

Dynamics of Muslim Minority Religion in East Amanuban District, South Central Timor Regency

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Abstract

This article examines the religious dynamics of minority Muslim communities in East Amanuban District, South Central Timor Regency, East Nusa Tenggara Province. Despite living in a predominantly Protestant Christian community, the region's Muslim community is able to maintain its religious identity while contributing to the local social and cultural diversity. This study aims to: (1) outline the history of the entry of Islam in East Amanuban, (2) identify the strengths and weaknesses of the Muslim community, and (3) analyze the patterns of their social interaction with the non-Muslim majority community. Using a qualitative descriptive approach through field observations, interviews, and document studies, the study found that the main strength of the Muslim community lies in the relatively large number of mosques and the commitment of the community in preserving the teachings of Islam. The challenges faced include limited human resources, inadequate religious facilities, and the influence of local customs that sometimes contradict Islamic practices. On the other hand, the value of tolerance, social solidarity, and local cultural wisdom is an important capital for the sustainability of their Islamic identity. The results of this study emphasized the importance of strengthening religious institutions and cross-community cooperation to strengthen religious harmony in multicultural areas such as East Amanuban.

Keywords: East Amanuban, interfaith tolerance, Muslim minority, religiosity, social dynamics

Abstrak

Artikel ini mengkaji dinamika keberagamaan komunitas Muslim minoritas di Kecamatan Amanuban Timur, Kabupaten Timor Tengah Selatan, Provinsi Nusa Tenggara Timur. Meskipun hidup di tengah mayoritas masyarakat Kristen Protestan, komunitas Muslim di wilayah ini mampu mempertahankan identitas keagamaannya sekaligus berkontribusi dalam mewarnai keragaman sosial dan budaya setempat. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk: (1) menguraikan sejarah masuknya Islam di Amanuban Timur, (2) mengidentifikasi kekuatan dan kelemahan komunitas Muslim, serta (3) menganalisis pola interaksi sosial mereka dengan masyarakat mayoritas non-Muslim. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif melalui observasi lapangan, wawancara, dan studi dokumen, penelitian ini menemukan bahwa kekuatan utama komunitas Muslim terletak pada jumlah masjid yang relatif banyak serta komitmen warga dalam menjaga ajaran Islam. Adapun tantangan yang dihadapi meliputi keterbatasan sumber daya manusia, fasilitas keagamaan yang belum memadai, serta pengaruh adat lokal yang kadang bertentangan dengan praktik Islam. Di sisi lain, nilai toleransi, solidaritas sosial, dan kearifan budaya lokal menjadi modal penting bagi keberlangsungan identitas keislaman mereka. Hasil penelitian ini menegaskan pentingnya penguatan kelembagaan keagamaan serta kerja sama lintas komunitas guna memperkuat harmoni keberagamaan di wilayah multikultural seperti Amanuban Timur.

Kata Kunci: Amanuban Timur, dinamika sosial, keberagamaan, minoritas Muslim, toleransi antaragama

Introduction

East Amanuban District in South Central Timor Regency, East Nusa Tenggara Province, is an area with cultural wealth, natural beauty, and religious diversity of its people. The majority of the local population comes from the Atoni (Dawan) tribe, along with other ethnic groups such as Kemak and Tetun. In the religious aspect, the community is predominantly Protestant Christian, while the Muslim community is present as a minority group with a relatively small number.¹ Despite this, the Muslim community plays an important role in enriching the social, cultural, and religious dynamics of the region.

The existence of Muslims in East Amanuban is inseparable from a unique historical process. Islam only came to the region in the mid-20th century through local figures and interactions with immigrants. Since then, the Muslim community has sought to maintain its religious identity amid Protestant Christian dominance, while establishing relatively harmonious social relations. This condition shows that religious diversity is not an obstacle to the realization of tolerance and harmony, but can be the foundation for creating a socially respectful life.

However, as a minority group, the Muslim community in East Amanuban is not free from challenges. They are faced with limited human resources, limited religious facilities, and the influence of local customs that are not always in line with Islamic teachings. This situation gives rise to a distinctive social dynamic, where their religiosity is always negotiated between a commitment to the teachings of Islam and the demand to adapt to a predominantly non-Muslim social environment.

From a sociological perspective, dynamics is interpreted as a process of interaction that involves change, interdependence, and mutual influence between individuals and groups.² Meanwhile, religiosity or religiosity includes the level of knowledge, beliefs, appreciation, and practice of religious teachings that a person lives in daily life.³ Thus, the religiosity of the Muslim minority in East Amanuban is not only seen in the practice of religious rituals,

¹ BPS Timor Tengah Selatan, "Luas Wilayah Menurut Kecamatan di Kabupaten Timor Tengah Selatan" (Soe, 2021), <https://timortengahselatankab.bps.go.id/indicator/153/54/1/luas-wilayah-menurut-kecamatan-di-kabupaten-timor-tengah-selatan.html>. diakses tanggal 1 Juni 2023.

² Tri Ardaniah, Raharto & Joni Murti Mulyo Aji, *Pengantar Sosiologi* (Jember: Jurusan Sosial Ekonomi Pertanian Fakultas Pertanian Universitas Jember, 1997); Slamet Santoso, *Dinamika Kelompok* (Jakarta: Bumi Aksara, 2004).

³ Muslim A. Kadir, *Dasar-Dasar Praktikum Keberagamaan dalam Islam* (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2011).

but also in social relations, adaptation strategies, and efforts to maintain identity in the midst of differences.

The term "minority" here is simply in the sense of a statistical minority in the region in question. Not intending to define a minority on the basis of differences in power and experience being disadvantaged by the majority group, as sociologist Robin Williams puts it, "A minority is any cultural (or religious) or physical segregation and aggregation of social consciousness, with hereditary membership and with a high endogamous tendency, that is subjected to political, economic, social or religious discrimination by a dominant segment within the scope of political society certainly."⁴

According to Williams, the concept of minorities is appropriate to read the reality of Muslims in East Amanuban. They are not only a demographically "small number," but also a group that must negotiate its identity, maintain religiosity, and deal with power relations with the majority. However, uniquely, this community is also able to build practices of tolerance and social cooperation so that existing discrimination does not always lead to conflict, but instead gives birth to distinctive social dynamics.

Some studies of Muslim minorities in Indonesia are generally still focused on urban areas, border areas, or specific ethnic communities. Research on the Muslim minority, especially in East Amanuban, has relatively little and is more based on oral stories. In fact, their social realities provide an interesting picture of the practice of tolerance, social solidarity, and survival strategies in a multicultural environment. Therefore, this research has an important academic value to enrich the literature on the Muslim minority in eastern Indonesia.

In addition, this study is also relevant in the context of the development of multiculturalism and strengthening religious moderation in Indonesia. The harmonious life built by the Muslim community with the non-Muslim community in East Amanuban can be a real example of how tolerance, interreligious dialogue, and cross-community cooperation can be realized in daily practice.

Some previous research on Muslim minorities has been conducted mostly in urban areas, border areas, or specific ethnic communities, such as the Chinese Muslim minority in Makassar,⁵ the Kendahe Muslims in North

⁴ Robin Williams, *Strangers Next Door* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1964), 304.

⁵ Ramli, "Moderasi Beragama bagi Minoritas Muslim Etnis Tionghoa di Kota Makassar," *KURIOSITAS: Media Komunikasi Sosial dan Keagamaan*, Vol. 12, no. 2 (2019): 135–62, <https://doi.org/10.35905/kur.v12i2.1219>.

Sulawesi,⁶ the Muslims in North Toraja,⁷ or the Muslims in the Sangihe border.⁸ Other studies have highlighted the multireligious-based model of education in the family⁹ and the role of women in Muslim minority areas.¹⁰

Meanwhile, this research focuses on rural areas in East Nusa Tenggara which are relatively rarely researched, especially in East Amanuban District which has a distinctive social and cultural character. In addition, the historical dimension of the entry of Islam into East Amanuban was also discussed, which so far has only been spoken orally, this provides a new contribution in the form of academic documentation. This research not only looks at the challenges, but also identifies the internal strengths and structural weaknesses of the minority Muslim community so that it can provide a more balanced picture. Finally, this study presents perspectives from peripheral regions that are rarely exposed in academic discourse on minority religion.

Based on this background, this research is focused on three main things, namely: (1) tracing the history of the entry of Islam into East Amanuban, (2) identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the Muslim community in maintaining its religious diversity, and (3) analyzing the form of their interaction and social dynamics with the non-Muslim majority community.

Method

This study uses a qualitative approach with the type of field research. The qualitative approach was chosen because it was able to delve deeply into the social reality, interaction patterns, and religious practices of the minority Muslim community in East Amanuban District in the context of their daily lives. The data used is qualitative data that includes attitudes, religious practices, and forms of social interaction between the Muslim community and the Protestant Christian majority community.

⁶ Sunandar Macpal & Donald Qomaidiasyah Tungkagi, "Tradisi Minoritas Muslim dan Toleransi di Lingkungan Kristen: Konstruksi Identitas Muslim Kendahe di Perbatasan Indonesia-Filipina," *Jurnal Bimas Islam*, Vol. 15, no. 2 (2022): 237–72, <https://doi.org/10.37302/jbi.v15i2.694>.

⁷ Salmiati, Lismawati, Nurlina Jalil, & Nurpayani, "Eksistensi Pendidikan Islam di Lingkungan Minoritas Muslim: Studi Kasus di Lembang Sereale, Toraja Utara," *Al-Musannif*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (2023): 109–124, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.56324/al-musannif.v5i2.110>

⁸ Muhammad Nur Ichsan Azis, "Agama Lokal di Kawasan Perbatasan: Kepercayaan Masade' di Kepulauan Sangihe," *Jurnal Kebudayaan*, Vol. 14, no. 2 (2019): 131–140.

⁹ Hadi Pajarianto & Natsir Mahmud, "Model Pendidikan dalam Keluarga Berbasis Multireligius," *Lentera Pendidikan : Jurnal Ilmu Tarbiyah dan Keguruan*, Vol. 22, no. 2 (2019): 254, <https://doi.org/10.24252/lp.2019v22n2i7>.

¹⁰ Muhammad Darwis Dasopang & Azmil Hasan Lubis, "Perempuan-Perempuan Tangguh Penjaga Nilai-Nilai Keislaman Anak: Studi Daerah Minoritas Muslim," *Kafa'ah: Journal of Gender Studies*, Vol. 11, no. 1 (2021): 83, <https://doi.org/10.15548/jk.v11i1.353>.

The data collection technique is carried out through three main methods: (1) field observation, to obtain a direct picture of religious activities and social interactions of the community; (2) in-depth interviews, conducted with religious leaders, community leaders, and Muslim citizens who are considered representative; and (3) documentation studies, including archival reviews, official records, institutional reports, and other relevant written sources.¹¹ Data analysis is carried out in a descriptive-qualitative manner through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawn.¹²

Results and Discussion

Profile of East Amanuban District

Geographically, East Amanuban District is located in the eastern part of South Central Timor Regency and the average area is at an altitude of 451.4 meters above sea level, with the lowest altitude being in Billa Village which is 247 meters above sea level and the highest altitude being in Pisan Village, which is 601 meters above sea level. Based on the criteria from BMKG, rainfall in this sub-district is moderate, which ranges from 4-232 mm/month. The number of rainy days was recorded on average 8.9 days/month except in August and September when there was no rain at all while December was the month that experienced the most rain, which was 15 days.

The area reaches 149.26 km² or 3.77% of the total area of South Central Timor Regency with a distance of 57 km from the district capital. This sub-district consists of 10 villages, with the largest village being Billa Village which is 27.62 km² while the smallest village is Telukh Village which is 6.23 km². Based on data from BPS South Central Timor, East Amanuban District is inhabited by 18,181 people or 3.88% of the total population of the district with a population density of 122 people/km². The most populated is in Oekam Village while the least populated village is Nifukiu Village.¹³

The majority of the population of East Amanuban are Protestants, which is 78.70%, followed by Catholics at 9.88% and Muslims at 11.43%. In this sub-district, Muslims are the largest population compared to other sub-districts in South Central Timor Regency. In most other sub-districts, there are not even recorded Muslim residents. In addition to East Amanuban, a sizable Muslim population is also found in the sub-district of Kota Soe 8.40% (3,478 people),

¹¹ A.N. Jamaluddin, *Modul Pembelajaran: Metode Penelitian Sosial* (Bandung: CV Pustaka Setia, 2018), 98.

¹² Mestika Zed, *Metode Penelitian Kepustakaan* (Jakarta: Yayasan Pustaka Obor Indonesia, 2014), 1-3; Sukardi, *Metode Penelitian Pendidikan* (Jakarta: Bumi Aksara, 2011), 157.

¹³ BPS Timor Tengah Selatan, "Kecamatan Amanuban Timur Dalam Angka" (Soe, 2021).

Fautmolo 9.46% (740 people), KiE 4.37% (977 people) and Central Amanuban 4.36% (693 people). If calculated for the district-level population, the total number of Muslims in South Central Timor is 2.59% or about 12,120 people.¹⁴

Most of the Muslim population of East Amanuban is a native of Timor or also known as the Dawan tribe and the majority of their livelihood is farming. The leading commodities are corn, rice and cassava. While the leading commodities from plantations are coconut and coffee, papaya and bananas are the leading commodities for fruits. In addition to agriculture, the residents of East Amanuban District are also engaged in the livestock sector, namely horses, cows, goats, buffaloes, pigs, ducks and free-range chickens. Some of the residents in Mnelaanen and Oe'ekam villages mostly make a living as traders, who are mostly Muslim immigrants from the Javanese and Bugis tribes.

History of Islam in East Amanuban

The entry of Islam into the South Central Timor region can be said to be later even though contact between the Sultanate of Ternate (North Maluku) with Solor (East Flores Regency) and Timor (the location of South Central Timor) has occurred since the early 16th century.¹⁵ However, the existing historical traces show that Islam has a strong enough influence and even plays an important role in the social change of the local community.¹⁶ Despite being classified as a minority, The Muslim community in East Amanuban sub-district is able to maintain their Islamic identity and play an important role in coloring the social dynamics and life of the local community.

Records of the entry of Islam into East Amanuban have only been obtained from oral stories heard directly from several secondary sources, while references in the form of books, journals or other record models have not been written in their entirety.¹⁷ Included in this article, the source of

¹⁴ BPS Timor Tengah Selatan, "Persentasi Jumlah Penduduk per Kecamatan Menurut Agama Yang Dianut (Persen), 2017-2019" (Soe, 2021), <https://timortengahselatankab.bps.go.id/indicator/27/165/1/persentasi-jumlah-penduduk-per-kecamatan-menurut-agama-yang-dianut.html>.

¹⁵ E. Junaedi. "Mengungkap Harmoni Umat Islam Di Kantong Mayoritas Kristen Nusa Tenggara Timur (NTT)". *Harmoni*, Vol. 15 no. 3 (2016): 173-180. <https://doi.org/10.32488/harmoni.v15i3.52>

¹⁶ Firda Yanti Alin. "Pengaruh Penyebaran Islam terhadap Budaya Nusa Tenggara Timur". *Maliki Interdisciplinary Journal*: Vol. 3 no. 2 (2025): 178-182. <https://urj.uin-malang.ac.id/index.php/mij/article/view/13670>

¹⁷ Lihat misalnya Sayyidati Hajar, "Wajah Baru Pemuda Pemudi Islam TTS," *kompasiana*, 2019, https://www.kompasiana.com/sayyidati25722/5c335532aebe1716b35a16c/wajah-baru-pemuda-pemudi-islam-tts?page=2&page_images=1#.

information used is the results of interviews with several elders or traditional leaders who had been living witnesses to some of the events in question.¹⁸

Islam first appeared in East Amanuban in 1967, brought by Usif Gabriel Isu known as the fetor (chief) of Noebunu. After he converted to Islam, the people of East Amanuban called him Gunawan Isu.¹⁹ Islam that was spread at that time was also known as the *soeb metan religion* or agama peci hitam.²⁰ This issue is one of the big families in South Central Timor that has considerable influence besides the Nope family. These two clans played a very important role and determined the history of the development of Islam in South Central Timor in general and Amanuban in particular.

Although the kings no longer have political power by carrying their royal names, their existence is still taken into account. Not only for the preservation of customs and culture in his kingdom but also his presence is still taken into account in the social and political context.²¹ For them, the king is like a god and what the king says is true and legitimate. The king has a very decisive position in various areas of life. Therefore, the entire community, including amaf (farmers), meo (hulubalang) and toh (people), recognized Nope as a king who could help them in various problems faced by the community.

On the other hand, at that time there was a leadership vacuum in the Nope palace. To overcome this, the entire Amanuban community, represented by the amaf (land owners), trusted Isu to take a position as a person close to Nope in deciding everything related to customs and others. Isu was positioned as the king's spokesman and spoke on behalf of the king.

The harmony of Isu and Nope is manifested in the marriage relationship of two families. One of the children of the Isu family, Gabriel Ifu, married the younger sister of one of the daughters of the Nope family, Kusa Nope, who at that time served as the ruler of South Central Timor. However, the cohesiveness and harmony of Isu and Nope did not last long. Internal family problems are the trigger for conflicts that occur.

Gabriel Isu's wife, who is Kusa Nope's younger sister, was "snatched" by Gabriel Isu's younger brother, while Nope ignored her at all and seemed indifferent to the problem. This problem eventually has an impact on

¹⁸ Wawancara dengan Bpk. Arifin Nobisa (84 th), mantan pengawal Raja Gunawan Isu (4 April 2023) dan wawancara dengan Bapak Usman Selan (5 April 2023).

¹⁹ Sayyidati Hajar, "Wajah Baru Pemuda Pemudi Islam TTS," *kompasiana*, 2019, https://www.kompasiana.com/sayyidati25722/5c335532aeebe1716b35a16c/wajah-baru-pemuda-pemudi-islam-tts?page=2&page_images=1#.

²⁰ Wawancara dengan Bpk. Sulaiman Ismail Naitboho, Kepala KUA Amanuban Timur (27 Maret 2023)

²¹ Adwi N. Riyansyah, "Raja-Raja Lokal di NTT: Peran dan Pengaruhnya Terhadap Pemerintah dan Masyarakat Kini", *Jurnal Antro*: 2018, <https://www.anthropology.id/raja-raja-lokal-di-ntt-peran-dan-pengaruhnya-terhadap-pemerintah-dan-masyarakat-kini/>

government affairs. Kusa Nope as the Regent of South Central Timor was "lazy to know" this matter and on the contrary, Gabriel Isu as the Amanuban sub-district head no longer supported Nope, even Gabriel Isu collaborated with Babys as a feter in Noemuke not to support the Kusa Nope government.

Then Kusa Nope looked for a way to corner Gabriel Isu and Babys. He raised the issue of the border chaos between Amanuban and Amanatun initiated by Gabriel Isu as the Noebunu brother. Gabriel Isu was arrested and taken to Kupang, while Babys as Noemuke's brother was arrested on charges of the API movement in 1955 and tried in Kupang. In 1957, Babys' sentence ended and he was released. On the way home, he stopped and slept two nights under an acid tree near the riverbank in Mantasi. At that time, Babys was wearing skullcaps/peci so that the story developed that Babys had become a Muslim with the name Abas Sole. Abas Solelah who then spread Islam in the southern part of Amanuban.

In 1958, the law on the establishment of an swatantra²² region of East Nusa Tenggara Province was passed and as a consequence in 1959/1960, the election of the regional head of South Timor had to be held. Therefore, each swapraja²³ government began to develop a winning strategy to become the regional head of South Central Timor. Kusa Nope gave *okomama*²⁴ to 7 swapraja and instructed all tamukung (village chiefs) to gather at Niki-Niki. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss together the autonomous government in South Central Timor. In the discussion, it was agreed and decided that if one of the swapraja is trusted as the regent, then the other swapraja will be appointed as the sub-district head.

²² Dalam KBBI swatantra artinya adalah pemerintahan sendiri. Pusat Bahasa Departemen Pendidikan Nasional, *Kamus Bahasa Indonesia* (Jakarta: Departemen Pendidikan Nasional, 2008). Sementara dalam Undang-Undang No.1 tahun 1957 swatantra adalah daerah yang berhak mengurus rumah tangganya sendiri atau disebut juga daerah otonom.

²³ Daerah swapraja adalah salah satu bentuk yang diakui pemerintah kolonial Belanda dan mencakup berbagai bentuk administrasi, seperti kesultanan, kerajaan dan keadipatian. Status swapraja berarti daerah tersebut dipimpin oleh pribumi dan berhak mengatur urusan administrasi, hukum dan budaya internalnya.

²⁴ Okomama adalah sebuah wadah yang biasanya digunakan untuk tempat sirih, pinang dan kapur. Alat ini berfungsi sebagai simbol penghargaan atau penyambutan dalam pendekatan sosial serta sebagai sarana pemersatu masyarakat Dawan. Dalam aktivitas keseharian seperti berkumpul, penerimaan tamu atau kegiatan lainnya, maka setiap orang yang datang akan mendapatkan hidangan sirih, pinang, kapur dan tembakau yang disajikan dalam okomama. Okomama ini merupakan sebuah simbol tanggung-jawab dalam berkeluarga dan juga berfungsi sebagai pemersatu dalam kesatuan bagi kehidupan masyarakat. Oktoviana Meluk, Moses Kollo dan Diana Rohi, "Okomama Menurut Tradisi Masyarakat Suku Dawan Di Oelbiteno Kecamatan Fatuleu Tengah Kabupaten Kupang", Vol. 9, no. 1 (2022): 71-76.

Kusa Nope was also elected as the regent, so the agreement must automatically be implemented. All fetors were inaugurated as sub-district heads, Abas Sole was inaugurated as South Amanuban sub-district head and Gabriel Isu was inaugurated as East Amanuban sub-district head. In 1964, through PP No. 41, the central government issued a regulation that those who became sub-district heads must undergo training in civil servants. Regarding Abas Sole and Gabriel Isu who are not civil servants, they were both eventually replaced. Abas Sole was replaced by Lazarus Laismina, while Gabriel Isu was replaced by Pieter Oematan.

The problem at that time was that the sub-district heads who were replaced were not immediately placed in the regent's office but were still employed at the sub-district office until this was considered a punishment. In East Amandaban, Pieter Oematan who replaced Gabriel Isu as the sub-district head of his policies were considered feudalistic, cruel and inhumane. Pieter Oematan's brutal behavior was seen during the inauguration of the pond project on the Benin River which also involved the community. Pieter Oematan beat one of the residents to death while in the process of making a pond. As a result of these events and problems, Daneil Taneo was appointed to replace him as the district head.

During the trial, Pieter Oematan was declared free and he returned to Soe. The release of Pieter Oematan caused a lot of dissatisfaction among the people of Amanuban. Gabriel Isu became a leading figure who opposed the release and return of Pieter Oematan to Soe. Gabriel Isu said to Pieter Oematan at that time; "Pa Piet Oematan returns here, we will play mud until the world of the apocalypse. In Piet Oematan there is no love at all as talked about as a Christian, it is just pure nonsense. Therefore, it is better for me to find another way". The above statement is actually an affirmation of the principle of Gabriel Isu becoming the Gunawan Isu (from Christianity to Islam) until it became the starting point for the development of Islam in East Amanuban.²⁵

Since that incident, Gunawan Isu began to spread Islam to remote villages in East Amandaban. He traveled from village to village on horseback accompanied by some of his guards.²⁶ His efforts were not in vain, the da'wah done to the Dawan tribe community was very well received until finally he built several mosques and madrassas as Islamic education centers. The first mosque and madrasah was established in the village of Sillu in Tunion (now

²⁵ Sayyidati Hajar, "Wajah Baru Pemuda Pemudi Islam TTS," *kompasiana*, 2019, https://www.kompasiana.com/sayyidati25722/5c335532aeebe1716b35a16c/wajah-baru-pemuda-pemudi-islam-tts?page=2&page_images=1#.

²⁶ Di antara pengawal Gunawan Isu adalah Arifin Nobisa, Anwar Nobisa dan Husen Falo. Wawancara dengan Bpk. Arifin Nobisa (4 April 2023).

Fautmolo district), built on waqf land from Gunawan Isu's biological father, Zulkarnain Isu.²⁷

After the construction of places of worship and educational institutions, the public's need for an understanding of Islam increased. Therefore, efforts began to be made to improve human resources, and in 1979 as many as 17 young men from Timor were sent to study Islam on the island of Java. The seventeen young men were M. Tamrin Manu, Moh. Ali Yuda, Ahyar B. Liunokas, Alimin Leonutu, Moh. Salim Tabun, Fakhruddin Tasip, Kasmad Takela, Kasim Taneo, Umar Asmau, Usman Sole, Abdullah Selan, Ali Tatang Sone, Mardan Sole, Abdul Qodir Lenamah, Hasan Sakan, Sabri Un and Sutarman Nenosaet. After returning from Java, M. Tamrin Manu built a pesantren called the Miftahuddin Islamic Boarding School²⁸ which is located in Oekam Village, East Amanuban District and is still standing today.²⁹ Gunawan Isu himself performed the Hajj in 1990³⁰ and died on September 28, 1994.³¹

The Strength of the Muslim Amanuban Timur

The religious dynamics of the Muslim minority in East Amanuban District show a complex but harmonious process in the midst of the majority Protestant population. Islam, which entered the region in 1967, managed to maintain its Muslim religious identity despite being a minority. The majority of Muslims in East Amanuban are indigenous tribes of Timor who have strong cultural roots and high militancy in defending their religion. They are also known to have noble morals that are in accordance with local cultural values, which also support a tolerant and inclusive life. Some of the strengths of this Muslim group can be described as follows:

First, the Muslim community in East Amanuban District has the most mosques and prayer rooms compared to other Muslim minorities in South Central Timor Regency. In BPS records, out of a total of 37 mosques in the district, 16 of them are located in East Amanuban District.³² This can be the main capital in maintaining and fostering the existing Muslim community. The mosque as the epicenter of the Muslim movement is certainly not only used as a place for mahdhah worship rituals such as prayers. Mosques can also

²⁷ Wawancara dengan Bpk. Arifin Nobisa (4 April 2023).

²⁸ Maps lokasi: https://maps.app.goo.gl/8PxjKYygZrjPwCS9?g_st=aw

²⁹ Wawancara dengan Bpk. Sulaiman Ismail Naitboho, Kepala KUA Amanuban Timur (27 Maret 2023)

³⁰ Wawancara dengan Siti Hajar, dosen Universitas Muhammadiyah Kupang (6 Oktober 2025).

³¹ Siti Hajar, Ramadan Jamhar & Siti Susanti Mallida Djaha (2023). The Local Wisdom Value of Dawan People in Usif Gunawan Folklore. In Nurdiah Lestari & Husamah (Eds.), *The 21st Century Paradigm in Supporting Sustainable Development* (h. 53-67). Tangguh Denara Jaya: <https://short-url.org/1gQhI>

³² BPS Timor Tengah Selatan, "Kecamatan Amanuban Timur Dalam Angka" (Soe, 2021).

function as a place of consolidation and disseminate various interests related to the various needs of Muslims. In addition, it can also function as a place for the regeneration of the young Muslim generation through religious science learning activities.³³

Although it is also undeniable that there are still some prayer rooms that are constrained in their management due to the lack or absence of ready and alert human resources. Some prayer rooms, even at the beginning of their establishment, were problematic by several parties until they became the attention of the local government. In this case, the Muslim minority in East Amanuban District at least until now no longer need to feel bothered to practice their teachings in their daily lives, such as prayer.

Second, support from the outside Muslim community. This is a very strategic capital if Muslim leaders in East Amanuban District can make the most of it. Various material and non-material assistance distributed to the Muslim community in East Amanuban District came one after another not only at certain moments such as the month of Ramadan, but also came throughout the year from various donation institutions.³⁴

In addition, they also get various facilities that can be felt directly by the younger generation when studying at several Islamic boarding schools in West Java. This kind of opportunity and opportunity, if managed optimally, can certainly yield sweet results in the future. It is possible that in the following years a Muslim figure from East Amanuban will emerge who can make the name of Islam proud.

Third, the majority of Muslims in East Amanuban District are local residents who have lived there for generations. They were a tribe of Timor who occupied the mainland of Timor Island before Islam was brought by their king named Usif Gunawan Isu even long before Christianity was brought by the Portuguese in 1556. This can be said to be one of the factors of the strength of Islam in East Amanuban District until now. This Timorese tribe is indeed known for being strong and firm in holding principles and having a high commitment in fulfilling promises, including maintaining the nobility of the Islamic values they adhere. Therefore, their militancy in defending Islam is not in doubt. Even if someone insults and harasses Islam, they are ready to be loyal to defend and defend the religion they believe in. Their principle was, "If we

³³ Hamid Fahmi Zarkasyi. "Peran Masjid Dalam Pendidikan Karakter (Akhlak)", *ISLAMIA: Jurnal Pemikiran Dan Peradaban Islam*, Vol. IX no. 1 (2014): 15-28; Ali Fahrudin, "Masjid Lerabaing: Kearifan Lokal dan Sejarah Penyebaran Islam di Nusa Tenggara Timur". *Jurnal Lektur Keagamaan*, Vol. 18 no. 2 (2020): 489-516. <https://doi.org/10.31291/ilka.v18i2.831>

³⁴ Wawancara dengan Abidin Umar & Murniati, relawan Dompot Dhuafa (7 April 2023); Wawancara dengan Uus Syarifudin, staff Rumah Zakat (2 Mei 2023).

are not the ones defending Islam, then who else? Where should we run? We were born and passed down from generation to generation here?", is that an interview with one of the speakers.³⁵

This is very natural considering that the existence of the kingdom system is still firmly rooted among the Timorese tribes. As long as their elders still believe in Islam as a religion that is still worthy of being followed, the Muslim residents of East Amanuban will remain loyal to their beliefs. This can be seen in several events that have occurred in NTT, such as the SARA conflict in Kupang in 1998 which also extended to Soe and other Muslim minority places. lainnya.³⁶ Or when there were protests against the construction of prayer rooms in several villages in East Amanuban District in 2021.³⁷

Fourth, the noble morals displayed by Muslim residents in East Amanuban District. As a tribe that still maintains manners and ethics in daily life, the positive cultural values among the Timorese are very much in line with what is taught in Islam. The nobility of attitude and noble morals displayed by Muslims can be *da'wah bil things* that in some cases can be a spark of sympathy for non-Muslims and make them Muslims. This is the real power that can be a strong attraction for others to join Islam.³⁸

In addition, Muslims in East Amanuban District are also fairly consistent in carrying out their religious teachings, such as for example in the implementation of daily or weekly worship. Some *ghair mahdhah* worship such as the slaughter of sacrificial animals and the distribution of zakat or alms can even be a special attraction for non-Muslims. In their assumption, such a model of worship really upholds the principle of justice that reflects the equal distribution of wealth that does not only gather in a few people. Therefore, during the distribution of sacrificial meat, non-Muslims in East Amanuban District usually get a share as well, even on some occasions special sacrificial animals are provided for them.

³⁵ Wawancara dengan Bpk. Sofyan Sesfao (24 Maret 2023).

³⁶ Ibnu Hasan Muchtar, *Konflik-Konflik Sosial Bernuansa Agama, Studi Kasus Kerusuhan Kupang, Nusa Tenggara Timur 30 Nopember 1998 dalam Konflik Sosial Bernuansa Agama di Indonesia* (Jakarta: Puslitbang Kehidupan Beragama, Badan Litbang Agama dan Diklat Keagamaan Departemen Agama RI, 2003); Muhammad As'ad, "Rekonstruksi Kerukunan Umat Beragama (Studi Kasus Kupang)," *Al-Qalam* 11, no. 2 (2005): 71-98, <http://www.jurnalalqalam.or.id/index.php/Alqalam/article/view/590>.

³⁷ Maimunah Anabanu, "Menyikapi Surat Penegasan Pemda TTS Atas 3 Mushola di Amanuban Timur" (Soe, 2021), <https://inlink.id/menyikapi-surat-penegasan-pemda-tts-atas-3-mushola-di-amanuban-timur/>.

³⁸ Lihat Nabila Fatha Zh & Umi Halwati, "Potret Dakwah Rasulullah (Dakwah Bil Hal, Bil Lisan dan Bil Qolam), *Al-Hikmah: Journal of Da'wah and Communication Studies*, Vol 10, No 1 (2023): 69-77, <https://doi.org/10.15548/al-hikmah.v10i1.5005>; Akhmad Sagir, "Dakwah Bil-Hal: Prospek dan Tantangan Da'i", *Alhadharah: Jurnal Ilmu Dakwah*, Vol. 14 No. 27 (2015): 1 - 13, <https://doi.org/10.18592/alhadharah.v14i27.1224>.

Weaknesses of East Amanuban Muslims

The internal problems faced by the Muslim minority in East Amanuban District include two things, namely the lack of reliable human resources and the limitation of religious facilities or infrastructure. The human resources in question are parties who play a role in regulating, maintaining and maintaining the existence of the Muslim community such as religious extension workers, mosque imams, Islamic boarding school teachers and Islamic organization leaders. In the context of the NTT society, religious leaders are a catalyst in protecting and embracing all people to unite in realizing a life full of brotherhood and peace as well as anticipating the widening of the symptoms of violence that are a challenge for us together.³⁹

They are the ones who should be spiritual leaders, educators and movers in strengthening religious identity and the existence of the Muslim community. In this case, it is not because there are no parties at all, but rather because of the lack of the number and quality of existing human resources.⁴⁰

The role and function of religious leaders is very vital and cannot be taken lightly in maintaining and strengthening the identity of the Muslim minority, especially for areas such as East Amanuban District. Their duties and functions include at least the following five things: first, religious education and formation. They are the ones who organize religious classes, recitations or training that help improve the understanding of religion and Islamic practice. This helps to strengthen Muslim identity and maintain religious beliefs within the community.⁴¹

For example, coaching for converts who have just converted to Islam. Because of the lack of human resources that exist, sometimes the coaching for citizens who have just joined Islam becomes constrained, their need to understand Islam is finally less noticed.⁴² As a result, not a few of them return to their original faith and even prefer to join Protestant or Catholic

³⁹ Ngainum Naim, *Teologi Kerukunan: Mencari Titik Temu dalam Keragaman* (Yogyakarta: Teras, 2011), 12.

⁴⁰ Wawancara dengan Bpk. Suherman Ismail Naitboho, kepala KUA Kecamatan Amanuban Timur (22 Maret 2023).

⁴¹ Salman Alfarisi & Hafid Amrullah, "Peran Pendampingan Dewan Da'wah Islamiyah Indonesia Provinsi NTT dalam Membina Aqidah Kampung Muallaf Oeselaen Pulau Semau Kabupaten Kupang", *Jurnal Bina Ummat: Membina dan Membentengi Ummat*, Vol. 6 No. 2 (2023): 67-94, <https://doi.org/10.38214/jurnalbinaummatstidnatsir.v6i2.207>

⁴² Dian Indriyani & Dwi Noviani, "Pembinaan Agama Islam Pada Muallaf di Pedalaman," *Jurnal Praktik Baik Pembelajaran Sekolah Dan Pesantren* 1, no. 02 (2022): 44-52, <https://doi.org/10.56741/pbbsp.v1i02.97>.

Christianity. This happened in almost all areas with Muslim populations that occurred between the 1970s and 1980s.⁴³

To unravel this, some parties try to use other approaches in unraveling the problem of converting coaching. One of them is by sending these new converts to Islam to several Islamic boarding schools in West Java. Those who are sent outside Timor are usually still in their teens or have just graduated from elementary school with the hope that when they return to adulthood, they will have a sufficient understanding of Islam.⁴⁴

Meanwhile, for adult converts, they are fostered by extension workers or Islamic religious coaches there, or their coaching is cooperated by involving the community of converts from Kupang or other regions. For example, the Ikatan Pelajar Mahasiswa Angkatan Timor (IPMAT) headquartered in South Jakarta was initiated by students from East Amanuban who were studying in Jakarta, Bandung and Cirebon. In addition to helping to distribute young converts to be educated at Islamic boarding schools, they are also involved in raising aid for converts, especially those living in East Amanuban.⁴⁵

Second, da'wah and the spread of Islamic teachings. They play a role in conducting da'wah among fellow Muslims, conveying religious messages, providing an understanding of Islamic teachings and strengthening religious beliefs through lectures, sermons or other da'wah activities.⁴⁶ *Third*, moral and ethical coaching. They play an important role in guiding the Muslim community in the moral and ethical aspects of Islam; give advice, help overcome moral problems and promote good values in daily life. This helps to strengthen a Muslim identity rooted in religious values.

Fourth, organizing religious activities. Muslim organizations in East Amanuban play an important role in organizing religious activities for the Muslim community. This includes the organization of congregational prayers, commemoration of Islamic holidays, Islamic studies or social activities based on the principles of the Islamic religion. These activities strengthen social ties within Muslim communities and help maintain Muslim identity.

Fifth, the protection of religious rights. In this case, they play the role of defenders and advocates in ensuring that religious rights, such as freedom of worship, religious teaching or the establishment of religious facilities, are respected and protected by the authorities. Through this role, they contribute

⁴³ Wawancara dengan Bpk. Nurdin Selan, 30 Maret 2023.

⁴⁴ Wawancara dengan Bpk. Sofyan Taenoe, 27 Maret 2023.

⁴⁵ Wawancara dengan Bpk. Iswandi Selan, 31 Maret 2023

⁴⁶ Jauharotina Alfadhilah, Abdul Rahmat Albustomi & Sa'di Zaman, "Peran Dakwah Islamiyah dalam Membentuk Masyarakat Beradab di Tengah Globalisasi: Studi Kasus Desa Sugiharjo", *ASWALALITA: Journal of Da'wah Management*, Vol. 3 no. 2 (2024): 62-71, <http://ejournal.iainutuban.ac.id/index.php/aswalalita/article/view/1083>

to strengthening Muslim identity, fostering community and promoting religious diversity in harmony with the surrounding community.

Meanwhile, the problem of limited religious facilities and infrastructure includes: first, the lack of mosques or prayer rooms. The lack of adequate numbers of mosques or places of worship is an obstacle for the Muslim community in carrying out worship collectively. If the number of mosques is limited, the distance that community members have to travel to reach the nearest mosque can be an obstacle. It is recorded that in the East Amanuban sub-district there are only 16 mosques and prayer rooms spread across 6 villages with details of 4 mosques in Mauleum Village, 2 in Billa Village and 1 mosque each in Oelet Village, Oekam Village, Mnelaanen Village and Tli'u Village. Meanwhile, 2 mosques each are located in Mauleum Village and Oekam Village and 1 mosque each is located in Pisan Village and Telukh Village.⁴⁷

Second, the lack of religious educational institutions. The lack of Islamic schools or madrassas can affect access to quality religious education for Muslim minorities. This can hinder the understanding of Islam and the development of Muslim identity. As an illustration, in East Amanuban there are only 3 ibtidaiyah (MI) madrassas consisting of 1 state in Mauleum Village and 2 private ones in Mauleum Village and Oekam Village. Meanwhile, 2 private tsanawiyah madrassas (MTs) are located in Mauleum Village and Oekam Village.⁴⁸

Third, the lack of government support. Limited government support in building and maintaining religious facilities can also affect Muslim communities. The lack of budget allocation for the construction of mosques, Islamic schools or other centers of religious activities is an obstacle in strengthening the identity of the Muslim minority. Some informants even said that government funding support for the Muslim community was virtually non-existent.

Fourth, the lack of literature and religious resources. Limited access to adequate religious literature and resources can limit the understanding and development of religious knowledge for the Muslim community. The lack of religious libraries or religious information centers can be an obstacle in strengthening Muslim identity.

To overcome these limitations, there needs to be cooperation between the Muslim community, religious leaders, religious organizations and the local

⁴⁷ Wawancara dengan Bpk. Sulaiman Ismail Naitboho, Kepala KUA Amanuban Timur (27 Maret 2023)

⁴⁸ Wawancara dengan Bpk. Sulaiman Ismail Naitboho, Kepala KUA Amanuban Timur (27 Maret 2023)

government. Steps that can be taken include fighting for budget allocation for the construction of religious facilities, establishing religious educational institutions, holding fundraising activities or coordinating with authorities to improve religious support infrastructure.

Based on observations in the field, some infrastructure assistance for the Muslim community comes more from several non-government organizations (NGOs) such as Rumah Zakat, Dompot Dhuafa, BAZNAS, Lazismu Muhammadiyah and others. Among the facilities provided are the procurement of water reservoirs, the construction of wells, baths/ablutions and the construction of mosques. Some mosques or prayer rooms were even built on individual donations from Muslim donors in Java, from Bandung, Jakarta or other cities. In addition, several NGOs also routinely send aid at certain moments such as the month of Ramadan, Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha.⁴⁹

Apart from internal, the problems faced also come from external Muslims, namely: *first*, pressure from the non-Muslim majority environment. The existence of pressure or influence from this non-Muslim majority environment can be a challenge in maintaining religious identity. Sometimes, there is a risk of assimilation or a decrease in the intensity of religious practices if Muslim minorities feel marginalized or find it difficult to maintain their religious identity.

Second, the influence of local culture and customs. Local culture and customs have a significant influence on the daily life of Muslim communities. Sometimes, local cultural values can be perceived as conflicting with certain religious practices. This can cause conflicts in maintaining religious identity and requires a good balance between local culture and Islamic religious teachings. For example, the case of apostasy of Muslim women when she marries a non-Muslim man for the reason that she has to follow her husband as a local custom, including following her religion or beliefs.⁵⁰

Third, social change and modernization. Social change and modernization can bring challenges in maintaining the identity and sustainability of religion. The influence of globalization, technological developments and changes in social values can change the way people view religion and bring challenges in maintaining distinctive religious traditions and practices, including Islam.

⁴⁹ Wawancara dengan Abidin Umar & Murniati, relawan Dompot Dhuafa (7 April 2023);
Wawancara dengan Uus Syarifudin, staff Rumah Zakat (2 Mei 2023).

⁵⁰ Wawancara dengan Bpk. Iswandi Selan (31 Maret 2023).

Social Interaction and Dynamics with Non-Muslim Majority

The interaction between the minority Muslim community and the non-Muslim majority community in East Amanuban District forms a complex but relatively harmonious pattern of social relations. This dynamic shows the process of negotiating religious identity, social adaptation, and the formation of social capital based on tolerance and local wisdom. First, religious tolerance is the main foundation of inter-community relations. Tolerance in East Amanuban is not only in the form of mutual respect, but is also manifested in concrete actions that go beyond religious boundaries. For example, in one family you can find members of three different religions—Catholicism, Protestantism, and Islam—but they live in harmony without imposing their own beliefs. When Muslims build mosques, Catholic neighbors work together to help with labor, building materials, and even the consumption of workers.⁵¹ Such practices show that tolerance is not just a normative concept, but a social reality rooted in the culture of mutual cooperation of Timorese people.

Second, interfaith social cooperation strengthens social integration in the region. In religious moments such as Eid al-Adha, Protestants and Catholics are not only spectators, but also participate in helping the slaughter and distribution of sacrificial meat. In contrast, Muslims are also involved in the social activities of non-Muslim communities, such as traditional events, weddings, or condolences. This pattern shows the existence of a mutually reinforcing social symbiosis, where religion becomes a source of collective morality to build solidarity and common welfare.

Third, multicultural education and awareness play an important role in maintaining this harmony. Public schools filled with children from various religious backgrounds become meeting spaces that foster empathy across identities. Teachers and local leaders act as mediators of the values of togetherness and equality. Through daily interactions, the younger generation learns to understand differences without feeling threatened by them.

Fourth, interreligious dialogue and social mediation are cultural instruments in reducing potential friction. Religious leaders and traditional leaders regularly communicate to discuss social issues and maintain a balance of relations between people. Dialogue is carried out not always in a formal form, but through traditional forums, family visits, or collective work in the fields and village celebrations. This is where the local wisdom of the Timorese

⁵¹ Wawancara dengan Bpk. Abdul Rohman Manes (31 Maret 2023).

people, such as the value of *nahe nof* (living together in peace), acts as a social mechanism to prevent conflict and foster a sense of interfaith brotherhood.⁵²

Fifth, the role of local leadership is a key element in maintaining harmony. Muslim and Christian leaders show a moderate and open attitude in building communication. They not only emphasize doctrinal differences, but also highlight universal values such as love, honesty, and social responsibility. This attitude encourages people to see religion as a source of public morality, not just a divisive identity.

Sociologically, this interaction shows that the people of East Amanuban have built a model of functional harmony, in which religion plays a role as social capital that strengthens networks of trust and solidarity. The growing social dynamics in the region prove that Muslim minorities can maintain their identities without having to be alienated, and that non-Muslim majorities are able to accept differences as part of their collective identity. Thus, East Amanuban became a social laboratory for the practice of religious tolerance and moderation in the Eastern Indonesia region.

Conclusion

The conclusion of the article regarding the dynamics of the religious minority of Muslims in East Amanuban District can be summarized as follows: first, Islam first entered East Amanuban in 1967 through a local figure Usif Gabriel Isu who was later known as Gunawan Isu. He was the chief of the tribe who spread Islam in the region by building mosques and madrassas for Islamic education. Previously, the traces of Islam in this region were still limited and documented mainly through oral stories and the involvement of relationships between noble families who played a role in the history of the development of Islam in the area.

Second, the strength of the Muslim community in East Amanuban lies in the relatively large number of mosques, strong religious commitment from local believers for generations, and noble morals that are in harmony with the local culture, so that it is able to attract the sympathy of the surrounding

⁵² Lihat Titin Wulandari Malau. "Dialog Antaragama dan Kontribusi Tokoh Agama dalam Penyelesaian Konflik dan Implementasinya untuk Memperkuat Toleransi". *Jurnal Magistra*, Vol. 2 no. 1 (2023): 01-18. <https://doi.org/10.62200/magistra.v2i1.70>; Abdon Arnolus Amtiran & Arimurti Kriswibowo. (2024). Kepemimpinan Agama Dan Dialog Antaragama: Strategi Pembangunan Masyarakat Multikultural Berbasis Moderasi Beragama. *Jurnal Penelitian Agama Hindu*, Vol. 8 no. 3 (2024): 331-348. <https://doi.org/10.37329/jpah.v8i3.3165>

community. Support from the outside Muslim community is also an important strategic capital. However, significant weaknesses include a lack of quality human resources in religious management and coaching, limited religious facilities, the influence of local customs that sometimes conflict with Islamic teachings, and a lack of government support in the development of religious infrastructure.

Third, social interaction between the Muslim minority and the non-Muslim majority (Protestant Christians) in East Amanuban runs harmoniously and tolerantly. They are able to live together in diversity with the values of social solidarity and local wisdom. Examples are cooperation in the construction of prayer rooms, mutual cooperation, and joint participation in religious activities such as the slaughter of sacrificial animals whose meat is also enjoyed by non-Muslims. Interfaith dialogue and the role of community leaders are the key to establishing positive relationships that strengthen social harmony in this multicultural area.

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