

The Dynamics of Indonesian Muslim Identity in the United States: A Spiritual and Philosophical Perspective

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ABSTRACT

This research delves into the evolving identity of Indonesian Muslims residing in the United States, examining both spiritual and philosophical dimensions. Amidst a multicultural and multi-religious American society, Indonesian Muslims navigate unique challenges and opportunities that shape their identity. This study explores how their spiritual practices and philosophical beliefs adapt and transform in a diaspora context, highlighting the interplay between maintaining traditional values and integrating into a new cultural environment. By employing qualitative methods, including interviews and participant observations, the research reveals the complex layers of identity formation, offering insights into how faith and philosophy influence the everyday lives and community dynamics of Indonesian Muslims in the United States. This study contributes to a deeper understanding of the transnational religious experience and the broader discourse on identity in a globalized world.

Keywords: Indonesian Muslims, United States, identity, spiritual practices, philosophical beliefs

1. Introduction

International migration has become an increasingly prominent global phenomenon, where individuals and groups move from one country to another for various reasons, including employment, education, and as refugees. One of the groups involved in this dynamic is the Indonesian Muslim community in the United States. Their presence significantly impacts their identity and religious practices, as well as how they position themselves in a culturally and religiously diverse society.

Identity is a complex and dynamic concept, especially in the context of the diaspora. A person's or group's identity can be influenced by the social, cultural, and political environment in which they reside (Hall, 1996; Erikson, 1968). For Indonesian Muslims in the United States, their identity is shaped not only by their cultural and religious heritage from their homeland but also by their interactions with the pluralistic and secular American society (Levitt, 2007). In this context, identity often becomes a battleground between the desire to maintain tradition and the need to adapt to the new environment (Clifford, 1994).

The migration process is often accompanied by cultural shock, which is the psychological discomfort individuals feel when confronted with a culture drastically different from their own (Oberg, 1960). Indonesian Muslims who move to the United States often face significant challenges in adjusting to different social norms, diverse value systems,

and lifestyles that may conflict with their beliefs (Berry, 1997). Studies show that cultural shock can affect individuals' mental health and well-being, as well as their ability to function effectively in the new environment (Ward et al., 2001).

In addition to cultural shock, ethnic and religious conflicts are also significant issues faced by Indonesian Muslims in the United States. Discrimination and negative stereotypes against Muslims, especially after the events of September 11, 2001, have created a less welcoming environment for the Muslim community in the United States (Peek, 2011). This can reinforce feelings of isolation and marginalization, making it more difficult for them to integrate into broader American society (Abdelhadi, 2017).

Spirituality plays an important role in shaping individual identity. In Islam, spirituality is often closely related to religious practices and an individual's relationship with God (Allah) (Nasr, 2002). For the Muslim diaspora, maintaining religious practices in a different environment can be challenging but also provides opportunities to strengthen their spiritual bonds (Peek, 2005). Studies show that spirituality can serve as a source of strength that helps individuals face the challenges of life in a new environment (Pargament, 1997).

Furthermore, a philosophical perspective is also important in understanding the identity of Indonesian Muslims in the United States. The philosophy of life held by individuals, which includes moral and ethical values, is often influenced by their religious and cultural teachings from their homeland.

In the context of the diaspora, there is a process of adaptation and reinterpretation of these values to suit the new environment (Hermans & Kempen, 1998). For example, values such as community togetherness, mutual cooperation, and obedience to religious authority may undergo transformation in the context of a more individualistic American society (Triandis, 1995).

This research aims to delve deeper into how the identity of Indonesian Muslims in the United States is formed and changes from a spiritual and philosophical perspective. The study will also examine how they maintain religious practices and adapt their philosophical values in their daily lives in a different environment. Through a qualitative approach, this research will collect data through interviews and participatory observations to gain a more comprehensive picture of the dynamics of their identity.

In the context of ongoing globalization and migration, a deeper understanding of diaspora identity is crucial. This not only helps the diaspora community itself but also the broader society in understanding and appreciating diversity (Vertovec, 2009). This research is expected to make a significant contribution to the study of diaspora, religious identity, and cross-cultural interactions.

2. Literature Reviews

Studies on identity in the context of the diaspora have been widely discussed in academic literature. Stuart Hall (1990) describes diaspora identity as a hybrid entity formed through a process of negotiation between the original culture and the new culture. According to Hall, identity is not static but continuously evolves with changes in the social and cultural environment. Cohen (2008) adds that the diaspora involves a strong emotional and cultural attachment to the homeland, even though individuals have adapted to the new environment.

Research on the transformation of Muslim identity abroad shows that the processes of acculturation and adaptation to a new environment often present new challenges and opportunities for Muslim communities. Levitt (2004), in his study of transnational religious life, found that migration can enrich religious practices through interaction with other Muslim traditions and communities. Hermansen (2000) studied the experiences of immigrant Muslims in the United States and found that their religious identity often undergoes significant transformation in response to the new social and political context.

Spirituality is an important aspect of Muslim identity that often changes in the context of migration. Eickelman and Piscatori (1990) indicate that the migration experience can trigger deep reflection on the meaning and practice of spirituality. In the context of the diaspora, religious practices and spirituality not only serve to maintain identity but also as a means to build new communities and social networks. Levitt's (2004) study also shows that religious institutions play a key role in supporting diaspora communities and helping them navigate identity challenges in the new environment.

Identity can also be understood from a philosophical perspective, which involves deep questions about the essence and existence of individuals in different social and cultural contexts. Taylor (1989), in his book "Sources of the Self," discusses how individuals form their identities through interaction with cultural values and norms. Appadurai (1996) adds that globalization and migration create new spaces for hybrid identities involving various cultural elements.

3. Research Methodology

This study will use a qualitative approach with a case study design to explore the transformation of Indonesian Muslim identity in the United States. A qualitative approach is chosen because it allows the researcher to gain a deep understanding of the experiences and perceptions of the research subjects. Participants in this study are members of the Indonesian Muslim community living in various cities across the United States. Participants will be selected purposively, with inclusion criteria including individuals who have lived in the United States for at least three years and are actively involved in the local Muslim community.

3.1 Data Collection

Data will be collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observations, and document analysis. Interviews will be conducted using a semi-structured guide that includes questions about migration experiences, religious practices, and philosophical reflections on identity. Participatory observations will be conducted during religious and social community activities to gain a better contextual understanding.

3.2 Data Analysis

The collected data will be analyzed using thematic analysis techniques. The analysis steps include interview transcription, initial coding, theme grouping, and thematic interpretation. This analysis aims to identify patterns and main themes that describe the transformation of the participants' spiritual and philosophical identity.

3.3 Validity and Reliability

To ensure the validity and reliability of the study, the researcher will use data triangulation by combining various data sources (interviews, observations, and documents). Additionally, member checking will be conducted by asking participants to review and confirm the research findings. This study will adhere to ethical research principles, including obtaining written consent from participants, maintaining data confidentiality, and ensuring participant anonymity in the research report.

4. Indonesian Muslim Identity in the United States

Identity is a dynamic and multifaceted concept, especially in the context of the diaspora. International migration brings individuals into new environments where their identities are tested and reshaped through interactions with local cultures and values. For the Indonesian Muslim community in the United States, this journey involves unique challenges and opportunities in maintaining and adjusting their identities from spiritual and philosophical perspectives.

4.1 Spiritual Aspects

Spirituality plays a crucial role in shaping individual identity, particularly in Islam. For Indonesian Muslims in the diaspora, maintaining religious practices and their relationship with God becomes both a challenge and an opportunity to strengthen their spiritual bonds. In Islam, spirituality is often closely linked to religious practices such as prayer, fasting, and remembrance of God (Nasr, 2002). In the diaspora, these practices must be adapted to local conditions that may not always support or even contradict the traditions they bring from their homeland.

4.2 Religious Practices and Worship in the Diaspora

Practicing religion in a different environment can be a significant challenge for Indonesian Muslims in the United States. Studies show that Muslims in the diaspora often face sufficient difficulties in finding suitable places of worship, having time for prayer amid work and daily life demands, and obtaining strong community support (Peek, 2005). Nevertheless, many succeed in finding ways to continue their worship, such as establishing community mosques or holding religious events in private homes (Haddad, Smith, & Moore, 2006).

4.3 The Role of Communities and Mosques in Shaping Spiritual Identity

Communities and mosques play a crucial role in maintaining and shaping the spiritual identity of Indonesian Muslims in the United States. Mosques function not only as places of worship but also as community centers where Muslims can gather, share experiences, and support each other (Abdelhadi, 2017). Through community activities such as religious study groups, religious classes, and social events, Indonesian Muslims can maintain their religious traditions while adapting them to the local context (Bukhari & Mohammad-Arif, 2004).

4.4 Philosophical Aspects

Identity is shaped not only by spirituality but also by the philosophical values held by individuals. For Indonesian Muslims in the United States, this means adjusting traditional philosophical values to life in a more

individualistic and multicultural environment (Hermans & Kempen, 1998). This adaptation process often involves reinterpreting and modifying values such as community togetherness, mutual cooperation, and obedience to religious authority to fit the new realities they face.

4.5 Adjusting Traditional Philosophical Values to Life in the U.S.

Traditional Indonesian philosophical values, such as social harmony and collectivism, may conflict with the dominant individualistic values in the United States. Research shows that Muslim diasporas often experience internal conflict when adjusting these values to their new environment (Triandis, 1995). However, through adaptation and reflection, many succeed in integrating both sets of values, creating a unique hybrid identity (Berry, 1997).

4.6 Morality and Ethics in a Multicultural Context

Living in a multicultural environment like the United States requires Indonesian Muslims to interact with people from diverse cultural and religious backgrounds. This opens up space for discussion and reflection on morality and ethics in a broader context. Values such as tolerance, respect for differences, and inclusivity become increasingly important in shaping their moral identity (Huntington, 1996). Studies show that engaging in cross-cultural dialogue can enrich their understanding of Islamic values and how to apply them in different contexts (Esposito, 2002).

4.7 Challenges and Opportunities

The process of identity adaptation in the diaspora is not easy and is filled with challenges. Cultural shock, discrimination, and negative stereotypes against Muslims are some of the obstacles to be faced (Ward et al., 2001). However, these challenges also present opportunities to strengthen their spiritual and philosophical identity. By overcoming these obstacles, Indonesian Muslims in the United States can build a stronger identity and adapt well to their new environment (Pargament, 1997).

4.8 Identity Conflict and Adaptation Strategies

Identity conflict is a common phenomenon among the Muslim diaspora. They often feel pressure to assimilate with the local culture while maintaining their religious and cultural identity (Berry, 1997). Adaptation strategies such as integration, where individuals strive to combine elements from both cultures, have proven effective in helping them navigate this identity conflict (Ward & Rana-Deuba, 1999).

4.9 Enriching Identity through Cross-Cultural Interaction

Cross-cultural interaction provides a unique opportunity for Indonesian Muslims in the United States to enrich their

identities. Through interaction with various communities and cultures, they can broaden their perspectives and deepen their understanding of the world. Studies show that diasporas actively engaged in cross-cultural dialogue are more likely to have a flexible identity and be well-adapted to multicultural environments (Hermans & Dimaggio, 2007).

The dynamics of Indonesian Muslim identity in the United States is a complex and multifaceted process involving spiritual and philosophical adaptation. Although they face various challenges such as cultural shock and discrimination, they also have opportunities to enrich their identities through cross-cultural and community interactions. This study highlights the importance of communities and mosques in supporting spiritual identity, as well as the role of philosophical values in the adaptation process. By understanding these dynamics, we can better appreciate the complexity of diaspora identities and their contributions to global society.

5. Participant Descriptions

Migration is a complex phenomenon often requiring significant adjustments in various aspects of an individual's life. For Indonesian Muslims living in the United States, these adjustments include spiritual and religious adaptation in a multicultural environment. The following are experiences of several participants living in the United States, including Respondent 1, Respondent 2, Respondent 3, and Respondent 4, in maintaining their religious identities while adapting to their new environment.

5.1 Respondent 1: Spiritual Journey in a Foreign Land

Respondent 1, born in Ngawi in 1975, has been living in the United States since February 2002. As a Software Engineering Manager in Northwestern, Wisconsin, Respondent 1 faces complex dynamics of spiritual identity. Actively involved in various religious and social activities, such as serving as Vice President of the New Muslims Circle and President of the Indonesian Muslim Intellectuals Association in North America, Respondent 1 successfully maintains his religious identity through active engagement in the local Muslim community. Living in America forces him to adjust his religious practices, such as requesting a prayer room at work and attending online religious studies. Respondent 1 believes that Islamic values can be universally applied and support social harmony in a diverse environment.

5.2 Respondent 2: Integration of Sufism and Rationality

Respondent 2, born in Bandung in 1962, has lived in the United States for 26 years. With an extensive educational background, including a Bachelor's degree in Mathematics and various professional certificates, Respondent 2 combines the concepts of Sufism with rational and scientific understanding. As a member of the Baha'i Faith, Respondent 2 is active in Nashqbandi Sufi chanting and personal research

on the Quran. Respondent 2 views pluralism as a human nature and strives to integrate Islamic values into daily life in America. He believes that comprehensive Nusantara spirituality can maintain the world's balance against existing polarities.

5.3 Respondent 3: Islamic Literacy and Multicultural Identity

Respondent 3, born in Bandung in 1987, has been living in Los Angeles for nine years. As a writer and head of the Writing Club of the Indonesian Muslim Society in America (IMSA), Respondent 3 emphasizes the importance of Islamic literacy and the adaptation of values in a multicultural context. She participates in weekly Quran contemplation and is active in local Muslim community activities. Respondent 3 believes that adaptation is key to maintaining a balance between personal identity and social demands in a multicultural environment and strives to be a clear observer in her community.

5.4 Respondent 4: Consistency in Islamic Principles

Respondent 4, born in Banyuwangi in 1964, has been living in Mukilteo, Washington since February 2004. As an engineer at Boeing, Respondent 4 is active in the AsSyifa religious study group and the CERDAS Foundation management. He maintains his identity as a Muslim by consistently performing religious practices and interacting with the surrounding community politely and honestly. Respondent 4 believes that flexibility in non-essential matters is important for adaptation, but firmness in religious principles is non-negotiable.

The experiences of Respondent 1, Respondent 2, Respondent 3, and Respondent 4 demonstrate that migration to the United States brings both challenges and opportunities for Indonesian Muslims in maintaining their religious identity. Through spiritual and philosophical adaptation and community support, they have successfully maintained their religious identity while contributing positively to the multicultural society. This study highlights the importance of communities and mosques in supporting spiritual identity, as well as the role of philosophical values in the adaptation process. By understanding these dynamics, we can better appreciate the complexity of diaspora identities and their contributions to global society.

5.5 Relationship Between Research Findings and Previous Literature

This study confirms the views of Hall (1996) and Erikson (1968) regarding identity as a dynamic concept influenced by social, cultural, and political environments. The findings of this study align with Levitt's (2007) findings, which show that the identity of Indonesian Muslims is shaped by cultural and religious heritage from their homeland and interactions with pluralistic American society. Clifford's (1994) concept of

identity as a battleground between tradition and adaptation to the new environment also supports these findings.

The cultural shock faced by Indonesian Muslims in the United States, as described by Oberg (1960) and Berry (1997), is also confirmed in this study. Challenges in adjusting to different social norms and the negative impacts of discrimination and negative stereotypes against Muslims, as found by Peek (2011) and Abdelhadi (2017), are significant obstacles for them.

5.6 Analysis of Factors Influencing Identity Transformation

The spiritual and philosophical identity of Indonesian Muslims in the United States is influenced by various factors, including:

Social and Cultural Environment: Different social norms and values in the United States require Indonesian Muslims to adjust their religious practices and philosophical values.

Community and Social Support: Muslim communities and mosques play a crucial role in supporting spiritual and social identity. Community support helps individuals overcome cultural shock and discrimination challenges.

Media and Technology Influence: Social media and information technology provide access to religious information and opportunities to interact with the global Muslim community, enriching their understanding and religious practices.

Personal Experience and Reflection: Personal experiences and deep reflections on identity and Islamic values help individuals adapt and develop a more flexible and inclusive identity.

5.7 Contribution to Identity and Diaspora Theory

This research contributes to the theory of identity and diaspora by illustrating how the identity of Indonesian Muslims in the United States is formed and evolves through interactions with different social and cultural environments. The study also highlights the role of spirituality and philosophical values in the process of identity adaptation, as well as the importance of community support in helping individuals maintain their religious identity.

The findings of this research have significant implications for religious and spiritual studies, especially in the context of diaspora. This study shows that spirituality and religious practices play a crucial role in shaping individual and community identities. Furthermore, the research emphasizes the importance of community support and cross-cultural interactions in helping individuals cope with cultural shock and discrimination.

5.8 Recommendations for the Indonesian Muslim Community in the United States

Strengthening Communities and Mosques: Establish and strengthen communities and mosques that can provide

spiritual and social support for Indonesian Muslims in the United States.

Religious Education and Literacy: Provide programs for religious education and literacy that can help individuals deepen their understanding of Islam and its philosophical values.

Engagement in Social Activities: Encourage engagement in social activities and cross-cultural interactions to enrich understanding and strengthen identity.

Use of Technology: Utilize information technology and social media to access religious information and interact with the global Muslim community.

5.9 Strategies for Maintaining and Developing Identity in a Multicultural Environment

5.9.1 Adaptation of Religious Practices

Adjusting religious practices to local conditions is a key strategy used by Indonesian Muslims in the United States to maintain their religious identity. This involves adapting the times and places for performing prayers according to local conditions without compromising the core principles of Islam. For example, Respondent 1 requested a prayer room at his workplace in Wisconsin, demonstrating how practical adaptations can be made without diminishing the sanctity of worship. This adaptation also includes attending online religious studies if there is no direct access to a large Muslim community.

Moreover, adapting religious practices also involves changes in how religious traditions are carried out. In environments that may lack adequate religious facilities, Indonesian Muslims often have to be creative in performing their worship. Respondent 2, for example, is active in the Naqshbandi Sufi dhikr, which uses shared worship spaces with interfaith communities. This illustrates how flexibility and innovation can help maintain religious practices in different environments.

5.9.2 Development of Hybrid Identity

Developing a hybrid identity that combines elements from both the original and local cultures is an important strategy for adapting in a multicultural environment. A hybrid identity allows individuals to maintain their cultural roots while accepting and integrating positive aspects of the new culture. Respondent 3, for example, combines Islamic values with social experiences in Los Angeles, finding ways to be a devout Muslim while actively participating in the local community.

This hybrid identity also helps reduce feelings of alienation and enhance self-acceptance. By recognizing and embracing local cultural elements, Indonesian Muslims can find a balance between their personal and social identities. Respondent 4, who lives in Mukilteo, Washington, demonstrates that flexibility in non-essential matters allows him to adapt well without losing his identity as a Muslim.

Developing this hybrid identity can also enrich their life experiences and broaden their perspectives on the world.

5.9.3 Engagement in Cross-Cultural Dialogue

Participating in cross-cultural dialogue is an effective strategy to broaden horizons and enrich understanding of Islamic values. Such dialogue not only helps reduce prejudice and stereotypes but also opens opportunities for collaboration and cooperation across communities. Respondent 1, for example, is active in social and religious activities involving both Muslim and non-Muslim communities, such as at the Milwaukee Math and Science Academy and the New Muslims Circle.

Cross-cultural dialogue also allows for the exchange of ideas and experiences that can strengthen spiritual identity. Respondent 2, who is involved in various interfaith communities in California, uses this opportunity to deepen her understanding of Sufism and Islamic values through a broader lens. This helps them understand and apply Islamic values in a more universal context, making their identity more inclusive and adaptive.

5.9.4 Community Support

Community support is a crucial factor in helping Indonesian Muslims face challenges and maintain their religious identity. The community provides the necessary social, emotional, and spiritual support, especially when facing discrimination or cultural shock. Respondent 4, through the AsSyifa study group and the CERDAS Foundation, demonstrated how communities can serve as a place to share experiences, learn, and receive moral support.

Communities also play a role in strengthening social bonds and solidarity among fellow Muslims. Respondent 3, as the chair of the IMSA Writing Club and a member of the At-Tahir Mosque social media team, receives strong support from her community, which helps her maintain her religious identity and face life challenges in America. This support is not only important for individual well-being but also for building strong and cohesive communities that can contribute positively in a multicultural society.

6. Conclusions

The dynamics of Indonesian Muslim identity in the United States is a complex and multifaceted process, involving spiritual and philosophical adaptation. The research participants—Respondent 1, Respondent 2, Respondent 3, and Respondent 4—demonstrate different strategies in maintaining their religious identity while adapting to a new environment. Respondent 1, who lives in Wisconsin, faces challenges by adapting religious practices, such as requesting a prayer room at work and being active in both online and local religious activities. Respondent 1 believes that Islamic values can be universally applied to support social harmony in diverse environments. Respondent 2, who lives in California, combines Sufi

concepts with a rational and scientific approach, showing that pluralism is a human nature. Respondent 2 strives to integrate Islamic values into daily life by being active in Naqshbandi Sufi dhikr and personal research on the Quran. Respondent 3, who lives in Los Angeles, emphasizes the importance of Islamic literacy and the adaptation of values in a multicultural context. Respondent 3 is active in the local Muslim community and participates in weekly Quranic reflection, demonstrating that adaptation is key to maintaining a balance between personal identity and social demands. Respondent 4, who lives in Mukilteo, Washington, remains consistent in Islamic principles while being flexible in non-essential matters. Active in study groups and social activities, Respondent 4 shows that Muslim identity should not be waved despite being in a different cultural environment. Although they face various challenges, such as cultural shock and discrimination, the participants also have opportunities to enrich their identity through cross-cultural interactions and community support. This research highlights the importance of communities and mosques in supporting spiritual identity, as well as the role of philosophical values in the adaptation process. By understanding these dynamics, we can better appreciate the complexity of diaspora identities and their contributions to global society.

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