

The Meeting of Islam and Adat: Exploring the Religiosity of Bajau Samah Community in Kotabaru

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Abstract

The Bajau people, an indigenous group residing along the shores of the archipelago, primarily in Borneo and Celebes Islands, perceive their religiosity differently from other land-based or maritime societies. This paper aims to explore the dimensions of religiosity among the Bajau Samah in Kotabaru, South Kalimantan. This ethnographic research involved researchers participating in the community's religious-cultural activities, such as the *Ma'dupa* and *Menyurung* rituals. The findings reveal that the Bajau Samah are inseparable from their sea and ancestors. These elements are not only their sources of livelihood and wisdom but also crucial 'figures' that shape their religiosity. Their experiences and thought processes regarding the sea and their ancestors manifest in various forms: religious feeling, religious belief, religious knowledge, religious practice, and religious effect. This study argues that while adat (customary law) and religion (Islam) are distinct domains, they collectively constitute the religiosity of the Bajau Samah, as evidenced in Kotabaru.

Keywords: *religiosity, Bajau Samah, Islam, adat*

Abstrak

Masyarakat Bajau, masyarakat adat yang tinggal di pesisir kepulauan nusantara terutama di Pulau Kalimantan dan Sulawesi, mempunyai persepsi religiusitas yang berbeda dengan masyarakat darat atau bahkan masyarakat maritim lainnya. Tulisan ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi dimensi religiusitas masyarakat Bajau Samah di Kotabaru, Kalimantan Selatan. Penelitian ini merupakan penelitian etnografi; peneliti berpartisipasi dalam mempelajari aktivitas keagamaan-budaya masyarakat, seperti ritual Ma'dupa dan Menyurung. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa masyarakat Bajau Samah tidak bisa dipisahkan dari laut dan nenek moyangnya. Keduanya tidak hanya menjadi sumber penghidupan dan kearifan mereka, namun juga 'tokoh' penting pembentuk religiusitas mereka. Pengalaman dan proses berpikir terhadap keduanya pada akhirnya terwujud dalam bentuk perasaan keagamaan, keyakinan keagamaan, pengetahuan keagamaan, pengamalan keagamaan, dan akibat keagamaan. Penelitian ini berargumen bahwa adat dan agama (Islam) merupakan dua ranah yang berbeda, namun keduanya berperan dalam membentuk religiusitas Masyarakat adat sebagaimana tergambar pada Masyarakat Bajau di Kotabaru.

Kata Kunci: religiusitas, Bajau Samah, Islam, adat

Introduction

Home to the most populous Muslim population (McDaniel, 2014), Indonesia is also home to hundreds of indigenous religions (Syafiq & Putri, 2022) alongside the six officially recognized religions by the Indonesian government: Islam, Catholicism, Protestantism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism (Yunus et al., 2020). Del Castillo et al. (2023) emphasize that religion is inseparable from the lives of indigenous people, including those in Indonesia. Religion plays a vital role in shaping their culture, identity and worldview. The interconnectedness between their land, plant and animal world, metaphysical beings, supernatural forces, and rituals underscores the essential nature of religion in indigenous lives. Their identity and core of life derive from their religious practices and spiritual beliefs.

While religion and religiosity are distinct concepts, they are deeply intertwined. This interconnection poses challenges in defining and researching both. Chaplin (1997) describes religion as a complex system encompassing beliefs revealed in behavior and rites connecting to God (Maya Sari, 2014). Mueller et al. (2001) and Peach (2003) define religion as a system of beliefs and practices (Vodéll, 2011). Additionally, religion can be understood as the closeness between a person and their God, manifested in theoretical, practical, and social expressions (Djam'annuri, 2004).

Religiosity, on the other hand, refers to the degree to which an individual practices a religion based on their connection to or conviction in its beliefs (King, 2008, in Vodéll, 2011). Some view religiosity as part of any religious doctrine that emphasizes behavior, social life, and feeling (Raudatussalamah & Susanti, 2017), encompassing both bodily and inner dimensions (Botson & Gray, 1981; Hair & Bowers, 1992; McIntosh et al., 1993 in Afiatin, 2016).

Religion and religiosity encourage followers to harmonize doctrinal and practical lives in their relations with God and human-oriented dimensions. This ethnographic study aims to identify how religious doctrines and practices are understood and practiced by the Bajau Samah in Kota Baru.

The Bajau people, an indigenous maritime community (Albab, 2020), traditionally inhabit coastal areas where they build their homes. Historically nomadic, most Bajau now reside in fixed locations within their groups. Although some Bajau live on land, they often return to their coastal origins. As indigenous maritime people, the sea is their sacred land, and their lives depend on marine

resources. All Bajau Samah are Muslims, yet they continue to transmit indigenous traditions to future generations. For them, religion (Islam) and adat (tradition) are complementary rather than contradictory. Islamic teachings are implemented alongside ritualistic traditions involving the sea.

According to Albab's study, despite living in marginalized conditions, the Bajau Samah in Kotabaru have maintained their maritime traditions and seafaring activities. The primary change is their transition from a nomadic lifestyle to a settled community, building houses in shallow or coastal sea areas. The Bajau people are often perceived as exclusive and reserved, traits stemming from their historical segregation, conflict avoidance, and distrust of outsiders. However, the Bajau Samah in Kotabaru, particularly in terms of social religiosity, demonstrate hospitality towards outsiders, as taught by their religious doctrines. They live harmoniously, interacting and treating visitors to their homeland with friendliness.

This study aims to examine the significance of local and inherited traditions to the Bajau Samah and identify other dimensions of their religiosity, such as their views on the sea and its resources, to avoid biased understanding. Additionally, the often-blurry distinction between adat and religion is explored to determine the extent to which religiosity is shaped by each or their combination. This paper argues that the sea is central to the formation of the Bajau Samah's religiosity.

Literature Review

Studies on Bajau Communities

Several studies on the Bajau people have been undertaken, generally classified into interconnected domains. The first area of study focuses on the Bajau people's strong connection to their origins, reflecting their heritage as indigenous maritime people. For the Bajau tribe, the sea represents their past, present, and future. Rustan et al. (2018) describe the sea as everything to the Bajau, encompassing life itself. Hasrawati et al. (2017) note that this belief leads the Bajau tribes in Wakatobi to perform the "Maduai Arak" ritual, appreciating the sea as God's medium for blessings. The sea is not only a place to live but also a source of food, pleasure, and solace.

Afrianto et al. (2018) explore the Bajau tribe's close relationship with several sea places and coastal areas in Berau. They demonstrate that names like "Derawan," "Maratua," "Kakaban," and "Sangalaki" have special references in the Bajau local language. The Bajau people of Berau Regency, East Kalimantan, are linked to their heritage through folklore, which characterizes their local identities and history. The Bajau maintain a strong connection to their legends, including religious legends, as instrumental versions of their truth.

The second domain relates to Bajau people's commitment to religious belief and rites. Rahman (2018) views the supernatural belief as an important phase of life among traditional societies including Bajau/Sama in Sabah, Malaysia. Although generally are Muslims, the Bajau still believe in the spirits commonly called as

“*pangroak kampoh*”. The belief is based on the idea that every element of life has a ruler (Indrawasih & Antariksa, 2003). Mohd (in Rahman, 2018) elaborates on the existence of the supernatural being and spiritual world in such religious system. Mahali’s study (Ibid) identifies four cosmological levels: the earth, the sky where spirits inhabit, the home for ancestors (embo-embo) and evil creatures (meron), and the highest level, Látallah, where God resides.

The Indonesian Bajau embraced Islam only in the eighteenth century (Nuraini, 2016). Despite their strong religious commitment, the Bajau people have traditions involving supernatural elements. These traditions inspire unique and sacred rites, such as baby birth ceremonies, marriage rituals, and death rituals. Suliyati (2017) describes the baby birth ceremony, where the baby is bathed and given sea water to drink, symbolizing a strong bond with the sea.

The third dimension of Bajau Samah focuses on the cultural traditions of the Bajau people. They believe in the importance of a leader to sustain their inherited maritime cultural traditions. The Bajau are familiar with and bound to Sandro (Sendro/Sanro), who leads various traditional rituals. According to Nurhaliza & Suciati (2019), the Sandro is a respected figure in the community, trusted to protect the Bajau tribe (Suryani & Rahmawati, 2022; Nuraini, 2016). Nuraini (2016) noted that the Sandro may seek protection from spirits before important undertakings, especially sea or land travel. The study also shows that all Bajau people have interacted with a Sandro at least once in their lives. Nuraini concludes that Bajau culture does not distinguish between sacred and profane, utilitarian and aesthetic, leading Sandros to consider themselves both good Muslims and reconcilers to ancestors through pre-Islamic rituals.

Saththa (2014) highlights the unique role of local female Bajau in Kampoeng Rampa, South Kalimantan, in traditional medicine. These women, called Sendro (traditional doctors), play a significant role in preserving local traditions. Their authority extends beyond public ceremonies to being mediators to God. Specific requirements for Sendro include the ability to read prayers, adherence to traditional customs, and being role models in attitude and social affairs.

Jubidalo (2010) examined the impact of myth on cultural rituals, such as the “buwas kuning” (yellow rice) ceremony, which involves communal ritual baths and reciting “dzikir” accompanied by burning incense. Santamaria (2018) analyzed the importance of rice to the Bajau, a non-agricultural, sea-oriented people, showing how cultural encounters shape beliefs and values. Rice must first be offered to ancestors before consumption.

The last category of studies explores the importance of kinship among the Bajau people. Suliyati (2017) examined the Bajo tribe’s kinship system, which plays a crucial role in their identity, distinguishing between Sama and Bagai. Despite their locations, the Bajo people maintain close kinship bonds. They believe they are connected to other Bajau tribes across regions, such as those in Mola, Matinggola, Kupang, Rote, Karimunjawa, Malaysia, and the Philippines. The Bajo tribe in Karimunjawa, for instance, believes they have kinship ties with the Bajo tribe in Bau-bau, Southeast Sulawesi.

Santamaria (2018) studies Sama-Bajau kinship by examining their culture. Despite physical-geographical distances and heterogeneous

communities, they are culturally and natively connected through a chain-link of spheres representing their habitation and livelihood domains. Although no single Sama-Bajau individual visits all Sama-Bajau communities in maritime Southeast Asia, they share origins through myth, legend, or oral history. Shared cultural properties indicate the closeness of cultural and native links.

Cultural transformation is natural and continuous, as reflected in the Bajau people's case. Limited studies address adat (tradition) and religion as a united discourse, often studying them separately. Previous studies on Bajau communities primarily describe their traditions without mentioning the role of religion in shaping these traditions and their religiosity. Religiosity often speaks from a theological perspective of one's spiritual relation with the Divine. This study posits that adat and religion together constitute a form of religiosity, as reflected in the Bajau Samah in Kotabaru.

Understanding the Concepts of Religiosity

Glock and Stark (1965) identify five dimensions of religiosity: experience, ritual, ideology, intellect, and consequence. The experiential dimension (religious feeling) emphasizes individual religious experiences, while the ritualistic dimension (religious practice) focuses on communal worship experiences. The ideological dimension (religious belief) involves the expectation to profess certain beliefs or doctrines. The intellectual dimension (religious knowledge) pertains to acquiring information about fundamental teachings, sacred scriptures, history, and morality. Lastly, the consequential dimension (religious effect) encompasses the secular effects of the other four dimensions, particularly

regarding what people should do and believe as a consequence of their religion.

In Islamic discourse, the depth of religious teachings and practices is evident. Islamic studies generally emphasize two aspects: *aqidah* (faith) and *sharia* (practice). According to Jalaluddin Rahmat (1989), Islamic studies focus on teaching and religiosity. The study of Islamic texts, such as the Quran and Hadith, addresses sacred references, while the study of religiosity discusses the comprehensiveness and dimensions of Muslim behavior derived directly or indirectly from these texts.

A Muslim's religious dimension encompasses all aspects of life, not limited to worship or divine values but extending to a broad, multi-dimensional scope. Ancok & Suroso (2001) translate Glock and Stark's dimensions into Islamic terms: *aqidah* (faith), *sharia* (practice), moral, intellectual, and mysticism (*tasawuf*). The first three dimensions are core to Islamic teachings, while the intellectual dimension is crucial as it underpins the others.

Religiosity remains a debatable topic because different religions and beliefs have varying concepts of what it means to be religious. Understanding religion as applicable in only one form and ignoring others' unique beliefs indicates a lack of understanding (Smith, 1963). In Indonesia, a Muslim visibly practicing religious rituals may be considered more religious than one who works to support their family, despite both being religious acts. Religion manifests in social life through various forms, and what seems ordinary (profane) can become religious (sacred) depending on the context (Eliade, 1959).

Baidhawiy and Jinan (2002) argue that when religion is understood as the ultimate goal, it becomes the core culture, embodying the spirit of religion. Religion interacts with local culture, influenced by internal and external factors that encourage religious belief and practice. These factors are personal, sectoral, and profane, existing within specific dimensions of space and time. Allport and Ross (1967) describe religious orientation as intrinsic (strong commitment) or extrinsic (utilizing religion in life), manifesting in social intrinsic and social extrinsic forms.

Religious orientation, space, and time influence one's understanding of religious teachings, humanitarian sensitivity, socio-cultural conditions and geographical-political contexts. Thouless (1999), as quoted by Afiatin (1998), identifies four factors influencing religiosity: education and social pressures, experiences shaping religious attitudes, ummat needs (security, love, self-esteem, and death), and thought processes (verbal or intellectual).

Ideology and religious commitment strongly influence a Muslim's attitudes. The intensity, academic capacity, and cultural attachment play strategic roles in shaping religious behavior. The impact of these factors is evident in the level of religious maturity, referred to in Islam as a true Muslim or Muslim Kafah, integrating faith and practice in all aspects of life. Allport's analysis (in Pauloutzian, 1966) describes a religious person as one demonstrating religious maturity through several criteria.

The first criterion is the ability to incorporate rationality into one's religious life, alongside emotional, social, and spiritual aspects, recognizing that not all religious teachings can be rationalized. The

second criterion is dynamism, which involves controlling and directing individual motives and activities so that religious actions fulfill the interests of religion while also addressing personal interests. The third criterion is consistency, demonstrated by the harmony between one's actions and religious moral values. The fourth criterion is comprehensiveness, which means adopting religion as a philosophy of life characterized by two key aspects: the ability to attribute the end of all things to God and the acceptance of differences in religious practices. The fifth criterion is integration, where one's life is marked by the seamless incorporation of religious activities into all aspects of life. The final criterion is heuristics, which involves recognizing the limitations in one's religious life and striving to enhance understanding and appreciation of other religious perspectives.

Method

This study employs an ethnographic qualitative approach to examine empirical data on the preservation of values of local wisdom of Bajau Samah in Kotabaru. The issues studied are deeply intertwined with the daily life of the community. This research was conducted in Rampa Village and Semayap Village in Pulau Laut Sub-district and Rampa Village in Pulau Sebeku Sub-district in Kotabaru District, South Kalimantan. These are homes to three cultural Bajau communities. In Semayap Village, the Bajau are minority, whereas in the other two villages, they constitute 100% of the population. All Bajau people in these villages are Muslims, with Rampa Village in Pulau Laut Sub-district being the largest with a number of of 6215 people.

Data collection took place from June to August 2023. The data were gathered through observations of religious-cultural traditions, such as the *Ma'dupa* and *Menyurung* rituals, and interviews with adat leaders, religious leaders, non-Bajau religious leaders, Bajau elders, village/government officials, Bajau representatives and local non-Bajau residents. To support the analyses, data obtained from interviews and documents, including books, articles, event reports, as well as pictures and videos of Bajau Samah traditions, were reviewed, selected and simplified. Finally, these data were examined using the applied theoretical frameworks.

The Bajau Samah: Sea Nomads and Their Sacred Connection

The Bajau or Bajo people are groups of nomadic people traditionally living on the sea. They are known by many names, such as Sea Nomads, Sea People, and Sea Gypsy. Bajau people are commonly found along the seashores of Nusantara, the Philippines, Malaysia, Timor-Leste, Solomon Islands, Papua New Guinea and Madagascar. In Kotabaru, South Kalimantan, the Bajau primarily inhabit the waters of the Laut Strait and Sebuku Strait. They call themselves Bajau Samah, Samah People or Rampa People. In their language, *samah* means equal; reflecting their belief in equality and the absence of a caste system in their social life (interview with Abdullah, future Sandro, on 27 June 2023). They believe that every individual has equal access to rights and should be treated equally, with no one feeling superior or inferior to others.



Figure 1. Bajau Samah's Elders and Key Figures – Haji Subkhan (top left), Kai Ridwan (top second left), Kai Johan (top third left), Zainal Abidin (top right), Ahmad Zaini (bottom left), Edan (bottom right)

As Figure 1 above illustrates, Bajau Samah are predominantly Islam adherents. Culturally, Bajau Samah are similar to other Bajau groups, with their distinct dialect known as *Bahasa Samah* (*samah* language), which has similar tone to Tagalog. Their lives are deeply connected to the sea, just like any other Bajaus. Almost every single Bajau Samah man is a fisherman relying on the sea's natural resources to survive. The sea is not only a means of livelihood but also holds a profound spiritual connection for the Bajau Samah. Their religiosity is closely tied to the sea.

Glock and Stark's (1965) dimensions of religiosity including religious feeling, religious practice, religious belief, religious knowledge, and religious effect are evident in Bajau Samah. As an indigenous community, they practice their ancestral rituals on their 'land' which, in their case, is the sea. The religiosity of the Bajau Samah begins with their personal experiences, either mystical or

non-mystical (religious feeling) related to the sea and their understanding of its values and meanings (religious knowledge) in their lives.

Bajau Samah and Their Connection to the Sea

To the Bajau Samah, the sea is not only their home and source of livelihood, but also a sacred place where they practice their traditions. This aligns with Albab's (2020) observation that, despite the marginalized, the Bajau have maintained their maritime traditions and close relationships with the sea. An important discourse regarding the sacred spaces of indigenous people is the concept of personhood. Indigenous people do not treat what sacred to them as objects, but as equal subjects, considering them 'non-human person' with similar rights to human kinds. They maintain interpersonal (Bird-David, 1999) or inter-subjective (Maarif, 2019) relationships with these non-human persons, interacting reciprocally, responsibly, and ethically.

Rustan and Nasution (2018) emphasize the sacredness of the sea among the Bajau people. For the Bajau, the sea is more than home; it is a place to sustain and inherit ancestral elements. This belief is encapsulated in the phrase '*Papu Manak Ita Lino Bake isi-isina, kitanaja manusia mamikira bhatingga kolekna mangelolana*' (God has given this world with everything in it; we as humans should think about how to obtain and manage it).

The sea has been integral to the Bajau Samah's lives from birth to death. One notable tradition involves newborns being briefly thrown into the sea to swim, symbolizing a strong bond with the sea

(Suliyati, 2017). This practice is believed to ensure the child's protection by the holy spirit (Suryani & Rahmawati, 2022; Boogert, 2017 in Syafiq & Putri, 2022).

Another significant ceremony is the circumcision ritual for boys, which includes a parade to the sea, offerings, and bathing, followed by circumcision on a gong. This ritual underscores the Bajau's respect for the sea as a medium of divine blessings and ancestral honor (Hasrawaty, Anas, & Wisudo, 2017). As teenagers, Bajau Samah boys receive boats built according to specific traditions, including being painted in seven colors representing their gods or ancestors. These boats are essential for transportation and livelihood, symbolizing the emotional and spiritual connection with their ancestors, who are seen as sources of wisdom and strength.

This boat should follow some criteria. For instance, it has to be painted in 7 colors, including black, red, yellow, green, white, blue, and purple, or the flag installed on the boat has to contain all those 7 colors. Those seven colors represent the gods or their ancestors, whose names shall not be mentioned but in rituals, who they believe are guarding their sea. The Bajau Samah share an emotional and spiritual relationship with their ancestors as sources of wisdom and strength. Their ancestors serve as a bind to bridge the past and the present: they cannot be who and where they are today without the deeds of their ancestors. They respect their ancestors so greatly that they do not allow themselves to spit, urinate, and defecate while they are on the sea. The Figure 2 below illustrates the miniature of the boat with seven colors on its flag.



Figure 2. Boat miniature with 7-colored flag

When a Bajau Samah dies, a ritual of *ma'dupa* is conducted, where the family reads the dead's will before presenting *sajian* (offering) for the spirit and reciting verses of the Quran for him. The rest of the processions follow the mainstream Islamic teachings. Another unique thing concerning with death is their graveyard. All Bajau Samah's bodies are buried in the same location in the place they call '*Iilir*'. They want to be together with their late parents, elders, and ancestors despite in the crowded and multi-layered graves. Some graves even have as many as seven layers. They refuse to be buried in the land provided by the government only to be reunited in the death. Figure 3 below illustrates the ritual of Ma'dupa.



Figure 3. Procession of Ma'dupa, complete with sajian and incense

The sea and ancestors play pivotal roles in the lives of the Bajau Samah. They respect and preserve the sea, which has shaped their entire existence. Those who move away often return, finding comfort and healing in the sea. While science has proven the benefits of seawater for skin-related diseases, the Bajau Samah believe the sea can cure various ailments, highlighting its significance in their lives.

The interconnectedness of the Bajau Samah's religiosity dimensions is evident. Their ancestral traditions and daily routines, along with their respect for the sea and ancestors, reflect a reciprocal, responsible, and ethical relationship with their sacred spaces (Maarif, 2019). Their experiences with the sea and ancestors (religious feeling) form an ideology (religious belief) that these elements are sacred and central to their lives. This ideology shapes their knowledge (religious knowledge) and results in ritualistic practices (religious practice). Together, these dimensions influence their attitudes and behaviors in social life (religious effect). For instance, the seven colors representing their ancestors are used in daily life and rituals, such as house paint and ritual clothing. Their choice to be buried with their elders indicates a belief in reunion after death. In short, the Bajau Samah view the sea and ancestors as sources of life and wisdom, forming the foundation of their religiosity.

Sandro and Religious Leaders

The Bajau Samah community is guided by two key figures in their traditions: the *adat* leader, known as Sandro, who leads traditional rituals, and the religious leader, who oversees religious rituals.

Nuraini (2016) highlights the ambiguous status of a Sandro, noting that while Sandro considers himself a devout Muslim, pre-Islamic practices are still evident in the rituals he leads. These practices, such as chanting mantras and communicating with spirits, are remnants of pre-Islamic religion. Despite this, they are not viewed as inconsistent with the practice of Islam.



Figure 4. Sandro - Kai Hadi (in light blue), religious leader - Haji Subkhan (in brown), future Sandro - Abdullah (in white), and Bajau Elder and artist - Kai Mukhtar (in dark blue)

As shown in Figure 4, Sandro does not only serve as a ritual leader, but also as a daily treater of community from diseases and being possessed. Suryani and Rahmawati (2022) noted that Sandro is a figure to be respected among Bajau Samah community. This respect is rooted in the belief that a Sandro will always protect the Bajau tribe. The protective function of a Sandro is supported by Nuraini 's study (2016) finding that the Bajau believe in the physical media to protect and care for others including tiny objects, talismans, and offerings deposited at sea or on land. For the Bajau people, all these

artefacts obviously mean nothing to them without the mediation of the Sandro.



Figure 5. Sandro performing meancak ritual during Pesta Leut

A Sandro uses water as medium of the treatment combined with Islamic prayers and verses from the Holy Quran. A Sandro is believed to be the manifestation or the representative of their ancestors, who constantly communicate with the living beings in most ritualistic occasions. A future Sandro must be the offspring of the current Sandro or the ancestors will have difficulties recognizing him. While those deeds are mainly done by men, a female Sandro's duties revolve around womanhood and the preparation of rituals. She also acts as midwife. All the processions of giving birth are led and done by a female Sandro (Nuraini, 2016). When it comes to the rituals of Bajau Samah, female Sandro is responsible to prepare *sajian* and other equipment for the ritual, such as yellow clothes,

candles, mirror, white plates, cups or glasses, keris, gong, gendang and music.

The Samah-Bajau religious practices and belief systems significantly vary across time and space. The more sedentary land-oriented they become, the more they tend to practice orthodox forms of Islam (Jundam, 1983 and Horvatich, 1992 in Maglana, 2016). Their commitment to Islamic beliefs and tenets necessitates the presence of both local and non-local religious leaders. The authority and capabilities of local religious leaders are highly esteemed, and their assistance is required to manage in almost every public religious affair.

This reliance on religious leaders occurs for two main reasons. First, the system of teaching in specific religious studies related to local public affairs is not an obligation for everyone. Second, the complex parameters and daily responsibilities of fulfilling basic family needs lead them entrust these duties to respected members of certain family lines.

An example of this is the ritual of animal sacrifice (*qurban*) practiced by the Bajau Samah. *Qurban* is typically performed individually, with buffalo being the most sacrificed animal, though buffalo and goat are also used. Before the day of sacrifice, ritual of *menyurung* is held. A religious leader leads prayers in the house of the person performing *qurban*, accompanied with *sajian*, spices, small pieces of wood, and water. The animal's eyes are covered, it is bathed (*tepong tawar* ritual), rubbed with powder and its head or horns are wrapped with a white cloth while *salawat* is recited. On the day of sacrifice, the beheading is performed by a religious leader

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in front of the person's house without digging a hole, allowing the blood to hit the ground or the sea directly. After the processions, the meat is distributed among the community and others eligible to receive it. Figure 6 illustrates Tepong Tawar ritual and Figure 7 represents the Manyurung ritual.



Figure 6. Tepong Tawar ritual



Figure 7. Menyurung ritual

The predominant form of Islam in Indonesia follows the Syafi'ite legal school, known for its ability to compromise (McDaniel, 2014). This perspective is reflected in various rituals such as *tasmiyah* and *tahlil*, similar to other Syafi'ian communities, with the notable inclusion of *sajian*. Religious leaders are regularly invited to lead these rituals, and weekly religious learning forums (*majlis ta'lim*) are held in local mosques to educate the community about Islam and the Quran.

The distinction between Sandro (adat leaders) and religious leaders lies in their respective responsibilities. Sandro oversee traditional rituals, while religious leaders manage the community's religious affairs. Despite religious leaders having more formal duties (Novebri & Pratiwi, 2021; Mardiana et al., 2021), the community still relies on Sandro for traditional medicine and events.

This differentiation indicates that space and time influence the religious orientation of the Bajau Samah (Allport & Ross, 1967). Traditional and Islamic rituals are performed on different occasions, yet elements of each are present in the other. For instance, Islamic prayers are included in *adat* rituals, and Islamic rituals incorporate *adat* elements like *sajian*. In daily life, the Bajau Samah seamlessly integrate Islamic values and their traditions. According to Haji Subkhan, a Bajau Samah religious leader, “Islam acts as a guidance that provides limitations and boundaries so that *adat* does not deviate from Islamic corridors” (interview, 26 June 2023). Before sailing, a Bajau Samah man prays to God Almighty for protection and abundant catches. All rituals are completed with *salawat* and Islamic prayers. Although presenting *sajian* might seem contradictory to Islamic teachings, it is viewed as a symbolic expression of gratitude towards the spirits for guarding their environment and granting permission for rituals.

The discussion suggests that the Bajau Samah perceive *adat* and religion (Islam) as distinct yet complementary realms that shape their religiosity. Their religiosity is deeply influenced by the experiences and contemplations regarding God and supernatural beings, reflected in their interactions with the environment and other people. This understanding of religious teachings and doctrines is informed by socio-cultural and geographical-political contexts, where all Bajau Samah are Muslims, and Islam is the predominant religion in Kota Baru (Allport & Ross, 1967). In summary, the religiosity of the Bajau Samah emphasizes the importance of ancestors, integrating them into their religious beliefs and doctrines.

Socio-Religious Life of Bajau Samah

The social life of the Bajau Samah begins with the family, which shapes each individual's identity and existence on emotional, social, and economic levels. The man is the head of the family, responsible for providing food, while the woman manages domestic affairs, including educating children and cooking. These roles, though seemingly simple, are crucial for maintaining harmonious relationships, providing emotional support, and preserving family integrity. Tuasuun et al. (2023) note that women are often seen as subordinate in accessing livelihood sources due to patriarchal and cultural structures. However, the Bajau Samah recognize the pivotal role of women. Men cherish their wives by working hard to meet their needs and those of their families. In turn, women respect their husbands, even allowing them to eat first in times of scarcity as a form of appreciation for their hard work.

Socially, Bajau Samah practice the culture of *gotong royong* (mutual cooperation). During events like weddings, men collaborate to build the stage, decorate, and install electricity, while women prepare food and other necessities. They prioritize community assistance, even pausing their work or sea activities to show loyalty and support.

Bajau Samah's everyday lives are marked by a strong sense of equality, or 'samah', meaning everyone is equal before God. This belief fosters inclusivity and safety for migrants in their villages (Suliyati, 2017). The Bajau Samah treat guests with utmost hospitality, often leading to cross-cultural marriages. Over time, newcomers assimilate and practice Bajau Samah cultures.

The Bajau Samah believe reciprocating good intentions. If treated well, the Bajau Samah will do even better in return. The establishment of an LDII (*Lembaga Dakwah Islam Indonesia*)'s mosque in their community exemplifies their egalitarian behavior, living harmoniously with different groups without conflict.

Economically, the Bajau Samah are similar in income, primarily as fishermen. Wealth is not flaunted publicly, except during events where women wear gold jewelry and men give money (sawer) to performers as a form of appreciation and *sadaqah* (alms). Despite their fortunes, they remain humble and supportive of each other.

A unique aspect of their homes is the kitchen's location on the terrace or in front, serving as a social space where women share spices, cooking essentials, and stories. Men are the primary breadwinners, with most being fishermen. Some women contribute economically by running small shops selling various products.

This study argues that the socio-religious life of the Bajau Samah begins with the family and extends to the community, encompassing emotional, social, and economic dimensions. The concept of 'samah' fosters harmonious relationships and prevents conflicts. However, their low education levels limit political representation and awareness of waste management. The practice of 'feeding' the sea with leftovers, intended to maintain marine biodiversity, has led to environmental concerns with trash accumulating under their houses, questioning their preservation methods.

Islam and Bajau Samah's Traditions

Regarding the relationship between culture and religion, culture expresses how humans experience and understand the world, while religion is a fundamental way in which humans experience and understand the world. The culture that arises from religion has been broadly categorized in four types: immovable, moveable, tangible, and intangible. The categories encompass various traditions, orally transferred knowledge, and specific practices and beliefs, passed down through generations and among practitioners of a faith (Abdulla, 2018).

As a community that embraces the religion of Islam as their sole religion, the traditions practiced by Bajau Samah align with Islamic teachings. According to Haji Subkhan, a Bajau Samah religious leader, '*Islam acts as a guidance that provides limitation and boundaries so that adat does not deviate from Islamic corridors*' (interview, 26 June 2023). Before a Bajau Samah man sails to the sea, he prays to God Almighty for protection and abundant catches. In all of their rituals, salawat and Islamic prayers complete the process. Although their rituals might seem contradictory to Islamic teachings, particularly in presenting sajian, they do not view it as an offering to the 'unseen'. Instead, they see it as a symbolic expression of gratitude towards the spirits for guarding their environment and granting permission to conduct rituals.

Bajau Samah cultures, shaped by Islamic teachings, emphasizes *gotong royong*, which fosters strong community bonds and maintains good relationships among the community members. This concept shares similarities with the Islamic notion of *habl min an-*

naas (relationship between humans). They believe harmonious relationship with others reflect a good relationship with God Almighty. They also understand that everyone is equal before God (*samah*), and that piety is a personal matter between an individual and God.

The Bajau Samah strive to live according to Islamic values. Crimes are rare in their community, with almost no records of theft or adultery. When children hit puberty, parents often arrange marriages to prevent sex out of wedlock, particularly when there is interest in the opposite gender. Thus, underage marriage is common in the Bajau Samah community, but is driven by clear and strong reasoning.

One of the most notable traits of the Bajau Samah is their hospitality towards strangers. Their friendliness makes newcomers feel comfortable and valued, often leading to cross-cultural marriages. However, this multicultural society does not equate to a multi-religious one, as cross-religious marriages are considered taboo and contradict Islamic teachings.

The Bajau Samah are not picky about food, consuming everything allowed in Islam (*halal*). However, some choose not to consume certain foods, if they are not forbidden in Islam (*haram*) due to personal reasons. For example, a Bajau elder who got stranded in the woods swore not to eat jackfruit for seven generations after it repeatedly blocked his path home. Consequently, many Bajau Samah avoid jackfruit, believing it brings bad luck.

Bajau Samah's traditions also serve as a medium for spreading of Islam. Bajau Samah elders believe that, tradition like *iko-iko* is arranged by their ancestors not only to advise them the principles of lives according to Islamic values but also to propagate Islam in the lands they visit while sailing (interview with Kai Mukhtar, 27 June 2023). In this sense, tradition becomes a medium to strive in God's path (*jihad*). Figure 9 below illustrates the Iko-iko tradition.



Figure 9 Bajau Samah artists performing *iko-iko*

In summary, while Islam and adat are distinct, they complement each other. Islam sets boundaries for adat to ensure it does not deviate from Islamic teachings, while adat enriches Islam, making it more colorful and easier to accept and understand. Studies on adat and religion as a united discourse are rare, and this study contributes to the discussion of religious and cultural studies, particularly concerning religiosity.

Conclusion

The findings suggest that the Bajau Samah perceive *adat* (customary law) and religion (Islam) as distinct yet complementary realms that together shape their religiosity. For the Bajau Samah, their religiosity is deeply influenced by their understanding and experiences of the sea and their ancestors, which serve as sources of livelihood, wisdom and the foundation of their religious beliefs. Their leaders, Sandro and religious figures, guide them to live according to these principles, based on their experiences with and reflections on God and supernatural beings, as well as their interactions with the environment and other people. This process results in a socio-culturally informed understanding of religious teachings and doctrines, where all Bajau Samah are Muslims, and geographical-political context where Islam is the predominant religion in Kotabaru. The religiosity of the Bajau Samah also emphasizes the importance of ancestors, integrating them into their religious beliefs.

This study has limitations, such as not addressing the Bajau Sahah's efforts to preserve marine biodiversity through their waste management system, nor the implications of their collaboration with the government on their cultural preservation. Future studies could explore these areas further.

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