fatwas and punitive measures. The summary of evidence is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Verifying judgments against Wujudiyyah

Variable	Data Source	Findings
<i>Takfīr</i> against Wujudiyyah	<i>Tibyān fī Ma'rifat al-Adyān</i> (Ar-Raniri)	Declares Hamzah and Syamsuddin heretics (<i>zindīq</i>), obliges the ruler to burn their works, and excommunicates their disciples and followers.
Death penalty for Wujudiyyah	<i>Tibyān</i> and seventeenth-century historical records	Orders the execution of followers who refused to repent, with political backing from Sultan Iskandar Tsani.
Book burnings	Historical accounts of Sultan Iskandar Tsani's reign; public events at Baiturrahman Mosque	Public destruction of Hamzah's (<i>Sharāb al-ʿĀshiqīn</i> , <i>Al-Muntahī</i> , <i>Rubāʿī</i>) and Syamsuddin's (<i>Mir'ātul-Muhaqqiqīn</i> , <i>Khirqah</i> , <i>Ḥaqq al-Yaqīn</i>) works as symbolic acts of orthodoxy.

The findings reveal that the issuance of *takfīr* fatwas against the Wujūdiyyah community functioned as a politico-religious instrument. These fatwas emerged because the teachings of Hamzah Fansuri and Syamsuddin al-Samatrani were perceived as contradictory to the official doctrine promoted by the court. The first piece of evidence appears in Nuruddin al-Raniri's *Tibyān fī Ma'rifat al-Adyān*, which

emphasizes the ruler's obligation to burn the works of Hamzah and Syamsuddin while accusing them of heresy (*zindīq*). The second is the extension of the *takfīr* verdict beyond the two scholars themselves to their students and followers who remained committed to Wujūdiyyah. Thus, the *takfīr* fatwa served both as a means to eradicate the doctrine of Wujūdiyyah and to consolidate the authority of orthodoxy within the Aceh Sultanate.

The next finding concerns the imposition of capital punishment on members of the Wujūdiyyah who refused to repent, representing a logical continuation of the *takfīr* ruling. This measure was deemed necessary because the fatwa alone was considered insufficient to halt the influence of Wujūdiyyah among the populace. The first supporting evidence is found in *Tibyān*, which explicitly states the obligation to execute the followers of Hamzah and Syamsuddin who persisted in their beliefs. The second is drawn from seventeenth-century historical accounts that document Sultan Iskandar Thani's active support for the enforcement of executions. In this sense, capital punishment functioned as a repressive instrument of the state to enforce orthodoxy and eliminate the plurality of Sufi thought.

Correspondingly, the practice of book burning emerged as a symbolic act reinforcing the implementation of *takfīr* and capital punishment. These burnings targeted the works of Hamzah and Syamsuddin, which were regarded as primary vehicles for the dissemination of Wujūdiyyah. The first evidence highlights Sultan Iskandar Thani's approval of public burnings conducted in front of the Baiturrahman Grand Mosque in Banda Aceh, representing the state's official stance. The second consists of detailed records of the destroyed works, including Hamzah's *Syarāb al-ʿAshiqīn*, *al-Muntahī*, and *Rubāʿī*, as well as Syamsuddin's *Mirʿāt al-Muḥaqqiqīn*, *Khirqah*, and *Ḥaqq al-Yaqīn*. The destruction of these texts was therefore intended not only to erase the intellectual legacy of Wujūdiyyah but also to assert the supremacy of al-Raniri's interpretive authority.

Nevertheless, the findings also reveal significant controversy and opposition from other scholars who strongly rejected the practices of *takfīr*, execution, and book burning. These responses are crucial as they demonstrate that not all religious authorities endorsed the imposed exclusivist approach. The first evidence is the perspective of Shaykh Ibrahim al-Kurani, who condemned the *takfīr* and executions as grave errors, arguing that Wujūdiyyah teachings could not be understood merely through a literalist lens. The second is the dissent of ʿAbd al-Raʿuf al-Singkili, who criticized al-Raniri's radical stance, underscoring the prohibition of declaring fellow Muslims as unbelievers and warning against the moral dangers of *takfīr*. These

counter-positions indicate the presence of an alternative discourse rejecting the use of *takfir* and executions as the sole instruments for enforcing orthodoxy.

Taken together, these findings demonstrate the interconnectedness of *takfir* fatwas, capital punishment, book burning, and the critical responses of dissenting scholars. The evidence underscores that the condemnation of the Wujudiyyah was not merely a theological phenomenon but a layered socio-political practice combining fatwas, repressive measures, public symbolism, and counter-discursive resistance. Overall, the results highlight the complexity of orthodoxy in seventeenth-century Aceh, shaped through a dynamic interplay of textual legitimation, political power, and competing scholarly authority.

3.3. Discussion

This study demonstrates that *takfir* edicts, book burnings, and executions of Wujudiyyah adherents functioned not merely as theological verdicts but also as instruments of religious law that consolidated the official boundaries of doctrine through the authorization of royal power. The root of the conflict lies in the conceptual divergence between *wahdat al-wujūd*, as articulated by Hamzah Fansuri and Syamsuddin al-Sumatrani, and *wahdat al-shuhūd* as defended by Nuruddin al-Raniri. This dynamic illustrates how doctrinal disputes were transformed into politico-religious mechanisms once al-Raniri's interpretation was institutionalized by the Acehnese court. Textual evidence is found in manuscripts such as *Tibyan fī Ma'rifat al-Adyan* and *Mā' al-Ḥayāt*, which contain *takfir* rulings and instructions for book burnings, validated through manuscript criticism, transliteration, and thematic coding. Practical evidence is reflected in accounts of book burnings at the Baiturrahman Grand Mosque and the execution of Wujudiyyah followers under the sanction of Sultan Iskandar Thani, verified through chronological reconstruction, contemporary archives, and historiographical triangulation. Together, these findings demonstrate that conceptual differences served as epistemological legitimations, while fatwas and punishments operated as effective mechanisms of theological control.

The results further reveal a close connection between *takfir* discourse, doctrinal stigmatization, and the strategies of Acehnese scholars in preserving the supremacy of Sufi teachings through their responses to the doctrine of *Martabat Tujuh*. This relationship is logical, as *takfir* practices functioned not only as mechanisms of belief but also as discursive regulations that safeguarded society's collective identity. Within the framework of Ibn 'Arabī's theory of *wahdat al-wujūd*, which emphasizes the unity

of existence as the foundation of spirituality, this study employs that analytical lens to interpret how Sufi thought in Aceh underwent a distinctive dialectic in confrontation with local orthodoxy. Literature shows that the Wujudiyyah controversy in the Malay–Indonesian world compelled scholars to reformulate the interpretation of *Martabat Tujuh* so that it aligned with *tawhīd* while retaining the metaphysical horizon of Ibn ‘Arabī (Masudi & Saepudin, 2025). Similarly, an examination of *Bustan al-Salatin* illustrates how Qur’anic and Sufi exegesis served as authoritative references in reinforcing dominant religious norms (Burhanudin, 2021). Hence, the application of Ibn ‘Arabī’s theoretical framework demonstrates how global Sufi discourse was practiced, negotiated, and modified in Aceh to preserve scholarly authority and maintain social order.

This discussion highlights the research’s novelty by showing that the Acehese *takfīr* discourse on the *Martabat Tujuh* doctrine functioned simultaneously as both a doctrinal regulatory instrument and a mechanism for socio-political stabilization. This uniqueness is evident in the combined textual and historical evidence, which demonstrates how accusations of unbelief and capital punishment were used as strategies of religious surveillance amid the dynamics of Wujudiyyah. In a comparative perspective, Bellver (2023) describes how Andalusian Sufism shifted from Ash‘arism to *wahda muṭlaqa* through intellectual compromise, whereas Aceh responded more decisively through legal instruments and fatwas. A parallel can also be drawn with Burhanuddin’s (2022) study of Sirhindi’s critique of wujūdiyyah in India, which was grounded in rational–theological argumentation, while Aceh emphasized social–executive authority. Thus, this research establishes its originality within the global landscape of Sufism and studies of religious authority.

The interpretation of these findings demonstrates that the *takfīr* verdicts against adherents of *Martabat Tujuh* were not merely acts of faith stigmatization but constituted social constructions that linked scholars with strategies for regulating the interpretive space. Doctrinal interpretation was transformed into social reality through institutional legitimization, turning fatwas and punishments into mechanisms of discursive control. For example, Hamzah Fansuri and Syamsuddin al-Sumatrani’s interpretations of *wahdat al-wujūd* were reiterated in commentaries and exegetical works as a means of strengthening the Sufi position (Pramono & Sudarmoko, 2021). Conversely, al-Raniri’s reinterpretation of the Qur’an underscored how the category of unbelief was employed to demarcate the boundaries of faith and consolidate scholarly authority (Nasir, 2023). Thus, the findings reveal that religious texts extend

beyond theological dimensions, shaping social and ideological orders by transforming conceptual differences into lived realities.

The implications of this study emphasize that the authority of Acehese scholars in responding to the *Martabat Tujuh* doctrine had both local consequences and broader contributions to global discourse on the boundaries of orthodoxy and Sufi practice. The dialectic between Ibn ‘Arabī’s teachings and Acehese authority produced a model of religious discourse regulation that balanced mystical tradition with the norms of shari‘a (Mukhia, 2020). This is evident in the ways scholars employed fatwas as instruments to restrict mystical interpretations deemed excessive (Zuhri et al., 2024). Furthermore, this pattern illustrates the deep entanglement between religious authority and political power, which in the Acehese context produced a sustainable mode of social regulation through religious legitimation (Kadivar, 2020). Consequently, the global implication is the potential of Islam Nusantara to serve as a model of balance among legal authority, Sufism, and political dynamics, relevant to contemporary interregional debates.

The research action plan aims to formulate concrete steps to address the historical problem of the relationship between Sufi doctrine and Acehese orthodoxy, ensuring that its constructive lessons are relevant to the present. This is crucial because the findings highlight the close connection between *takfir*, execution, and intellectual homogenization with royal political strategies, making reflection on these dynamics essential to sustaining pluralism in religious discourse. The first recommendation is to establish interdisciplinary academic forums involving historians, philologists, and Nusantara scholars to reconstruct the thought of Hamzah Fansuri and the Wujudiyah objectively, thereby creating intellectual appreciation and countering historical stigmatization. The second recommendation is to encourage Islamic educational institutions, fatwa bodies, and global academic communities to develop curricula grounded in universal values such as tolerance, dialogical openness, and the recognition of diversity, and in the spirit of *ulūl albāb*—intellectual depth, wisdom, and orientation toward the common good. Accordingly, this action plan has the potential to strengthen religious moderation by establishing forums, facilitating cross-actor discussions, and conducting ongoing evaluation in both academic and social-practical contexts.

4. CONCLUSION

The central findings of this study demonstrate that the Sufi polemics in

seventeenth-century Aceh reflect an intellectual dynamic that transcended theological discourse, transforming into socio-political practices that both constrained and directed the plurality of thought. This insight carries global significance as it illustrates how religious interpretation can serve as an instrument of legitimacy and exclusion. This pattern remains relevant in the study of religion and power across regions. The first concrete evidence is found in the analysis of the takfīr fatwa and the executions of Wujudiyah adherents, which reveal the close interconnection between doctrinal debates and royal authority in shaping religious norms. Additional evidence is observed in the construction of Nuruddin ar-Raniri's legitimacy, which curtailed alternative interpretations to reinforce official orthodoxy, highlighting the role of texts, fatwas, and public acts in defining the boundaries of orthodoxy. Collectively, these findings underscore the complex interplay between mystical teachings, orthodox interpretations, and political configurations within the Acehnese intellectual landscape.

This study contributes to contemporary debates on religion, politics, and Sufism by offering a historically grounded framework for understanding how religious orthodoxy is constructed, negotiated, and enforced within Muslim-majority societies. The Acehnese case demonstrates that orthodoxy is not merely a theological consensus but a product of institutional power, textual authorization, and political interests. This insight is particularly relevant today, as modern Muslim societies continue to grapple with tensions between plural religious expressions and state-sanctioned interpretations of Islam. By showing how mystical plurality was narrowed through mechanisms such as fatwas, public punishment, and scholarly legitimation, this research challenges essentialist views of Islamic orthodoxy as fixed or inevitable. Instead, it highlights orthodoxy as a contingent outcome shaped by historical contexts. Consequently, the study encourages contemporary scholars to reassess debates on "moderate Islam," religious authority, and doctrinal conformity by situating them within broader power relations, thereby fostering a more nuanced understanding of religious governance in the modern Muslim world.

The findings of this study have concrete implications for current scholarship and political discourse concerning Islam and authority. In academic terms, the concept of contextual ontological pluralism offers a theoretical tool for re-evaluating contemporary conflicts between Sufi traditions and reformist or state-backed orthodox movements, particularly in Southeast Asia and the Middle East. It enables scholars to trace how metaphysical doctrines are mobilized to justify inclusion or exclusion within modern Islamic institutions. Politically, the Acehnese precedent illuminates present-

day practices in which governments or religious councils deploy theological claims to legitimize regulatory control over belief, such as the marginalization of heterodox groups through legal or administrative means. By historicizing these strategies, this study provides a critical perspective for policymakers and intellectuals engaged in debates on religious freedom, counter-radicalization, and Islamic law. Ultimately, the research underscores the enduring relevance of Sufi polemics for understanding how religion continues to shape—and be shaped by—power in contemporary Muslim societies.

The limitations of this study lie in its focus on the historical case of seventeenth-century Aceh, which constrains the scope of analysis from extending to broader comparative contexts that could deepen the inquiry. However, this limitation opens opportunities for further research to examine similar patterns in other regions, thereby achieving a more comprehensive understanding of the configurations linking Sufism, orthodoxy, and politics. From a philological perspective, numerous Sufi manuscripts remain unexamined critically, leaving ample space for subsequent studies to produce new editions and conduct comparative analyses. Methodologically, this study has not yet integrated anthropological and sociological approaches that could trace the legacy of these polemics in contemporary life, making interdisciplinary research highly promising. Accordingly, the present limitations invite future explorations that can further enrich the understanding of the relationship between Sufism, orthodoxy, and authority in the dynamics of global Islam.

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