



The Cultural Syncretic Strategy of The Muslim Minority: A Case in the Mentawai Islands- Indonesia



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Abstract

This paper discusses how minority Muslims in Mentawai, especially among the older generation, conduct cultural negotiations and strategies carried out by Islamic preachers in locality traditions. Practically, this paper contributes to models of cultural and Islamic studies that are friendly to the value of locality. The research was conducted with a qualitative approach. Data collection techniques were performed in three ways: observation, literature/document studies, and interviews—technical data analysis with technical analysts Miles and Huberman. Arat Sabulungan, as a local belief for the indigenous Mentawai, is an elementary value for the Mentawai community. The historical-political factors of the New Order period, making sociologically, consistency to religious beliefs were not smooth. In addition, it is also caused by cultural negotiations that in Islam are more "difficult" compared to non-Islamic religions. The practice of Arat Sabulungan is a contributive variable causing difficulties in cultural negotiations. During this time, the strategy used by Islamic preachers, especially targeting the segment of the older generation and indigenous people who firmly hold the values, is with a pattern of syncretic that is sometimes "extreme". This pattern is considered more optimal in maintaining the Mentawai Muslim entity in the older generation and the indigenous elite.

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1. Introduction

The Mentawai Islands is one of the regions in the administrative region of West Sumatra Province, which adheres to the Muslim minority (Delfi, 2013; Singh et al., 2020). It has a cultural entity that differs significantly from Minangkabau culture, as the majority culture in the Province. Muslims are 24% of the entire Mentawai population. In comparison, the number of Protestants is 49%, Catholics is 26%, and other religions (such as Bahai) is about 1% (Yulia et al., 2018). In terms of religious understanding, it shows that the teachings of Islam have not been fully applied by the Adherents of Islam, which amounts to 24% in Mentawai because there is still the influence of old beliefs carried out by the Mentawai community, namely the belief of Arat Sabulungan.

Delfi (2013) explains that Arat Sabulungan is a locality tradition related to the people's knowledge, beliefs, and customs in Mentawai. The Mentawaians' traditional Arat Sabulungan culture plays an important role in their lives. Arat is a term used by Siberut residents to describe the culture that combines their faith into everyday discourse (custom). This statement alludes to Arat Sabulungan, a native belief based on their forefathers' teachings. Sabulungan comes from the term bulug, which means "plant leaves." The suffix a and the added prefix sa refer to a leaf arrangement or a plant collection utilized in religious rituals. The key aspects of ceremonial rituals are the usage of leaves in ceremonies, as well as mesmerizing dancing and music. The leaves (and flowers) also serve as a conduit for offerings to the uma spirits. Sabulungan is thought to be a part of human behavior, according to Juniator Tulus, and spirits view buluat (offerings) as a means of devotion through which humans who make the offerings earn good fortune and escape harm.

Their faith is founded on their ancestors' knowledge—a set of ideals known as puaranan Mentawai that maintains life's balance (Mentawai customary system). Arat Sabulungan is the charged concept of Mentawai living as a puaranan Mentawai. In the family and the uma, Arat is revered as a holy tradition and the foundation of human life. As a result, arat represents world harmony as well as a way to bring the uma together in the broader community of Mentawai. Harmony with the world encompasses acceptable relationships among humans, as well as their relationships with nature, biotic matter (flora and fauna), inanimate items, natural phenomena, and the spirit realm. Arat is a guidance system passed down from the ancestors and is seen as a crucial guideline in life, particularly for those who are immersed in the uma's communal life. In Mentawai, uma denotes a deep bond with a small group of people known as a clan, as well as their main communal longhouse, which is the hub of group activity in a range of rites and ceremonies. The uma is used not just for group discussions, but also as a gathering place for those seeking spiritual direction to heal ailing community members (Yulia, et al., 2018).

Arat Sabulungan believes that natural objects have a spirit. Spirits are thought to live comparable lives to humans; however, not everyone has the ability to see and communicate with the visible and invisible realms of the spirit world. Those with a strong ability to converse with the spirit world are referred to as Kerei or Sikerei in Siberut (Tulus, 2012). The Kerei is a spiritual leader who is involved in a number of uma ceremonies as well as personal healing rituals. Because he can communicate with both the actual human world and the spirit realm, the Kerei acts as a link between both. Almost every place on Earth, according to local belief, has a set of rulers or many guarding spirits. As a result, there are countless guardians or supernatural rulers, such as the sky spirits known as Saikamanua. Saikalelu or Sibarakalelu are the spirits who live in the woodland kingdom (Sumatera, 2019). The spirits who live in and around rivers are known as Saikaoinan or Sibarakaoinan, while those who live near the sea are known as Saikabagakoat. The Teteu and Sigegeugeu spirits, who look after the land, are the most important spirits. Every human person has a relationship with the spirit world, and humans strive to maintain a positive relationship with the spirit world in order to keep life running smoothly. Various rituals and devotional acts are used to

maintain a connection with the spirit realm. Rituals are used not just to meet the psychological needs of people, but also to keep the *uma* in harmony.

In Mentawai culture, ritual worship encompasses a wide range of acts. Having the ability to enchant and, second, performing rituals are two important jobs in Siberut (Singh & Henrich, 2020). Both are necessary for influencing the spirits that reside in all areas, particularly where human activity occurs. They're also important for influencing the human soul, because humans and their souls should be happy in life. Aside from that, it's lovely that good spirits want to live in a human body. If the soul does not feel at ease with the good spirits, it will leave the body, sometimes resulting in death. Unhappy spirit-influenced spirits can also depart the body for a period of time, causing the person to become ill.

This paper discusses how minority Muslims in Mentawai, especially among the older generation, conduct cultural negotiations and strategies carried out by Islamic preachers in the midst of locality traditions Arat Sabulungan. Practically, this paper contributes to the models of cultural and Islamic studies that are friendly to the locality in the Mentawai ethnic entity, where Islam is not radical but can negotiate with the locality itself.

2. Materials and Methods

This research is research conducted with a qualitative approach with data collection techniques through three ways: observation, literature/document studies, and interviews (Aspers & Corte, 2019). Technical data analysis for this study was conducted with technical analysts from Miles and Huberman, emphasizing three stages of analysis, namely the reduction stage, data presentation, and conclusion (Mayring, 2004). The data reduction stage is the initial stage of analysis, namely sorting interview and observation data through categorizations to find themes and patterns to form one classification of data. Once classified, the data is presented in sub-chapters or with grouped items making it easier to conclude. This research was conducted in Mentawai islands as a spatial locus because the research object is the Muslim community minorities Mentawai. The main focus is in Siberut island area. This area, culturally, is assumed to still practice Arat Sabulungan in a visceral manner that is seen in their daily life patterns. Among the three major islands in the Mentawai Islands, namely Siberut Island, Sipora Island and Sikakap Island (North Pagai-South Pagai), Siberut island is still an island considered "firm" to hold the tradition of Mentawai locality, compared to other islands. Besides the "native" Mentawai community settled more on the island, sociological-demographic facts show that the "people of the edge" (the term Mentawai society for migrants), when compared to other areas of the Mentawai Islands, are not so much when compared to other islands or regions such as in Sipora and Sikakap (Whitten & Whitten, 1982).

Other islands (Sikakap and Sipora) also became research locus because there was also an "enclave" of Mentawai natives who assumed to be Muslims. But on these two islands, the demographic composition tends to be balanced between the "native" and the "edge people", even for the island of Sikakap, precisely more migrants than the "natives". However, in the context of qualitative research, all islands in the Mentawai Islands are used as samples to obtain a comprehensive reality.

3. Results and Discussions

3.1 *Syncretic as A Social Entity*

In society, religion has a function. It influences shaping social, cultural, economic, political structures and so on. Social studies, especially anthropological approaches, make it more possible to

comprehensively understand the most profound meanings of religious life in society and the correlation between religion and various elements of culture.

In the context of this study, the focus is not on the nature of religion in the sense of revelation and methodological debates relating to sacred texts and their literal understanding. But focus more on researching people as perpetrators who live, believe and carry out orders (in the form of interactive activities) to the teachings of religion that are believed. In this context, the researchers examined how religion is included and inherent in culture and social systems, certainly based on facts or socio-cultural realities.

When we examine the aspect of negotiation between local culture and the teachings of religions that have been considered as "outsiders" or come from the "outside", then the social facts that will emerge are syncretism practices. This practice of syncretism is synonymous with acculturation. This acculturation is related to the dissemination of culture or cultural diffusion. There is a difference between syncretic and syncretism. Syncretic is the process, while syncretism is the result of syncretic. Some anthropologists think that syncretism is one of the three results of acculturation, namely (1) acceptance, (2) adaptation and (3) reaction.

Meanwhile, syncretism is a process of adjustment or negotiation-adaptation, which is interpreted as combining original and foreign characteristics in a harmonious unity. Syncretism is an attempt to drown out differences and produce unity among different sects or philosophical traditions. In other words, the effort to deliver harmony is the ultimate goal. For the sake of it, it is considered appropriate to sacrifice principle and dogma. In philosophy and religion, syncretism is commonly defined as reconciliation or synthesis of opposing principles or practices performed by a group or society.

Departing from the above understanding, it is understood that syncretic is an effort to process, unite and combine and complete two or more different or opposite principal so that a new system is formed in contrast to previous principles and systems. Then, the understanding of syncretic that applies or is seen in the Muslim community in the Mentawai Islands concerns two elementary principles related to value, namely Islam and Arat Sabulungan. Arat Sabulungan is an early entity, a local-specific-specific entity that is considered "original" to the Mentawai community. Therefore, the Mentawai Muslims, especially from the older generation, still exercise the tools of values, the outlook of life, rules and knowledge contained in the teachings of Arat Sabulungan. They have been guiding long before the arrival of Islam itself. In a cultural context, although administrative, Mentawai is in the region of West Sumatra. Still, the people of the Mentawai tribe have a different custom with once with Minangkabau customs, the majority of which are used by West Sumatrans. Mentawai people are indeed in the region of West Sumatra, but their businesses are different from ours!".

2.2. Islam Vs Arat Sabulungan: Syncretic Strategy Of Islamization In Mentawai

In the spatial context, the tradition of Arat Sabulungan is still considered vital in the Mentawai part of Siberut Island. In the southern part of Mentawai, such as Pagai North-South Island and Sipora, the noble value of ancestral traditions sourced from Sabulungan Arat has thinned. It can even be said to have begun to disappear. This is logical because the indigenous Mentawai community settled more on Siberut island than any other major island.

Islam's arrival in Mentawai is considered as the introduction of new values brought in by foreigners. The existence and activity of outsiders through a group of Muslim missionaries in the past engaged government authorities, and the "necessity" of embracing a religion may have been regarded as repression by society. The teachings of Sabulungan as an intrinsic Mentawaian identity in their lives are difficult for sasareu to accept. As a result, the values of outsiders are reflected in the

existence of Islam puaranan sasareu (outsider's rules). The term sasareu refers to something other than what is indigenous to the Mentawai people. As a result, it's tough to compare Arat sasareu to Arat Mentawai.

This is in contrast to the Baha'i religion, which was likewise introduced by the outside world and was just recently decriminalized by the government in 2000. Most Mentawaians who have been introduced to Baha'i believe it is similar to Arat Sabulungan's teachings. When individuals in Siberut are questioned about Baha'i, they frequently respond that it is makerek kapuaranan Mentawai, or similar to Mentawai values. It demonstrates that the majority of Mentawaians are selective in their acceptance of the sasareu's values.

Because past Baha'i leaders in Indonesia referred to it as the Baha'i religion of Islam without disclosing its relationship, the Baha'i faith is sometimes referred to as the Baha'i religion with Islam in Siberut. In general, in Mentawai, there is no problem with religious differences because the indigenous Mentawai people are quite open. Despite having unpleasant historical experience of their locality beliefs in the New Order phase, it is not reactive-anarchist, let alone prejudicial to other religious beliefs. Theoretically, this is characteristic of "silent resistance", as James C. Scott put it. It even comes into being part of different religious beliefs (people's religion "edge") while still exercising their locality beliefs. This includes the Mentawai Muslim minority.

Moving religious identity from non-Muslim to Muslim (and vice versa), in the indigenous Mentawai community, in general, dominated by social problems, including (1) Social conflicts at the group/community level. Social conflict seems simple for an outgroup, but it is substantial for them. Some cases show this, such as the case of the church building, when their religious identity is non-Muslim. Commonly found, church development involves self-help in the early stages of its construction. Usually, each Uma (oriented "clan" or "fam") gets their own tasks, such as providing wood and so on. There are groups of Uma who are late to hand over wood as their duty/ration in its development. When this condition is considered a mistake, considered negligent, touted on various occasions, then for members of the uma, this is regarded as a reduction in self-esteem. So, spontaneously, usually, through the figure of uma, they will come out of the non-Muslim community.

(2) Personal issues of the group that "brought" the Religion of Islam. Usually, this is related to the "attitude" of the preacher. Mentawai people are most easily converted when they see the "attitude" of the preachers are in an area that is not following their culture, although it is common for the "edge" community. For example, there is a case where this case becomes their preference in looking at Islam itself. The case when a preacher marries his student. In our intensive interviews, the informants did not want to formally mention the identity and the group (organization) where the preacher came from. From a non-Mentawai Muslim informant who settled long ago in Siberut, data obtained that several years ago, there was a preacher who impregnated his daughter. Then they were married. Previously, this preacher also married his students on the spot before preaching in Siberut. This is an issue that reduces the view of Mentawai Muslims towards the existence of Islam. Even in a research site, dairying occurs "donate" deeds done by one of the preachers. This "donate" act, until now spoken from person to person from year to year. It becomes a reference when other preachers are preaching Islam.

In the context above, the actual opportunity of Islam and non-Islam is the same because the process of moving from one religion to another is dominated by social problems (conflicts). Significant differences occur when it comes to ritual aspects. As explained earlier, Arat Sabulungan, which is the local belief of the Mentawai community, is a belief in the spirits found in nature. Thus, their interpretation of the empirical world's relationship with the non-empirical world. This is the basis of Mentawai people's activities. Starting from the activities of the procession of birth, breeding, shaming, hunting, making medicine, making houses, making sampans, the process of transformation

from the world of children to the world of adults, marriage, death and so on, inseparable with aspects of Sabulungan (spiritual world).

In this context, Sikerei's presence is so significant in the social system of Mentawai society as a liaison with the spirit world. Sikerei is responsible for maintaining harmony between man and the spirit world. These spirits are considered to give the good and benefit that man needs to live. So, in all its activities, man is obliged to carry out the existing restrictions for the continuity of life so that life is harmonious and balanced.

Therefore, in the face of Sikere, preachers must be able to act "softly" and even accommodate syncretism practices. As a "cultural spirit", the presence of a Sikerei is very strategic in maintaining the balance of the socio-cultural system in Mentawai. Some Sikere converted to Islam, but they do not practice ritual worship based on Islamic shari'a. So, all this time is to "let" alone while appreciating his choice to do the "bicultural". Even the preachers consider this Sikerei more to invest in maintaining the stability of their da'wah. Sikerei is just an intermediate object. The main thing is the younger generation through the path of education. Therefore, it is not surprising then practically, preachers and NGOs / NGOs (Muslims) let these indigenous elites carry out rituals Arat Sabulungan without wanting to blame. It is not possible to give the option to select one. This would be potentially counterproductive.

Although Mentawai people now convert to Islam, there are still many events that show their belief in the existence of these spirits. The practice of Sabulungan still exists, especially in the older generation. For example, they still believe that someone who is sick can be caused by spirits, even though they have been treated at the community health centres. Not infrequently found in some cases, the occurrence of colonial cure disease by involving doctors and Sikerei. They still take medicine, but on the other hand, they will still perform the spirit calling ceremony so that the sick can heal. The ceremony was led directly by a Sikerei. Usually, this ceremony involves culinary elements that are contrary to Islamic syariah values, namely food derived from pork and other primate animals. This animal is difficult to leave behind due to natural availability factors, easy to find and often also, in some instances, is a "recommendation" from the Sikerei who act as pork breeders.

This is also the trigger for converting one community (Uma) from Muslims to non-Muslims, especially in the older generation. In non-Muslim religions, this culinary problem does not become a dietary restriction of their religion. This is also what makes the preachers - in the Term of some informants - "raise their hands", can no longer preach in Mentawai.

While the Mentawai Muslim minority of the elderly who are still consistently Muslim, usually because of the strategy that is "grounded" is carried out by the preachers or the community escorts. In the other side, the importance of pork in the Mentawai culture, where porks are not only reserved for communal ritual parties, porks are also standard and means of paying fines, especially in the Siberut island area. The Term Mentawai alak toga or bride-price in sociological-anthropological terms of economics. There are several types of fines in Siberut Mentawai that use pork s as a means of payment, including Tulou customary fines. As part of the typical culinary Mentawai as well as symbolic elements of Mentawai culture, the animals mentioned above become one of the significant "obstacles" to the existence of Islam in Mentawai.

In the context of the explanation above, the strategy of Islamic preaching from the preachers becomes essential. The syncretic and "soft" preaching strategy became the most successful strategy so far in offering Islam to the indigenous Mentawai people. In addition, the strategy is also considered effective in maintaining or escorting the original Muallaf Mentawai, especially those from the older generation. The porks important position seems challenging to offer to the Mentawai of the older generation, even though they have converted to Islam.

Seen, at least reflecting on the case of Aman Taolayta, and assumed to be the same as the older generation. The sociological segment Aman Tautallatta, Islam and other religions are only seen as identities (additions) that they inevitably have to follow. There is no denying da'wah's activities in the past carried out by Islamic preachers involving government officials, considered repressive activities of preaching that merges with political coercion. So that we cannot be left behind, many accept Islam "instantly", including accepting other religions. They were forced to abandon the Sabulungan Arat that had been inherent in their lives. This gives rise to the perception inherited over time, between generations, especially among the older generations of Mentawai in the Siberut area, that Islam is as Kapuaran Sasareu (rules of outsiders). Kapuaran sasareu also gave birth to the next assumption, namely "containing the religious values of outsiders, not our rules and religions".

Islam and other religions, except Bahai, are considered the others positioned in the context of binner opposition. While Bahai religion, which is historically not an official religion recognized by the Indonesian government both since the new order period until now, and not an integral part of the repressive-intimidate period of the past in the eradication of Sabulungan Arat, is considered by the Mentawai community as a religion that has similarities and similarities with the teachings of Sabulungan Arat. Among the Mentawai, especially among the older generations on Siberut island, the island where Bahai has a conquering entity compared to the islands of Sipora and Pagai, Bahai religion is often seen as the Makerek Kapuaran Mentawai (the same rules as the rules of the Mentawai people).

This historical-sociological condition poses significant obstacles in the process of spreading Islam that occurred during this time. So, the syncretic pattern of negotiation from the preachers became a solute choice. The preachers, especially Islamic preachers who come from Mentawai, or their parents are not native to Mentawai but were born in Mentawai, always looking for a "middle ground" (syncretism), especially among the older generation. Allow this segment to do both the religion and culture of the Sabulungan, without demeaning each other. However, both have their own demands that must still be met.

In the process of negotiating through this pattern of syncretism, it basically does not place two different value entities in the position of opposition binner. A dichotomy position constructed by an entity that considers itself more hegemonic and dominant. One is superior to the other. One is noble compared to the other. But the pattern of successful da'wah is seen from how the preachers first recognized a social fact that there is a valuable entity that has previously existed, become historical-value and recognized functionally during this time for the Mentawai sociologically and anthropologically. Then, the value of Islam comes not in the position of "the most" in the opposition relations binner. The noblest while the values of Mentawai are not noble, the holiest while the values of Mentawai are not sacred and the like.

It is important to bring functional relationships between the two entities without reducing each other between one entity and another. In turn, each side felt appreciated so as not to cause obstacles to appreciate and even accept the values of "others", such as Islamic teachings for the Mentawai. In the end, the strategy of syncretism and "soft" without judging and reducing conducted by preachers in Mentawai is a strategy that is considered successful in maintaining the existence of Muslims in this area.

With regard to culinary, through the approach of "dai asli Mentawai", they usually sought alternative culinary supporters such as chicken and beef in lieu of pork. But in the development so far, replacing the pork is very difficult because the pork "stock" is much more in Mentawai than other animals to support the Punen/ritual performed by the Mentawai community, especially led by Sikerei. In addition, the price of cows is very expensive, while porks, besides being cheaper than cows, pork breeding is much more significant than other animals. So, this becomes a great "challenge" for dai and those who have become Muslims. The changes they made limited culinary is

done gradually, evolutive without denouncing and provide justification of prohibition based on the rules of syar'i, while still "offering" alternative culinary solutions. Although not maximal, but in some places has gotten a pretty good result.

4. Conclusion

Arat Sabulungan as a local belief for the indigenous Mentawai, is an elementary value for the Mentawai community. It relates to identity, harmony with the environment as well as the binder of communal solidarity. This local belief had a bitter experience during the New Order. Therefore, most of the indigenous Mentawai converted to the religion (official) of the state at the time (New Order). The conversion sociologically and historically left the sociological issue of uneven displacement. So, on the way, many indigenous Mentawai people, including those who chose Islam as their religion, were so easy to enter and exit their chosen religion. Both from Islam to non-Islam and vice versa.

The strategy used by Islamic preachers during this time, especially those who engineer segments of the older generation and indigenous peoples who firmly hold the values of Sabulungan arat is with a pattern of syncretic that is sometimes "extreme". "Son da'i father Sikere" is an extreme form found in looking at the phenomenon of syncretism among the older generation of minority Muslim Mentawai. This pattern is considered more optimal in maintaining the Mentawai Muslim entity in the segment of the older generation and the indigenous elite.

This paper still leaves a variety of epistemological questions, especially related to the response among the older generation of Mentawai Muslims to the reduction of Arat Sabulungan values in the perception of the younger generation of Mentawai Muslims. Then, the effectiveness of what culinary alternatives have been successfully offered by the preachers so that it can be accepted by the Mentawai Muslim community, especially from the older generation.

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