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## The Dynamism of Local Islamic Thought in Gorontalo in Anthropological Studies

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### Abstract

*This research found that the pattern of Islamic thought in Gorontalo emphasizes aspects of Sufism rather than the fiqh approach. This Sufism approach greatly influences the religious behavior of the Gorontalo Muslim community in religious thinking. Several important figures in Sufism thought were able to lay the initial foundations in the dynamics of Islamic thought in Gorontalo, for example, Bala Kitabi, Bapu Matoa, and Haji Limbo. In several previous studies, Islamic religious dynamics (thoughts and movements) in Gorontalo tended to emphasize biographical aspects and were too textual, seeing how Hizbut Thahrir's open criticism of the "Western" concept, in this case the ideas of democracy in Indonesia, is very typical. general and artificial. This research is qualitative research using an ethnographic approach. This research aims to reveal the dynamics of Islamic thought from the time of Sultan Amai as the founder of Islam in Gorontalo until the time of KH. Adam Zakaria. This research found that Islamic thought in Gorontalo became more dynamic after the entry of Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah in Gorontalo. Recently, transnational Islamic thought movements have emerged that complement the dynamics of Islamic thought in Gorontalo, for example, Wahdah Islamiyah, Hizbut Thahrir Indonesia and Jama'ah Tabligh.*

**Keywords:** Islamic Thought, Sufism, Transnational Islam

### Introduction

In Gorontalo, Islam as an official religion began with the conversion of King Amai to Islam, there are three opinions. The first opinion says that it occurred in 931 AH or 1524 AD. The second opinion says the incident occurred in 899 AH or 1495 AD. The second opinion is held by the kingdom according to what is written on the entrance gate to the Hunto Sultan Amai Mosque in Biawu Village, Gorontalo. The mosque was founded not long after Raja Amai and his entourage arrived in Gorontalo (Ismail,

2008:60). The third opinion as stated by Amin (2012:23) is that Islam began to enter the territory of the Gorontalo kingdoms around 1525, brought by King Amai. At that time, Islam was introduced through marriage. King Amai married a princess from the Palasa kingdom, named Owutango. The Palasa kingdom is in Tomini Bay and its king is Muslim. The princess herself had family ties to the kingdom in Ternate, who had already known about Islam.

## Research methods

This research is qualitative research that uses an ethnographic approach. This qualitative approach using the ethnographic method was chosen because it attempts to describe the world of people's lives from the perspective of the person being studied (emic perspective). Ethnography is about telling credible and authentic stories. Ethnography provides "space" for the people studied to speak out in their own local context, usually relying on verbatim quotations and "detailed (event) descriptions" (Fetterman, 2010).

The qualitative research approach utilizes data in the form of narratives, detailed stories, expressions and original language constructed by informants and emphasizes the quality of the entity being studied. Apart from that, a qualitative research approach was chosen because this method attempts to describe the world of people's lives "from the inside" from the perspective of the person being studied. Therefore, it is hoped that this qualitative research can provide a better and deeper understanding of social reality and pay attention to processes, patterns of meaning and structural elements. Qualitative research not only describes reality, but is also open to all possibilities, by making previously unforeseen things a source of reflection and making previously unknown things known. The perspective used in this research is an inductive style, focusing on individual meaning and translating the complexity of a problem.

This research was conducted in Gorontalo, one of the areas at the northern tip of Sulawesi with the majority of people adhering to Islam. In this research, the data collection techniques used were in-depth interview techniques, participant observation and documentation studies. This step was chosen because the researcher was directly involved in religious life activities which were the context or background of this research.

## Results and Discussion

### Sultan Amai Founded the Foundation of Gorontalo Islam

King Amai fulfilled Princess Owutango's request to convert the people of Gorontalo to Islam as a condition for King Amai's acceptance of marrying her and making Islam a part of the customs of the Gorontalo people. Subsequently, King Amai was given the title " *to lao pamaklumu*" and at that time he was also given the title *tulutani* (sultan), because he was the first Islamic king in Gorontalo. In general, the Islamization process in the Kingdom of Gorontalo took place peacefully without any hint of violence. The people accepted Islam without any significant friction, the people voluntarily abandoned the old belief called *alifuru*. With the advent of Islam, the king and people of Gorontalo no longer worshiped sacred objects which were considered prototypes of God. According to Kadir (2010:217), the spread of Islam in Gorontalo was *top down*, meaning that Islam spread due to the big role of the rulers, which was then massively accepted by the people.

It should be emphasized that King Amai according to Tacco (1935:26) laid the foundation for Islamization in Gorontalo after marrying Owutango, the daughter of Raja Palasa Ogomonjolo (Kumojolo) in Siyendeng, Tomini, who was related to the Kings of Ternate. One aspect of the Islamization process in Gorontalo needs further attention. This is different from most kingdoms in the archipelago, such as Gowa, where Islam was introduced through missionaries through kings. It can be said that Gorontalo had relations with Ternate through royal diplomatic elements in the process of spreading Islam.

King Amai carried out reforms in the kingdom by developing traditional principles and community habits adapted to Islamic teachings. Therefore, according to Nur (1979:21) King Amai brought in eight teachers who were also small kings under Palasa's *vassals*, namely Tamalate, Lemboo, Siyendeng, Hulangato, Siduan, Sipayo, Songinti and Bunuyo. They are tasked with guiding the population and designing customs that are guided by Islam. They divided their tasks according to their fields and abilities, such as Raja Tamalate, Lemboo, Siyendeng and Hulangato who were tasked with designing customs that would be applied to the people of Gorontalo.

Apart from that, Raja Tamalate and Siyendeng also taught how to make household utensils such as *tolu*, serving lids and making table salt. Likewise, Kings Siduan, Sipayo, Songinti and Bunuyo were tasked with teaching things related to spells and shamans in medicine. Apart from that, they also served as missionaries in developing Islamic teachings in society (Giu, 1971:1). They were given a separate settlement location by Raja Amai in the Hunto area (Biawu Village, Kota Selatan District now). In this area a place of worship was also established called *Tihi Lo Hunto* (now Sultan Amai Mosque).

This mosque is the center of Islamic educational and cultural activities for the community. The activities held are in the form of *da'wah* and *tablig* about religion and society in the relations between the world and the hereafter. Likewise, in his activities he began to introduce and develop the principles of customs and customs that apply to the kingdom using Islamic teachings, so that customs play an important role in the channel of Islamization. In honor of him, eight small kings of Palasa were given the title *Olongia walu lonto otolo pa*.

The kingdom began to determine the importance of customs in accordance with Islamic sharia, the result of this formulation is known as the principle of "*s araa topa-topango to adati*" meaning that sharia is based on custom. In the customary draft created by King Amai together with eight small kings, a customary formulation of 185 customs was implemented (Nur, 1979:301) and 113 of them are still carried out by the community today, 24 of which are related to marriage ceremonies, 21 of which are related to death, and the rest related to family, society, receiving guests, and crowning leaders (Niode, 2007: 87). These traditional principles are the main guideline in carrying out royal government and its relationship with society which is patterned on Islamic life.

During Motolodulakiki's reign, he sent royal officials to study Islamic teachings in Ternate, so that in Islamic teachings there was more emphasis on the teachings of *monotheism* and *ma'rifat*. Motolodulakiki succeeded in developing the Islamization process and expanding the socialization of Islam in society. This happened after the enactment of customary law in "*adati hula-hula to saraa, saraa hula-hula to adati*" (*adat bersendi saraa, saraa bersendi adat*). During the time of Sultan Eato (1673-1679) the formulation of the ancestral fatwa changed to "*aadati hulohuloaa to saraa, saraa hulohuloaa to Quruni*". And this is the Gorontalo philosophy which according to the Baate cannot be changed as stated in the Gorontalo *tujai*. (Amin, 2012: 94-100) means that customary law and Islamic law have the same position.

The progress of Islamic education took place during Eyato's reign (1673-1679). According to Niode (2007:87-88) King Eyato placed a high premium on education, so that education could elevate social status and tend to shift the social structure of the *wali-wali*

(descendants of the nobility) class. Previously, social status was determined by blood line and descent. Eyato then carried out reforms with the main basis of education, religion and morals being able to occupy positions in the government bureaucracy in the kingdom.

The royal authority who regulates religious affairs for the lives of the people is held by *Kadli*. Apart from supervising religious courts, his duties include also overseeing the development of religious teachings. To facilitate his duties, *Kadli* is assisted by 2 *Hakimu* (judges), 4 Imams, 4 *Saradaa*, and 2 *Hatibi* (chatib). The duties of the imam and *saradaa* are to take care of religious activities, especially teaching Islam and every religious celebration or Islamic holiday held in the mosque (Tacco, 1935:97).

Islamic teaching is carried out by imams and *saradaa*, they teach about the Koran. Start by learning the Arabic alphabet by following readings from the Koran. After understanding, they are taught writing and punctuation in Arabic and Malay script or pegon script. Once the punctuation is understood, the next lesson continues with reading short verses from the Koran. After reading fluently, we continued with *tajwid lessons*, namely the rules for reading the Koran correctly. Usually students who learn *tajwid* help students who are just learning to read and write Arabic script.

Students are also taught the Malay Arabic script or pegon letters. In this regard, the religious curriculum is held in suraus, mosques by imams or *saradaa* from places of worship, usually activities are held in the afternoon. The lesson material also focuses on reading the Bible, the Koran, such as understanding the content of the Koran and the basics of jurisprudence.

Parallel to the development of Islamic education, Arabic script became the most important connecting channel in the written tradition. Writings or manuscripts provide information about situations, images, attitudes, views and ideals. According to Mu'jizah (2009:144) that several manuscripts of the Kings of Gorontalo use Arabic script, such as in correspondence and contracts with the Dutch East Indies Government. For example, the letter from the King of Gorontalo Muhammad Hasanuddin Iskandar Panglima Syah to GJ Willem Arnold Alting, dated 26 Rajab 1205 (31 March 1791). This letter states that the King of Gorontalo asked the Dutch to exchange the price of the cloth they bought for gold produced in Gorontalo. Apart from that, the King also informed about the behavior of Bugis traders who often fight cocks and violate Gorontalo customs.

## The Spread of Islam through the Sufism Approach

The spread of Islam in Gorontalo uses a Sufism approach. The way of religion of the Gorontalo people is more culturally influenced by the values of Sufism, so that the customs are more closely related to Sufism. This approach is used as part of the Gorontalo ulama's way of accommodating traditions that grow and develop as local wisdom that is always maintained. In other words, Sufism reconciles religion with custom. There is almost no Gorontalo custom that is not influenced by Sufism. One example that can be mentioned is the *molubo custom* from the root word *tubo*, namely respect.

The characteristic of Gorontalo ulama in teaching Sufism is in the form of an assembly which is not attended by many people but only a few people. At that time, the influence of colonialism was very strong and spying on the space for ulama activities. They

learn to move from one cleric to another. The sciences studied are Sufism and tarekat. One of the books that is often taught is the book *Ihya Ulumuddin* by a famous scholar, namely Imam al-Ghazali and also the book *Al Futuhatul Makkiyah* written by Ibn 'Arobi Al Hatimi.

When viewed from the aspect of the Gorontalo ulama, their scientific knowledge goes back to Rasulullah SAW. They studied with Haji Alim (Bugis) who was one of the students of the leading ulama from South Sulawesi, namely Sheikh Yusuf Abul Mahasin Tajul Khalwati Al-Makassari Al-Bantani (1626-1699) who was given the title Tuanta Salamakari Gowa. Haji Alim had students named Bala Kitabi, Bapu Matoa, Haji Limbo. Apart from that, Bala Kitabi studied in Arabia for 13 years while Bapu Matoa only studied for 4 years. Bala Kitabi had students KH Yahya Podungge or Paci Nurjana (1918-1997), KH Ridwan Podungge or Aba Idu (1945-2009), KH. Abdul Samad Bulla or Tuan Samadi (d.1971), Kali Hundu. They learn the science of Sufism and tarekat from zuhud and tawadhu scholars. Although it cannot be denied that they also study jurisprudence, it is less popular. The special in-depth study of fiqh was only during the time of KH Adam Zakari a who had a student, namely KH Rasyid Kamaru (Qodhi Kota Gorontalo).

One of the unique things about Gorontalo's ulama is that they do not have a student base through Islamic boarding schools. They only have students in various science councils rather than educational institutions in the form of Islamic boarding schools. This is different from the ulama in Java who own and are caretakers of Islamic boarding schools. The Gorontalo ulama are more comfortable with the science council model with a system of learning from teachers. Through science councils and a limited number of students, they believe their knowledge is easier to learn and accept and they feel calm when studying. It is not surprising that from the time of Bala Kitabi until the time of his students, not a single Islamic boarding school or religious school was established. The establishment of Islamic boarding schools was only established by institutions or foundations such as the Al-Khairat Islamic boarding school which was built in 1977, Al-Huda, Al-Falah, Hidayatullah, Hubulo and several others (Hasanuddin et al, 2012: 138-146). The absence of Islamic boarding schools in the past had an influence on the ulama in Gorontalo, whose numbers were only small compared to the number of ulama in other areas, especially in Java.

Currently, the development of Islam in Gorontalo is increasingly dynamic. Gorontalo opened up to the entry of several Islamic organizations apart from NU, Al-Khairat and Muhammadiyah as well as tarekat groups with various sects. The entry of transnational Islamic networks such as Jama'ah Tabligh and Wahdah Islamiyah gave a new style to the study of Islamic thought in Gorontalo. Currently, Islam in Gorontalo is facing a different situation from the past. There is no longer a royal system that is established, Islam is no longer institutionalized in a kingdom, religious affairs are no longer regulated by royal officials. Times have changed, currently Gorontalo's local Islamic dynamism is experiencing "repression" and ideological "shocks" coming from outside. The open war of discourse (contestation) between different religious groups is increasingly unstoppable. The spectrum of thought from New Islamic groups is considered different from the beliefs and understanding of the Gorontalo people inherited from ancient ulama.

## Gorontalo and beyond Islamic Transnationalism

The term transnational Islam is a new terminology in academic discourse in Indonesia. This movement is an ideology that crosses nation-state boundaries. Several Islamic organizations that fall into the category of transnational Islamic movements and their accomplices in Indonesia include: the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, Hizbut Tahrir in Lebanon, Wahabiyah in Saudi Arabia, Jama'ah Islamiyah in Pakistan, the Salafi Jihadist Movement in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as Shiites based in Iran (Aksa, 2017). The aim of this organizational movement is to jointly struggle to realize the formalization of the Shari'ah and the establishment of the Khilafah as a national and state system in the Islamic world with different methods and scope of movement. The movement to formalize sharia is a representation of a new Islamic movement in Indonesia which has a cross-border network and members called the "Transnational Islamic Movement". So far studies of transnational Islamic movements have tended to look at two aspects. Firstly, studies that look at the polemics of religious thought in the aspect of purifying Islamic teachings (Baihaki, 2018; Fajarini, 2014; Nashir, 2008; Rasyidah, 2014). The second tendency sees the problem of transnational Islamic movements in relation to politics and the establishment of the caliphate (Amiruddin, 2014; Nuh, 2014).

*Transnational Islamic political movements as a form of development of Islamic thought have given rise to polemics that have "violated" mutual agreements in maintaining brotherhood between groups of the Islamic Ummah. Gorontalo cannot escape its relationship with the development of the diversity of thought that is currently developing. One example is the actions of the East Indonesia Mujahideen group in Poso which continues to carry out suicide bombings. On March 29 2021 at the Makassar Cathedral Church there was a suicide bombing carried out by millennial terrorists affiliated with Jama'ah Ansharut Daulah who pledged allegiance to the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) group. After the bombing was carried out, Densus 88 carried out a large-scale operation by arresting 32 terrorists in various regions at the end of March 2021 and 3 women were arrested in Makassar.*

The concerns of the Gorontalo ulama regarding the channelization of hard-line Islamic network cadres who tend to carry out suicide bombings, are suspected of being based on a textualist-atomistic way of thinking and also a tendency to think haphazardly by easily making infidels other people outside their group. The tactical alliance between Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah Gorontalo was able to suppress the egoism of big interests in protecting the Gorontalo area from being besieged by hardline Islamic ideology. The religious moderation program initiated by the government was intensively promoted by ANSOR Gorontalo City to present a friendly Islam and not an angry Islam in the midst of polemic thoughts.

Gorontalo ulama adhere to the principle of the country called *Payu Limo Totalu Lipu Pei Hulalo* (With the five basic foundations of the State I build) as a formulation of *Duluwo Limo Lo Pohalaa* (Two large kingdoms from five small kingdoms), namely;

1. *Bangusa talalo lipu poduluwalo* (the nation is protected, the state is defended)
2. *Batanga pomaya* (perpetuate ourselves)
3. *Upango potombulu* (we make our wealth a support)
4. *Podungalo life* (Our body and soul are at stake)

5. *Openu de moputi tulalo bodyla moputi lo baya* (so that the bones are white but don't bear the shame)

The noble values of Gorontalo above serve as a reference in guarding and maintaining the dynamic movement of transnational Islamic thought in Gorontalo which tends to propagate the thoughts of the Islamic community through halaqah (studies) carried out in various mosques in Gorontalo. Gorontalo ulama are fully aware that Gorontalo society anthropologically originates from a small family called laihe led by a person called pulahe. From this group it developed into a lembo'a led by a pillow, from several lembo'a whose community life increasingly developed into a larger settlement called Linula led by an olongia. The structure of Gorontalo society that was built a long time ago cannot be separated by differences in views, because Gorontalo society actually comes from one family (*ngala'a*). The five principles above are considered as social capital in Gorontalo society which is able to foster a spirit of mechanical solidarity among the Muslim community.

Islam as a religion of peace (*rahmatan lil alamin*) and way of life *always* prioritizes friendliness over hatred which encourages its adherents to position Islam as a religion that loves peace. Even though debates are difficult to avoid, the Islamic ummah is required to always maintain brotherhood between people (*ukhuwa Islamiyah*) amidst existing differences. The principles of tawasuth (moderation), tawazun (balance), tasamuh (tolerance) and I'tidal (perpendicularity) based on the thoughts of Ahlul Sunnah wal Jama'ah (Aswaja) must be internalized in the thinking of the Islamic ummah. This view is not a coincidence, but rather a contextualization of Islamic teachings which are present in the dimensions and dynamism of the lives of its adherents.

Discourse wars as an effect of the struggle for truth between religious groups in Islam, often put different dimensions to what is desired by the Owner of Truth (God). The discourse of Islamic thought which is depicted in the discourse war as a form of contestation between different Islamic groups in Gorontalo provides a new direction in the dynamism of the local Islamic thought movement. The Gorontalo ulama realized that if at that time Islam entered Gorontalo using a fiqh approach, then civil war would color the journey of Islam in Gorontalo. The fiqh approach will avoid polemics between schools of thought or between traditional groups and puritan Islamic groups.

The presence of Wahdah Islamiyah's *Islamic center* is quite close to the Gorontalo State University campus as part of territorial politics or strategic territorial expansionist tendencies in the spread of ideology (understanding/thoughts and movements). On the other hand, the collaboration program between Wahdah Islamiyah and the Gorontalo City Government in eradicating Koran illiteracy is not a matter of ideology but a matter of relevance to changing times, where the Islamic ummah, especially the millennial group, is considered to be experiencing a "shake" in terms of aqidah and is increasingly moving away from Al-Qur'an and Sunnah of the Prophet.

*The millennial group (students) or "millennial Salafis" is a group of symbolic attributes that are consciously or unconsciously depicted in the form and way they express their religion. Millennial Salafis are synonymous with prancing trousers, beards, turbans, black foreheads, burqas, veils or niqabs. It's just that millennial Salafis tend to follow current fashions and conditions, so it's no wonder they are also involved in "hanging out" in coffee shops,*

*fashion, style and other symbolic attributes. Nevertheless, their Islamic spirit is maintained without forgetting the initial doctrine, namely returning to the Koran and the Sunnah of the Prophet.*

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