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Religiosity of Suburban People Community: A Case Study on Social Reality of Bonokeling Teaching in Indonesia

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Abstract. This study aims to define and analyze the religiosity of the Bonokeling community and its religious background. This study is a qualitative study. The target of this study are disciples of the Bonokeling teaching in the area of Pekuncen Village in the Banyumas Regency. Sources are chosen by applying a snowball sampling technique. Data collection is completed by conducting interviews, observations and documentation. Our data is analysed using interactive methods of data collection, such as data condensation, data presentation, and conclusion. Bonokeling teaching was originally taught by a public figure known as Kyai Bonokeling. Although Bonokeling principles are based on the religion of Islam, it only practices 3 Pillars of Islam, which are creed (confession of faith), fasting and zakat. Disciples of Bonokeling teaching get to know the principles of Bonokeling through their parents, some of whom are direct descendants and some are loyal disciples of Kyai Bonokeling. In experiencing or behaving religiously, the majority of Bonokeling disciples practice the ritual obediently and solemnly although they do not fully understand the significance of the instruments used and the prayers they chant during the rituals. Disciples of Bonokeling teaching do not just recite and say amen to prayers. As time progressed, disciples of Bonokeling left their denomination and started to worship in accordance with Islamic sharia. These changes happen as education advances, but also due to socio-cultural exposures once they leave their hometown to study or work outside the region. The existence of the Bonokeling denomination is slowly vanishing and only its cultural activities are left for people to practice. Meanwhile, the loyal disciples who have been practicing for a long time (until the existing generations succeed them) live in remote areas.

Keywords. Religiosity, Disciples of Bonokeling

1. Introduction

Bonokeling is a belief or faith that has become a religious denomination for some people living around Pekuncen Village, Banyumas Regency. The principles of Bonokeling are not much different compared to other beliefs that teach kindness. According to the history told by Sumitro, a local figure considered as the Leader of Bonokeling Tradition, the principles of Bonokeling were initially taught by a public figure named Kyai Bonokeling. It has kejawen (Javanese tribal tradition) ritual combined with 3 Pillars of Islam, which are confession of faith (the creed), fasting and zakat. This becomes a concrete result of syncretism between the local tribe of Javanese and the religion of Islam. By the time Islam arrived in Banyumas and Cilacap,
figurative dialogue took place between Islam and local culture which then established the Bonokeling denomination, taking form of syncretic religious disciplines [1]. Religiosity defines what degree an individual commits to their religion which then is reflected in their acts and behaviours [2]. Religiosity of people of Pekuncen Village can be seen through how they hold their worshiping rituals or religious rituals taught by Kyai Bonokeling including Islamic fest celebration of Eid Al-Fitr and Eid Al-Adha, also known as Ba’da Perlon rituals [3]. Some other Bonokeling rituals practiced by its disciples can also show how religious they are. Religiosity is a degree of someone believing the religion values and carrying out those values [4]. We can find within Bonokeling worshiping rituals how local culture then becomes the developing element and adhesive that keeps the harmonious life among local people.

According to the tradition leader Sumitro, there are some traditions that have been practiced hereditarily, so these traditions are known as religious rituals because they hold the rituals celebrating Islamic fest such as Eid Al-Adha and Eid Al-Fitr. Eid Al-Adha is called “Perlon Besar” and “Bada Perlon” in the local language. Disciples of Bonokeling called “anak putu Bonokeling” (children, grandchildren of Bonokeling) today are more than 1000 people. Someone can be considered as a member once they reached adulthood, in this case 12 years old for circumcised men and 17 years old for women.

Disciples of Bonokeling do not require their descendants to have the same belief. The massive flow of information and technology today makes it easy for someone to get information and this seemingly has an influence on the social culture of a person or a society. It also applies to children who are descendants of Bonokeling disciples. Absorbing information about the good principles of Islam from education at school, mass media or socializing with the outside world while working outside the village, more or less opens up knowledge and insight about the true principles of Islam. This undoubtedly resulted in a change in the religiosity of the community of Bonokeling. For instance, one of the grandchildren of Mr. Sumitro who continued his education at the State Islamic University of Purwokerto, chose to adhere to Islam according to sharia, namely the 5 pillars and carry out worship rituals according to the teachings of Islam. Mr. Sumitro added that the change in his grandson’s religiosity is due to education where lessons about religion do not only provide knowledge of the Islamic religion but also worship practices in daily life such as praying five times a day and reading the Qur’an.

A number of previous studies consist of research which examines local beliefs by describing people who still maintain traditions [5]. A study by Griyanti et al. [6] examines the fusion of Islam and rituals of local beliefs. A study by Khoudja [7] examines the experience of religiosity of immigrants in Turkey and the religious trajectory of immigrants. Other studies examine the people who follow the teachings of Bonokeling [8]-[9].

The conditions of religiosity in the Bonokeling community as described above motivated the author to conduct a study on the religiosity of the Bonokeling community. In addition to that, this study uses macro approach on the issue of religiosity and micro approach on social reality that allows behavioral change using social facts paradigm. This study has never been carried out by previous researchers who have studied the Bonokeling community and rituals or traditions that have been practiced from generation to generation. While previous studies only defined the rituals or traditions practiced by the Bonokeling community, or looking for reasons as to why they persisted with their teachings, this study examines the reality of the religiosity of the Bonokeling community in Pekuncen Village.

2. Methodology
This study utilizes a qualitative approach to the research. The research design uses a
mixed paradigm, namely social facts paradigm, social definition paradigm and social behavior paradigm to analyze the extent to which the Bonokeling community’s religiosity is related to changes in religiosity due to external factors and its sustainability in the future. Religion from the perspective of offering in established groups has decreased compared to established immigrant groups because they experienced barriers in performing rituals [10]. Neo-assimilation from newcomers enables turmoil in established groups, who act as a developing community and a buffer against outside influences. From this perspective, the arguments of the offering side can also be extended to subjective religiosity and prayer because thriving religious communities are important for sustaining religious beliefs and practices [7].

This study targets several communities who adhere to the teachings of Bonokeling in Pekuncen Village, Jatilawang District, Banyumas Regency. Sources of this study are determined in using the snowball sampling technique. Snowball sampling is a technique with the help of key-informants. Key informants provide detailed and comprehensive data from a particular setting, and find other key informants to be studied [11]. The power of snowball sampling technique is that it can build ideas based on the sources of the formed network [12]. With this snowball sampling technique, the head of Pekuncen Village and the Bonokeling community leader were chosen as key informants to further provide instructions on who can be used as informants from the grandchildren of Bonokeling who are competent in providing data.

The data used in this study are primary data and secondary data. In this study, primary data is obtained and collected directly from informants through observations, field notes and interviews. The secondary data of this study is data that has been processed, in the form of written manuscripts or documents obtained from Pekuncen village, Jatilawang district, or research journals related to Bonokeling in Pekuncen village as supporting data for study activities.

Validity of the data in this study used the source triangulation method, by checking information or data through several sources in the same or different ways, such as interviews, observations, and documentation. The analytical technique used in this study is an interactive model analysis through several stages that is simultaneously used until it is complete, in accordance with the study objectives. The interactive model above can be illustrated in the image below [13]:

![Interactive model](image)

**Figure 1.** Interactive model

Based on Figure 1, data collection by the researcher was carried out as long as needed for the information to examine the problem. Data condensation was utilized, which is data reduction, or simplifying, abstracting and transforming raw data of the study. At the stage of data display, researchers compiled and presented the data that have been reduced and conducted in the study.
In the final stage, researchers drew conclusions and verified based on the facts obtained at the location of the study.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1.1. Results

Bonokeling community is a community of Bonokeling descent in Pekuncen Village who adhere to the teachings of Kyai Bonokeling. Bonokeling is located in Pekuncen Village, led by a key kyai, Kartasari. Disciples of Bonokeling were introduced to Bonokeling teachings through their parents who are loyal disciples of Bonokeling. However, in actuality, not many of Bonokeling disciples’ descendants know what traditions are carried out by disciples according to the teachings in its entirety.

Bonokeling disciples also believe and have faith in Islam and carry out Islamic law, but only a few Islamic laws are known and implemented, namely the confession of faith, fasting and zakat. They do not practice prayers (shalat) and perform the pilgrimage to the holy land (hajj), although there are five Pillars of Islam, which are confession of faith, salah (daily pray five times a day), fasting, zakat, and hajj. There is a strong belief that Bonokeling followers are also muslim since their practice is also carried out by another muslim community, known as NU. Thus, they refuse to be called as Islam abangan. As stated by Sumitro, the leader of the Bonokeling community, Bonokeling disciples are Muslims without any frills, such as Islam kejawen or Islam abangan or even Islam puritan. They still practice Islam teachings, but the only difference is they do not practice daily prayer and hajj.

Disciples of Bonokeling refused to be called as Islam Kejawen or Islam Abangan, as it is legally documented that indigenous people in Pekuncen Village are all Muslims and only 12 people who migrated to the area were Christians. According to one Bonokeling elder, shalat is a relationship with God, so all disciples must have a relationship with the Almighty God all the time. The relationship can manifest in the act of always remembering God, hence they considerably practice shalat whenever they think of God. Other mentioned ways in keeping a relationship with God are by practicing traditions such as Perlon Suran, Perlon 3, 7, 40, 100, 1000 of memorial day and many other Perlon. Meanwhile, the Bonokeling community understands hajj as a trace-back journey, which they already done such activity by visiting the tomb of Kyai Bonokeling, practiced Perlon including the preparation, cleaning of the tomb of Kyai Bonokeling and also carrying out collective prayer led by Kyai Kunci. They consider these activities to have a similar purpose with hajj.

Ritual activities of the Bonokeling community in Pekuncen village, which to this day still hold traditional and cultural values, generally contain salvation prayer which caters to the needs or perlon. These activities are done monthly and based on Javanese calendar. During the month of Sura a chanting is done in Balai Pasemuan on Friday kliwon or Friday legi or Friday pon. In the month of Saper, they carry out a perlon on Monday pahing, Tuesday kliwon and then they also do rikat, where they clean up the tomb of Kyai Bonokeling on the third Friday. During the month of Maulud they conduct ba’da mulud and a pilgrimage to Adiraja in Cilacap. During the month of Ruwah or Sadran they hold Unggahan and during the month of Ramadan or fasting month they do likuran on the 21th night of the month. On the month of Syawal they do Riyaya or Eid al-Fitr celebration on the 1st of the month. Lastly, on the month of Besar they carry out perlon rikat and Besaran Kurban or the Qurban fest (sacrifice).

People of Pekuncen Village, especially the Bonokeling community still carry out the salvation ritual or kenduren along with the offerings (such as rice set on banana leaves known as ambeng, tumpeng side with ingkung chicken and other side dishes, banana, street foods, tea
or coffee). These rituals are usually related to a life cycle of Javanese people in general, such as birth, circumcision, marriage, death, and rituals regarding rice planting as well. Rituals for birth, for example, making red and white porridge when giving name to a baby and when the baby’s navel has disappeared. Rituals for rice planting, for instance, holding a ceremony before planting known as miwiti ritual, during the planting known as tandur ritual, harvest season celebration, and an Apostle celebration as a sign of gratitude to God for the harvested rice. These ritual activities have become religious activities of the Bonokeling community in daily basis since they practice perlon almost everyday, namely syukuran, slamelan, and similar activities. This kind of perlon is usually referred to as an ‘in-between’ perlon which is considerably incidental and personal, but still involves other Bonokeling communities both during the preparation and its implementation. Thus, their religious practice in their daily life is when they do perlon, both regular and individual perlon. This ritual activity is a characteristic of Javanese culture [14] that in Javanese culture there are many gods to whom whenever they have a purpose such as marriage, birth, death they always hold rituals known as slamelan.

According to one of the elders of the Bonokeling community, shalat is a relationship with God, and every disciple of God must pray, meaning that they must always have a relationship with God the Creator. The relationship manifests in always remembering God's existence, so that by remembering God it is considered as shalat. Bonokeling community understands the pilgrimage (haji) as a traced back activity, and they also carry out these activities when traveling to the tomb of Kyai Bonokeling, conducting perlon activities starting from preparing the perlon, cleaning the grave of Kyai Bonokeling, praying together led by Kyai Kunci. They believe these worshipping activities have no different significance than hajj.

Various aspects of life in the Bonokeling community are inseparable from the belief system and Bonokeling tradition. Ritual activities carried out by disciples of Bonokeling continue to be carried out to maintain the continuity of their own lives, both individually and socially [15]. For example, farmers do their jobs and carry out rituals starting from before planting to harvest and after harvesting in order to maintain sustainability and ensure the availability of their food. Their life is comfortable with the traditional way of life because they think new things can endanger the balance of life, so they are afraid of changes in the religious system and social system that exists in their environment.

Moreover, disciples of Bonokeling, who are mostly farmers, will support efforts to maintain traditional social relations and the funds spent on ceremonial ritual activities needed to maintain these relationships. As long as these relationships can be maintained, members of the Bonokeling community will be able to reject the pressures and demands from outside. Bonokeling community does not feel the pressure from Islam community to adhere to the Shari’a because the children of Bonokeling descendants who study Islam are supported by their Bonokeling disciple parents fully aware that what they do is for the good of their children in the future regardless of the beliefs and behavior of religiosity.

Bonokeling descendants who have embraced Islam in accordance to the Shari’a do not completely leave the ritual activities carried out by Bonokeling community. Some of them still want to join the rituals of perlon, unggahan, udunan, perlon besar and ba’d riyya, birth, marriage, and death. This is because these rituals are usually done collectively at certain times so it’s not only religious but they also have social values. Bonokeling community also recommends its members with privilege to share with other community members or neighbors in need.

Religiosity of Bonokeling disciples can be seen through their social relationship among members and also with other believers including Muslims who practice 5 pillars of Islam, which
are good, harmonious, tolerant and respectful. Although conflicts have happened in the past, it was all solved efficiently. The existence of Bonokeling teaching in the future might have vanished due to the dissolution of the generation who practiced Bonokeling teaching, which in turn left them to focus on solely doing the cultural activities. Meanwhile, the remaining practitioners live in remote areas.

3.1.2. Discussion

Study results show that religiosity of Bonokeling teaching demonstrates that practicing Islamic teachings in an unfaithful act by mixing Javanese culture and spiritual journey of the founder of Bonokeling teaching. However, the assimilation continues to evolve to this day so it might still produce a new religiosity style. In the local tradition perspective, it is seen how Javanese elements dominate the rituals such as selametan and perlon that uses Javanese calendar, and also how they wear black beskap (Javanese traditional clothes) and blangkon (Javanese traditional headwear). Whilst the Islamic values that are embedded merely to the point of believing in the oneness of God and have not reached the worship or implementing Islamic law in daily life hence the absence of prayer (shalat) in the religiosity of the Bonokeling community. Bonokeling descendants learn the teachings of Bonokeling from their parents who were then passed down from generation to generation, still with the values of the same teachings. The saving factor of religiosity of the Bonokeling community that still follows the teachings is basically its social environment, which are family and the people surrounding them who adhere to Bonokeling teachings.

Disciples of Bonokeling believe and have faith in Islam and even practice Islamic shari’a. However, they do not practice shalat and hajj to the holy land, although there are five Pillars of Islam (namely the confession of faith, shalat, fasting, zakat, and hajj). In celebrating Eid al-Adha, the Bonokeling community does not practice Eid al-Adha prayer and this confirms that there is no shalat in Bonokeling teachings. This fact becomes a unique point of Bonokeling, whereas to this day nobody knows the reason why Bonokeling only follow 3 Pillars of Islam, not five as taught by Prophet Muhammad SAW.

According to descendants of Bonokeling community who have embraced Islam, almost all rituals carried out by Bonokeling community are different with the Islamic rituals. Regarding shalat which is an obligation for all Muslims, descendants of Bonokeling testify that Bonokeling disciples never practice shalat like Muslims do, whilst Bonokeling disciples testify that they carry out shalat in another form, by always remembering and in connection with God. The perception and point of view in regards to each religiosity show how the Bonokeling community who still practice the Bonokeling teachings and who have already embraced Islamic teachings have distinct differences in how they maintain relationship with God or Allah SWT.

Ritual activities practiced by the Bonokeling community based on the teachings of Kyai Bonokeling are considerably identical with Javanese culture [14]. However, in the sociology of religion theory, these rituals are considered as a form of religious expression or religiosity of faith dimension. Belief itself is one of the dimensions of religious expression from a community which includes forms of ritual and piety [16]. Rituals are formal and specific religious actions that must be carried out by religious adherents. In Bonokeling teachings, the rituals are to perform unggahan, unduhan, ba’da perlon and other perlons as explained by sources according to their knowledge of Bonokeling teachings.

The results of this study show that the Bonokeling community who follow the teachings have comprehensive knowledge of Bonokeling teachings which is indicated by their understanding of the principles, procedures for carrying out the rituals or traditions, instruments
used in the rituals along with their meanings and prayers that are chanted during the rituals. This is as stated in the sociology of religion about religiosity of a society or community on the dimension of knowledge. Religious knowledge includes knowledge of religious people about their own religion, about their religious conceptions, teachings, rules of beliefs, and rules or procedures to worship in their religion [16].

The reality of religiosity in the practice of Bonokeling teachings show that religion is not a mere belief system, it is also a system of actions involving rituals where the belief system in the sacred brings consequences for its disciples to develop symbolic actions that offer submission and admiration to the sacred. The symbolic act is referred to as a ritual that plays an important role in religion. In rituals, moral and social sentiments are strengthened, in which the morality of community members is renewed as to functionally maintain solidarity in society [16]. This result is in line with that of a previous research which shows that there are differences in the experience of religiosity of immigrants in Turkey, between those who often attend to worship and those who rarely worship, where those who frequently attend are more motivated to worship and have an exclusive experience of religiosity [7].

Along with the changing time where interaction of the Bonokeling community with the outside world takes place, it is very possible that changes in religious behavior of Bonokeling disciples also occur. Changes in religious behavior that occur in the descendants of the Bonokeling community allow friction between them which might trigger conflict in the community. For example, conflicts between Bonokeling followers who embrace Islam and followers of 5 Pillars of Islam or other religions and those who still follow the teaching of Bonokeling.

This study provides facts regarding changes in the religiosity of Bonokeling community and the factors behind the changes in religiosity which include educational and social factors, which then supported by internalization process of the Bonokeling community for Islamic religious teachings that are in accordance with the Shari’a and ultimately accept Islamic teachings as part of his religion. This condition is almost the same as revealed in a study conducted earlier which concluded that Bungamale culture is a form of acculturation, where there is a combination of Islamic values and local culture, the emerging culture is part of Islamic teachings in the area [17]. Cultural norms and values are displayed symbolically at a ceremony carried out with full public-supported policy. Ceremonies have values in showing solidarity among community members as if they have common interest. This condition is quite similar to that reported from a study conducted by Rigal & Joseph-Goteiner [18] which concluded that the ritual of clapping hands can become a global interaction in supporting social solidarity all around the world.

On a different perspective, this study result is different from the result of a study conducted by Lasiyo & Wahyono [19] concluding that problems and conflicts occurred due to different beliefs between traditional Islam disciples and disciples of Islam that based on al-Qur’an and Hadith are contradictory. The Bonokeling community as adherents of Indigenous Islam is considered as a subordinate and is always under pressure from Puritan Islam. Therefore, they consistently try to carry out resistance and negotiations against influence of Puritan Islam in order to continue to exist and fight back by means of mimicry, play, storytelling and cultural involution. The results of this study also have differences from study by Pontzen [20] which concluded that Asante Twi Islamic discourses are often raised but people stick to the traditional religion, which is Hausa Boka which often talks about it and practices it.

The study results found the fact that there had been conflicts or frictions due to changes in religious behavior in some Bonokeling disciples who followed Islamic teachings according
to Shari’a. However, the conflict was minimal and could be resolved peacefully. This was done so that social harmony (which is one of the social strengths of the Bonokeling community) was maintained. Efforts that are being made, among others, are by involving Islamic religious figures or leaders in the perlon ritual activities carried out by Bonokeling community such as birth, death, marriage, *muludan*, apostleship or other activities. These ritual activities usually use the prayers from Qur’an or the hadith of Prophet Muhammad, so that people who embrace Islam according to Shari’a participate in the rituals carried out by Bonokeling community.

The results of this study are different from those of a study by Ridho [21] which concluded that relationship between Hindu group and Muslim Wetu Telu is characterized by harmony while the inter-religious relationship between Hindu group and Muslims of Five Times tends to be hostile. Meanwhile, the relationship between Hindus and less orthodox Muslims of Five Times is marked with a number of uncertainties. This study shows a good relationship or harmony between Bonokeling community who follow the teachings of Kyai Bonokeling who teaches 3 pillars of Islam with followers of the 5 pillars of Islam. In carrying out their worship, there is an attitude of tolerance, by letting each other carry out their religious activities according to the teachings of their respective beliefs.

This study is in line with the study by Arifin & Manan [22] where the results of their study show that residents performing rituals according to their beliefs will prevent harm from spirits and ghosts around the rice fields. Although they have acculturated to Islam, they still perform this ceremony because it has been passed down from generation to generation and has become part of the culture, and there is no sufficient understanding of Islamic teachings, the involvement of Islamic teachings, the involvement of religious leaders in the ceremony convinces the community that the tradition is not against Islam, local traditions are used as a medium to introduce Islam and bring the understanding that these rituals are part of the Islamic tradition. In this study, the people of the Bonokeling community still carry out rituals before planting rice, when planting rice, during harvesting and after harvesting. These events also involve Islamic religious leaders to lead prayers using the holy verses of the Qur’an or the Prophet’s hadit, in addition to prayers from Bonokeling religious leaders.

Based on the results of the study and discussion of the studies that have been described above, minor and major propositions can be obtained. Minor propositions in this study is that the understanding and knowledge of a person about the teachings of Bonokeling affect the religiosity of its followers, especially in terms of carrying out or practicing Bonokeling teachings. The religiosity of the Bonokeling community at this time determines the sustainability of Bonokeling teachings as a belief in the future, therefore there is a need for regeneration or rejuvenation of the Bonokeling teachings in order to survive in the future.

The major proposition from this study result and its discussion is that a person’s religiosity is reflected in their knowledge, practice, and social relations in society. Religiosity will ascend along with increasing understanding of the teachings of their beliefs as well as frequent practice, daily worship practices, and establishing social relations in society. Therefore, it is necessary to teach religion continuously to the younger generation so that they can practice religious teachings well and that religion will last forever. Bonokeling community has an extraordinary internal commitment and tolerance for people outside the community is very well established. Apart from that, there is finding that in the future there will be a breakdown in the generation of Bonokeling practitioners. Therefore, it is necessary to internalize local wisdom, especially those related to Bonokeling teachings. The internalization of local wisdom can be done by teaching Bonokeling principles to disciples of Bonokeling, especially to the younger generation, so as to maintain the sustainability of the Bonokeling community’s
religiosity in the future.

4. Conclusion

In its development, the religiosity of the Bonokeling community has changed. Changes in religiosity of the Bonokeling community are motivated or influenced by external factors, such as advances in information technology, and educational factors among Bonokeling descendants who continue their education to Junior High School, High School or colleges. Social interaction that exists in the Bonokeling community is very harmonious and peaceful as expected. However, changes in religiosity that occur in some descendants of Islam, has more or less led to a very clear difference between disciples of Bonokeling teachings and adherents of Islamic teachings according to Shari’a. These differences in religiosity resulted in different perceptions in perceiving the behavior of each worship which in the end led to conflicts. The conflict was not too serious and could be resolved immediately with the efforts of Bonokeling and Islamic religious leaders or the head of Pekuncen Village. Conflicts were resolved using local wisdom in society or in social interaction. The existence of Bonokeling teachings in the future will result in the disconnection of generations of Bonokeling teachings’ practitioners, whilst activities will be more focused on cultural activities. Meanwhile, the remaining practitioners who have been loyal for a long time (until the existing generation runs out) live in remote areas.

References