

AN ISLAMIC ANTHROPOLOGICAL APPROACH AT THE LOCAL LEVEL: A STUDY OF RELIGIOUS PRACTICES OF MUSLIM COMMUNITIES IN EAST KALIMANTAN

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Abstract. This study examines the Islamic anthropological approach as a methodological framework for understanding the religious practices of Muslim communities at the local level, particularly in East Kalimantan. Using qualitative-ethnographic methods, this research seeks to reveal how Islamic values are articulated, negotiated, and practiced within distinctive local cultural contexts. The Islamic anthropological approach does not merely position Islam as a fixed normative system, but rather views it as a living tradition that continuously interacts with customary values, local wisdom, and social dynamics of local communities. The findings indicate that Muslim communities in East Kalimantan have successfully built a harmonious synthesis between universal Islamic teachings and local traditions through a long process of cultural acculturation. Three patterns of cultural negotiation were identified: selective accommodation, meaning transformation, and creative resistance. Local ulama play a central role as intelligent cultural mediators in this process. These findings contribute theoretically to the development of Islamic anthropology and practically to multicultural Islamic religious education

Keywords: *Islamic Anthropology; Religious Practices; Local Wisdom; East Kalimantan; Cultural Acculturation*

I. INTRODUCTION

The primary consumer goods sector (consumer non-cyclicals) Islamic Anthropology as an academic discipline has undergone significant development since the mid-20th century. In contrast to classical Islamic studies which are more normative-theological in nature, Islamic anthropology exists to understand Islam as it is lived, practiced, and interpreted by Muslim communities within concrete socio-cultural contexts [1]. This approach becomes increasingly relevant when we are confronted with the extraordinarily rich diversity of Islamic expressions throughout the Muslim world, including in Indonesia [2].

In Indonesia, specifically in East Kalimantan, the diversity of Islamic religious practices constitutes a social reality that cannot be ignored. The Muslim community in this region lives within a plural cultural context, where Islamic values interact dynamically with the indigenous traditions of the Dayak, Kutai, Banjar, and various other tribes that were rooted long before the arrival of Islam. This interaction produces a distinct and unique character of Islam, which often cannot be understood solely through a normative-textual approach [3].

The urgency of this research is based on at least three primary reasons. First, academically, there is still limited research approaching local Islamic phenomena in East Kalimantan with an adequate anthropological framework. Second, theologically, there is a need to understand how universal Islamic principles can engage in constructive dialogue with local traditions without losing their creedal

substance. Third, pedagogically, a strong empirical foundation is required for the development of Islamic religious education models that are multicultural and contextual in outlook.

Based on this background, this research formulates three core questions:

- (a) How can the Islamic anthropological approach be applied in understanding the religious practices of Muslim communities at the local level?
- (b) What are the forms and patterns of interaction between universal Islamic values and local wisdom in the lives of the East Kalimantan Muslim community?
- (c) What are the implications of these findings for the development of Islamic studies and Islamic religious education?

The objectives of this research are to:

- (a) describe and analyze the forms of religious practices of the Muslim community in East Kalimantan through the lens of Islamic anthropology;
- (b) identify patterns of negotiation between Islam and local traditions; and
- (c) formulate recommendations for the development of local wisdom-based Islamic religious education..

II. RESEARCH METHODS

This research utilizes a qualitative approach with an ethnographic design as the primary methodological framework. The choice of ethnography is based on the

consideration that this study aims to understand the meanings, interpretations, and lived experiences of Muslim communities in a deep and holistic manner, which cannot be achieved through quantitative measurements alone.

The research was conducted in three locations selected purposively: (1) The Muslim community in Tenggarong District, Kutai Kartanegara, as a representation of semi-urban Muslim society with historical roots in the Kutai Sultanate; (2) The Muslim community in Muara Bengkal District, East Kutai, as a representation of rural Muslim society that still strongly adheres to local traditions; and (3) The Muslim community in Manggar Village, Balikpapan City, as a representation of urban Muslim society that is cosmopolitan and heterogeneous.

Data collection techniques used include four complementary methods. First, participant observation for six months, during which the researcher was directly involved in the religious and social activities of the community. Second, in-depth interviews with 24 informants consisting of religious figures, traditional leaders, and ordinary community members selected through purposive and snowball sampling techniques. Third, documentation studies of cultural artifacts related to religious practices. Fourth, Focus Group Discussions (FGD) for three sessions to validate preliminary findings.

Data analysis follows the thematic analysis model of Braun and Clarke (2006), modified according to the Islamic anthropological framework, encompassing six stages: data familiarization, initial coding, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining themes, and report writing. Data validity is ensured through source triangulation, method triangulation, member checking, and peer debriefing with two research colleagues

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Manifestations of Islamic Religious Practices at the Local Level

Research findings indicate that the religious practices of Muslim communities in East Kalimantan possess rich and layered dimensions[4]. In the first layer, there are ibadah mahdhah (pure worship) which are universal prayer, fasting, almsgiving, and the hajj pilgrimage carried out according to sharia without substantive cultural variations. However, in the second and third layers, there is a spectrum of religious practices showing a very rich gradation between the 'purely Islamic' and the 'locally nuanced'[5].

One of the most interesting practices is the Aruh Baharin (Aruh Ganal) tradition found in the Banjar-Dayak Muslim community in Kutai Kartanegara. This tradition is a post-harvest thanksgiving ceremony that combines elements of Islamic rituals—recitation of prayers, tahlil, Surah Yasin—with local customary elements such as symbolic offerings, dances, and traditional music [6]. Local ulema (religious scholars) take an accommodative stance toward this tradition after performing a 'purification' of elements that are theologically problematic, while maintaining elements that can be compromised as expressions of gratitude[7].

Another significant tradition is the belian ritual in a version that has undergone Islamization. In the contemporary version, the belian ritual—which was historically an animistic healing practice—has undergone a transformation where the veneration of ancestral spirits is replaced by Islamic prayers and the recitation of Quranic verses. Nevertheless, aesthetic elements such as sapeq music, dances, and traditional clothing are maintained as expressions of cultural identity considered theologically neutral[8]

Other identified practices include: the tradition of the Prophet's Birthday (Maulid Nabi) colored with songs in the Kutai and Banjar languages; life cycle rituals (birth, circumcision, marriage, death) that blend customary processions with sharia pillars; pilgrimages to the tombs of local sultans and saints as a form of respect placed within a moderately interpreted framework of tabarruk; and traditional healing practices that integrate Quranic prayers with local herbal remedies.

Patterns of Negotiation between Universal Islam and Local Traditions

The process of negotiation between universal Islamic values and local traditions takes place continuously and dynamically. This study identifies three main patterns of negotiation operating within the Muslim communities of East Kalimantan.

The first pattern is selective accommodation. In this pattern, the Muslim community selects elements of local tradition compatible with Islamic values to be maintained, while consciously eliminating elements considered contradictory. This pattern is most commonly found in life cycle ritual practices. In Kutai Muslim traditional weddings, for example, the rich and festive customary processions—bepelas, mengulur niat, beluluh—are maintained and even become a source of cultural pride, yet the sharia marriage contract (akad nikah) receives a central portion and cannot be replaced by any customary procession[9].

The second pattern is transformation of meaning. In this pattern, local traditions undergo a transformation of meaning and function through Islamic reinterpretation, without fundamentally changing their outward form[10]. Traditions that originally had animistic or Hindu-Buddhist connotations are reinterpreted within an Islamic framework[11]. This process is often referred to by informants as 'Islamizing tradition from within.' Its theological legitimacy is obtained through the fiqh principles of sadd al-dhara'i' and dar' al-mafasid muqaddam 'ala jalb al-mashalih preventing harm takes precedence over seeking benefit so that changes are carried out gradually and dialogically[12].

The third pattern is creative resistance. This pattern emerges as a response to what the community perceives as a threat of homogenization to their cultural identity, coming from both puritan movements that reject local traditions and from global pop culture. The community responds by further strengthening and celebrating their local traditions within an Islamic frame, as a statement that being 'Islamic' and 'locally cultured' are not two mutually exclusive things[13].

The Role of Local Ulema as Cultural Mediators

Local ulema play a very central and determinant role in shaping the character of local Islam in East Kalimantan.

Different from the often oversimplified representation of ulema either as rigid guardians of orthodoxy or as obstacles to modernization—the local ulema encountered in this study generally function as intelligent, creative cultural mediators who possess high social legitimacy in their communities [14].

The mediation ability of local ulema rests on two complementary core competencies. First, deep religious competence mastery of the kitab kuning (classical texts) [15], the science of fiqh (jurisprudence), tafsir (exegesis), and other Islamic sciences which grants them the authority to perform contextual ijtihad. Second, broad cultural competence a deep understanding of customary traditions, local languages, and the social dynamics of the community which allows them to communicate and negotiate effectively with customary leaders [16][17], [18], [19].

The strategy most frequently used by local ulema is what this research terms ‘progressive reinterpretation.[20]’ Through this strategy, local practices that are potentially problematic theologically are reinterpreted within an Islamic framework gradually and persuasively, rather than through direct confrontation which could potentially trigger resistance. This method is in line with the dakwah bil-hikmah (preaching with wisdom) approach taught in the Quran (Q.S. An-Nahl: 125).

Implications for Islamic Religious Education

The findings of this study have broad and profound implications for the development of Islamic Religious Education (PAI), particularly in the context of a culturally diverse society like East Kalimantan. First, the PAI curriculum needs to be developed by integrating anthropological insights that allow students to understand and appreciate the diversity of Islamic expressions. This does not mean religious relativism, but rather a mature understanding of the boundaries between what constitutes the substance of Islamic teachings and what constitutes its cultural expressions[21] [22], [23], [24], [25].

Second, PAI pedagogy needs to transform from a one-way knowledge transmission model toward a dialogue model that respects the students' experiences and cultural backgrounds. The culturally responsive teaching approach developed by Geneva Gay (2010) provides valuable inspiration for adaptation within the PAI context in Indonesia, specifically in recognizing and validating students' cultural experiences as legitimate learning resources [26].

Third, PAI teachers need to be equipped with adequate intercultural competence, including the ability to conduct critical analysis of local religious practices using relevant fiqh and ushul fiqh rules. This competence will help teachers avoid two traps: on one hand, syncretism that blurs the line between Islam and local tradition; on the other hand, excessive purification that rejects all forms of local Islamic cultural expression [27] [28], [29].

Fourth, Islamic educational institutions in East Kalimantan need to take an active role in documenting, studying, and preserving local wisdom as part of the cultural heritage of Islam Nusantara. This role is in line with the academic mandate of UINSI Samarinda as the highest Islamic educational institution in East Kalimantan, which is obligated

to integrate deep religious knowledge with sensitivity toward the local cultural context[30].

IV. CONCLUSIONS

This research has demonstrated that the Islamic anthropological approach constitutes a highly productive and relevant methodological framework in understanding the complexity of religious practices among Muslim communities at the local level. Through this approach, it can be revealed that the Muslim communities of East Kalimantan are not passive recipients of Islam arriving from the outside, but rather active agents who creatively and intelligently negotiate their Islamic identity within a distinct local cultural context. The three primary findings of this research can be summarized as follows. First, the religious practices of the East Kalimantan Muslim community exhibit a hybrid character that blends universal Islamic elements with local wisdom through a long, organic, and continuous process of acculturation. Second, the dynamics of negotiation between Islam and local tradition occur through three interacting main patterns: selective accommodation, transformation of meaning, and creative resistance. Third, local scholars (ulama) play a key role as legitimate cultural mediators through progressive re-signification strategies rooted in relevant principles of fiqh. The theoretical implications of this research highlight the need to develop a more contextual Islamic anthropological framework, capable of appreciating the diversity of Islamic expressions at the local level without falling into religious relativism. Meanwhile, the practical implications include the reform of curriculum, pedagogy, teacher competency, and the institutional orientation of Islamic religious education to be more responsive toward the local cultural context. This research has limitations in terms of geographical scope, which is restricted to three locations in East Kalimantan. Further research with a broader scope, cross-regional comparative methodologies, and longitudinal approaches is highly necessary to deepen the understanding of local Islamic dynamics in Kalimantan, while simultaneously providing a more comprehensive contribution to the development of Islam Nusantara studies..

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