

## ISLAM, ETHNICITY, AND THE POLITICS OF CULTURAL IDENTITY AMONG BETAWI MUSLIMS IN JAKARTA

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### Abstract

Betawi is an ethnic group known to be the native of Jakarta, the capital city of Indonesia. In the post-Reformation era in 1998, some people made efforts to reinforce the Islamic identity of Betawi. This article focuses on the religious expression of Betawi Muslims and the strengthening of local cultural identity in Jakarta, through a phenomenological study and identity theory. This study shows that the consolidation of the religious identity of Betawi Muslims forms diverse theological understanding dynamics, the politicization of rituals, and the development of new religious groups among Betawi Muslims, such as the FBR (*Forum Betawi Rempug*, The Betawi Brotherhood Forum), *Majelis Rasulullah*, and others. These different spiritual experiences increasingly strengthen political identity in the context of Betawi to the foreground of Islamic identity. It is a cultural identity that is narrow and distinct from the hybrid Betawi culture, which historically been shaped in the public cultural space by ethnic and religious diversity.

### Keywords:

*Islam, Religiosity, Betawians, Ethnicity, Identity.*

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### Abstrak

*Betawi merupakan etnis yang dianggap sebagai penduduk asli Jakarta, ibu kota negara Indonesia. Setelah masa reformasi pada tahun 1998, terdapat upaya untuk memperkuat identitas Islam dalam mendefinisikan etnis Betawi. Artikel ini memfokuskan pada ekspresi keberagamaan Muslim Betawi sebagai wujud penguatan identitas budaya lokal di Jakarta. Artikel ini menggunakan metode kualitatif dengan pendekatan fenomenologi dan teori identitas sebagai kerangka teorinya. Hasil kajian ini menunjukkan bahwa keberagamaan Muslim Betawi yang semakin kuat dan mengental tercermin dalam berbagai dinamika paham keagamaan, politisasi praktik ritual dan munculnya kelompok keagamaan baru di kalangan Muslim Betawi, seperti FBR, Majelis Rasulullah dan lainnya. Berbagai pengalaman keberagamaan tersebut semakin mengentalkan politik identitas dengan menyandarkan pada identitas Islam dalam mendefinisikan Betawi. Sebuah identitas budaya yang semakin sempit dan berbeda jauh dengan hibriditas budaya Betawi dahulu yang secara historis dibentuk oleh ragam etnik dan agama dalam ruang budaya kosmopolit.*

### Kata Kunci:

*Agama; Teologi; Gereja; Kekristenan; Transformasi.*

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## A. INTRODUCTION

The term Betawi refers to the region and its inhabitants, which originated from the Dutch word, Batavia. It also appears in the name of some renowned Batavian clerics, Sheikh Abdurrahman al-Batawi and Sheikh Junaid al-Batawi, who enter the Jawi community in Mecca at the beginning of the 19th century during their studies.<sup>1</sup> Previously, it was called Jayakarta before the arrival of the Dutch in the area. VOC, a Dutch trading company in the 17th century, named it Jacatra.<sup>2</sup> Such a phenomenon had a historical relationship with the rise of the *Bataafsche Republiek* (Batavian or the Batavia Republic). It was the name of the Netherlands when the French Empire, headed by Napoleon Bonaparte, conquered this country (1795-1856). Batavia is an area of 661 km<sup>2</sup> between 160.40 'and 170.0' East Longitude. The Cisadane River surrounds this area in the west, several islands are known as the Thousand Islands in the Java Sea in the north, the Citarum River in the east, and the Indian Ocean in the south.<sup>3</sup>

The Betawi people are the seventh largest ethnic group in Indonesia. The number increased sharply in 2000 to reach 5,042 million people (45.65 percent of the population of Jakarta) or five times that of the population in 1930.<sup>4</sup> The Betawi cultural area currently covers the region of DKI Jakarta, Karawang, Bekasi, Bogor, the Thousand Islands, and Tangerang.

In the early days of its formation as a coastal city, Betawi (Port of Sunda Kalapa, Jayakarta

or Batavia), since the Kingdom of Tarumanagara in the 7th century until the post-Reformation, was inhabited by different ethnicities, such as Sundanese, Javanese, Bali, Ambon, Banjar, Bugis, India, Arabic, Chinese, and others. Some religions live in this region, such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Christianity, Confucianism, and others. Although the population differed in ethnicity and beliefs, Malay language unified them as a lingua franca.

As a result of dealing with various ethnicities and religions, the Betawi people need to recognize their existence differently as the ethnic "native inhabitants" who live in Batavia or Jakarta.<sup>5</sup> The government of Governor Ali Sadikin (1966-1977) strengthened the recognition of ethnic identities through the so-called invention of the Betawi tradition.<sup>6</sup> There was a shift from Betawi as a meeting room for ethnic and religious hybridity for centuries toward the formation of ethnic identity with a particular religion. Throughout his rule, the common belief among the people of Jakarta that they need a kind of identity within their cultural framework, which was Betawi culture. It ranged from local language dialects, clothing, arts, food, Betawi settlements to popular culture through Betawi-dialed radio, including the emergence of Betawi artists, such as Benjamin S.<sup>7</sup>

The need for recognition of the existence of Betawi as ethnicity in later times also leads to the reinforcement of the Islamic religious identity linked to the Betawi ethnicity. While

<sup>1</sup>Abdul Aziz, *Islam & Masyarakat Betawi* (Ciputat: PT. Logos Wacana Ilmu, 2007), 73. See also Rakhmad Zailani Kiki, *Genealogi Intelektual Ulama Betawi, Melacak Jaringan Ulama Betawi Dari Awal Abad Ke-19 Sampai Abad Ke-21* (Jakarta: Jakarta Islamic Centre, 2011), 25.

<sup>2</sup>Uka Tjandrasasmita, "Masyarakat Jakarta Sebelum Batavia, Sebuah Pendekatan Sejarah Sosial," in *Arkeologi Islam Nusantara* (Jakarta: KPG in collaboration with EFEO and UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta, 2009), 133.

<sup>3</sup>Ajip Rosidi, ed., *Ensiklopedi Sunda, Alam, Budaya, Dan Manusia* (Jakarta: Pustaka Jaya, 2000), 106--107.

<sup>4</sup>Leo Suryadinata, Evi Nurvidya Arifin, and Aris Ananta, *Indonesia's Population: Ethnicity and Religion*

*in a Changing Political Landscape* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2003), 55.

<sup>5</sup>Tjandrasasmita, "Masyarakat Jakarta Sebelum Batavia, Sebuah Pendekatan Sejarah Sosial."

<sup>6</sup>Yasmine Zaki Shahab, "Rekacipta Tradisi Betawi: Sisi Otoritas Dalam Proses Nasionalisasi Tradisi Lokal," *Antropologi Indonesia* 66, no. 66 (July 22, 2014): 50–51, <https://doi.org/10.7454/ai.v0i66.3422>.

<sup>7</sup>Zeffry Alkatiri, J. J. Rizal, and Ben Sohib, "Not like Eating Chili: Constructing Alternative Cultural Space for the Betawians," *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 12, no. 4 (December 2011): 604, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14649373.2011.603922>.

initially, the identity of Betawi people appeared to be complicated and hybrid, there was later an attempt to identify and characterize the Betawi people so strongly with Islam. An attempt to limit the identity of *Kebetawian* in terms of religion: the Betawi people are Muslims.<sup>8</sup> Almost all scholars also agree that Betawi people are religious and faithful to Islamic teachings and practices. In Jakarta, they embraced Islam more strictly than other ethnic groups.<sup>9</sup>

This article focuses on strengthening the identity of the diversity of Muslim Betawi in post-reform. It reflects in various forms of Betawi Muslim religious experience in the way of theological understanding, Islamic ritual traditions and the emergence of new groups such as FBR. Since 1978, however, there have been a *Bamus Betawi*, *Forum Ulama dan Habaib Betawi* (Fuhab) and others. Through a phenomenological approach and identity theory, the author attempts to explore various ways of reinforcing the Betawi Muslim religious identity which derives from the experience of the Betawi people themselves. This article used the perspective of Wach regarding multiple forms of expression of spiritual experience, including theological understanding, ritual practices, and religious institutions to describe the religiosity of Betawi people.<sup>10</sup>

Based on the author's knowledge, there was little studies have focused on this dimension of

Betawi Muslim religious identity. Scholars typically study the Betawi problem in terms of art, culture, history, and archaeology.<sup>11</sup> Abdul Aziz's thesis may be one of the early studies on the relationship between Betawi and Islamic identity. He believed that the Islamic factor could not be ignored in the development of communities like Betawi so that its recognition of Islam made non-Muslims considered not part of the community.<sup>12</sup> Aziz's study was followed by a later study that strengthened the Islamic identity of the Betawi people in the search aspects of the Betawi ulama network, particularly teachers and *Mu'allim* from the 19th to the 21st century.<sup>13</sup> This article seeks to strengthen this study by focusing on the escalation of strengthening Islamic identity in the form of their religious experience in terms of theological understanding, Islamic ritual practices, and the emergence of new groups in the post-1998 reform period. The research location is also limited to the areas only around Cakung, Srengseng Sawah, and Jatinegara.

This study is very significant in the context of the increase in the diversity of cultural identity politics in Indonesia, particularly after the reform. After the collapse of the New Order regime, which was perceived to be authoritarian to the SARA issues, it contributed to the decentralization crisis, which caused the dynamics of local politics and power relations.<sup>14</sup> It also affected the subject of the rise of *Adat* and the identity politics of local

<sup>8</sup>Alkatiri, Rizal, and Sohib, "Not like Eating Chili: Constructing Alternative Cultural Space for the Betawians."

<sup>9</sup>Yasmine Shahab al Haddar, "The Position of Betawi Women, Native People in Jakarta" (Australian National University, 1982), 32.

<sup>10</sup>Joachim Wach, *Ilmu Perbandingan Agama, Inti Dan Bentuk Pengalaman Keagamaan* (Jakarta: PT Raja Grafindo Persada, 1994).

<sup>11</sup>Lance Castles, "The Ethnic Profile of Djakarta," *Indonesia*, no. 3 (1967): 153–204. See also Cornells Dirk Grijns, "Lenong in the Environs of Jakarta: A Report," *Archipel* 12, no. 1 (1976): 175–202. See also Martha Gay Logsdon, "Neighborhood Organization in Jakarta," *Indonesia*, no. 18 (1974): 53–70. See also Haddar, "The Position of Betawi Women, Native People in Jakarta." See also Jean Gelman Taylor, *The Social World of*

*Batavia: European and Eurasian in Dutch Asia* (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983). See also Ridwan Saidi, *Profil Orang Betawi: Asal Muasal, Kebudayaan Dan Adat Istiadatnya* (Jakarta: PT. Gunara Kata, 2001). See also Heru Erwantoro, "Etnis Betawi: Kajian Historis," *Patanjala* 6, no. 1 (2014): 1–16. See also Jajang Jahroni, "Islamisasi Pantai Utara Jawa: Menelusuri Penyiaran Islam Di Tanah Betawi," *Jurnal Lektur Keagamaan* 14, no. 2 (2016): 369–418.

<sup>12</sup>Aziz, *Islam & Masyarakat Betawi*.

<sup>13</sup>Kiki, *Genealogi Intelektual Ulama Betawi, Melacak Jaringan Ulama Betawi Dari Awal Abad Ke-19 Sampai Abad Ke-21*.

<sup>14</sup>Edward Aspinall and Greg Fealy, "Introduction: Decentralisation, Democratisation and the Rise of the Local," in *Local Power and Politics in Indonesia:*

communities.<sup>15</sup> The politics of ethnic and religious identity was part of this reinforcement, as reflected in the Betawi Muslim ethnic community in Jakarta. Similar cases of ethnic identity politics have also occurred in other ethnic groups, such as Malaya, Sundanese, Dayak, Toraja, and others.

## B. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 1. Strengthening of the Betawi Muslim Religiosity

This section will explain the various forms of Betawi Muslim religious expression that show the strengthening of the Betawi religious identity, particularly after the reformation. The author will focus on the expression of religious experience in the form of religious understanding, which is an expression of intellectual thought or product, ritual practices as a form of deeds and religious institutions in the form of religious organizations or institutions.<sup>16</sup> The author expected that these three forms of diversity could explain the expression of Betawi Muslim religious experience as evidence of the strengthening of their religious identity along with changes in political, social, and religious dynamics in Jakarta.

### 2. Betawi Muslim Religious Understanding

Most of the Betawi people are Muslims. Some scholars believe that Islam was one of the early cultural attachments of the Betawi people to be followed by those who spoke Malaya. This religion seems to have enriched Malayan culture in the Batavian colonial community. Betawi people chose Islam to differentiate their distinctive identity from others, so they called themselves as the people of "Selam," long before they used the term "Betawi." The word Selam is a local pronunciation of the word

"Islam" as the word Srani for the word Christian (Nasrani). This self-understanding involves the affirmation of the identity of the Betawi people from the Dutch occupation, which they called Srani. They placed the experience of being a human at the lowest strata, under the strain of a racist social system. It was coupled with a heavy burden of life, especially for the majority of residents living in private lands. Efforts to Christianize people in various ways, such as education and distribution of rice (Christian rice), are also a plausible reason for the sharp separation between the Selam and Srani. In the post-independence period, the word "Betawi people" seems to be used more uniformly by indigenous Muslims. In the meantime, the original inhabitants of Christian people were descendants of non-Betawian ethnic groups, in which others called them according to their origins, such as the people of Tugu or Depok.<sup>17</sup>

Betawi people, known as followers of Islam, can still be typified based on whether or not they obey divine commands. Based on this typology, it is understood that there are two groups, namely those who are obedient to performing the pillars of Islam and the pillars of faith, and those who are not obedient to performing religious orders. The former is a devout person called Habib, teacher, convert, or cleric. They are people who obey the teachings of Islam, such as performing the pillars of Islam and other worship rituals. Included in this group are not only religious teachers who teach in Islamic boarding schools or educational institutions but also those who have performed the pilgrimage and pious people who carry out religious orders in obedience.

The role of the Ulema in the Betawi community was not only limited to the propagation of the Islamic teachings but also helped establish Islamic educational facilities,

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*Decentralisation & Democratisation* (Singapore: ISEAS, 2003), 2.

<sup>15</sup>Adam D. Tyson, *Decentralization and Adat Revivalism in Indonesia: The Politics of Becoming*

*Indigenous* (London and New York: Routledge, 2010), ix.

<sup>16</sup>Wach, *Ilmu Perbandingan Agama, Inti Dan Bentuk Pengalaman Keagamaan*.

<sup>17</sup>Aziz, *Islam & Masyarakat Betawi*.

such as the construction of *Pesantren* and madrasa as a means of Islamic da'wah. Not a few of them used the Taklim assembly model to organize religious lectures in mosques. Majelis taklim is a non-formal educational institution for the people. The scholars organize recitations in mosques, and assemblies on a regularly scheduled basis are models of the existence of ulama regeneration. This phenomenon, for example, appears as the oldest *Taklim* assembly in the Habib Ali Kwitang Assembly in Betawi and is still crowded with worshippers.

Habib position (plural: habaib) is a prominent position among the Betawi people. Apart from being considered a descendant of the Prophet Muhammad (Sayyid / Sadah), Habib, who came from the descendant of Hadrami in Yemen, became one of the first ethnic groups to bring the Islamic teachings to Jayakarta, which later became known as Batavia.<sup>18</sup> Arabian descendants such as the Habib, both from the Sayyid and non-Sayyid communities, tend to identify themselves as Betawi, even though they only have a relationship through marriage to Betawi women. Although both religiously observant, the position of Habib is different from that of teachers and converts, as it is believed that Habib is a Prophet's heredity. The presence of the Forum Ulama and Habaib Betawi (FUHAB) founded in 2004 has exposed this trend. However, both have a liquid relationship.<sup>19</sup> The Habib position among the Betawi people had increased in the post-reform era, especially as the case of the Islamic Defense Action in Jakarta began in October 2016. Some Islamic scholars, including those who were from the Islamic Defenders Front (Front Pembela Islam - FPI), led a large-scale demonstration of Muslims in protest to Ahok's

statement or Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, a Chinese Christian who was allegedly blasphemous to Islam before the general election of the Governor of Jakarta.<sup>20</sup>

The second group is ordinary people. They are people who are not too obedient in carrying out the principles of Islam. Ordinary people, in some ways, are similar to *Abangan* in Java.<sup>21</sup> For them, carrying out the principles of Islam is considered ideal, such as constructing Mushallah, alms, prayers, chanting and others. As a result, ordinary people, as well as teachers, converts, Habib, clerics or students, seem to try to give lessons that are considered ideal for their children. It is common to see that children from ordinary people's families also learn to read the Holy Qur'an through the Quranic teachers at night, even though many of them have never finished their studies. They considered it ideal if the Betawi children attended religious schools. This group even consciously recognizes that those who have religious knowledge as people who have their statistics to be proud of. In the post-independence period, particularly in the 1970s, there was a growing political tendency among Indonesian citizens towards Islam along with the trauma of the rebellion of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) in the 1930s. They described themselves as religious ones to avoid others' stigma. If they were not religious, others would mark them as members of the PKI, godless people.<sup>22</sup>

In Betawi, ordinary people and converts had always been doing charities in society, such as eating together during the death ceremony, providing food during the wedding ceremony or the circumcision ceremony. It seems, therefore, that for the Betawi people either from the ranks of converts or ordinary people, Islam is the main guideline of their lives.

<sup>18</sup>H. Mawardi (Betawi young Ulama), interviewed by Deni Miharja, Cakung, Jakarta Utara, on November 14, 2019.

<sup>19</sup>Kiki, *Genealogi Intelektual Ulama Betawi, Melacak Jaringan Ulama Betawi Dari Awal Abad Ke-19 Sampai Abad Ke-21*.

<sup>20</sup>Michael Hatherell and Alistair Welsh, "Rebel with a Cause: Ahok and Charismatic Leadership in

Indonesia," *Asian Studies Review* 41, no. 2 (April 2017): 174–90, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10357823.2017.1293006>.

<sup>21</sup>Aziz, *Islam & Masyarakat Betawi*.

<sup>22</sup>Lea Jellinek, *Seperti Roda Berputar, Perubahan Sosial Sebuah Kampung Di Jakarta*, trans. Eddy Zainuri (Jakarta: LP3ES, 1994), 75.

Nevertheless, Islam cannot be ignored as a general characteristic of the Betawi people. Because most Muslims have used the Hijri calendar to determine essential days in the circle of life.<sup>23</sup>

The Ulema group generally teaches the teachings of Sunni Islam or *Ahlu Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah*. The character of understanding of the next generation of Betawi scholars continues to be inherited. In addition, while they follow the teachings of Sunni Islam, among the Betawi people who founded it, have developed religious differences between traditionalist Islam and Islam which appears to be puritanic, such as Wahhabism and Salafism, which initially developed in the Middle East.<sup>24</sup>

However, in general, the Betawis have followed a network of Habibs, teachers, and Mu'allim since the 19th century, adhered to the teachings of traditionalist Islam which maintain traditional values. It was easier to blend with local, cultural values in Betawi in various forms of expressions, such as traditional clothing, traditional houses, brown arts, Lenong, Ondel-ondel, Tanjidor, alms traditions, and others. It was completely different from the puritanical Islam perspective, which tended to purify the Islamic beliefs and practices of Betawi people who were interested in the teachings of the Qur'an and Hadith thoroughly.<sup>25</sup>

### 3. Religious Ritual Practices among Betawi Muslims

Betawi religious experience in the form of religious ritual practices is part of the expression of religious actions. Their experiences occur in various forms of rituals and religious traditions, both related to the life cycle period (such as rituals of birth, seven months pregnancy, circumcision, marriage, death, and Khataman); and related to the practice of religious ceremonies outside the life cycle ceremony (such as remembrance, Ratiban, recitation, pilgrimage, Salawat,

Maulid, haul, social gathering, invitation, and others). The Betawi religious practices of remembrance and prayer also appear in traditional arts, such as *Pencak Silat*, Ondel-ondel, mask dance, and others. Some of the Betawi ceremonies and religious traditions, in general, can also be found in the cultural traditions of Muslim in Archipelago under different names.

In the Betawi tradition, every family can perform religious ceremonies related to the life cycle. If the ceremony is simple and does not involve many people, it is usually called almsgiving. However, if the ceremony is big enough, it is called a celebration. Many special events and the ability of the owner's intent have played a vital role in determining the size of the ceremony in the circumference of life. The ceremony is normally conducted by making food for serving, burning incense, accompanied by recitation of prayer. Many Betawi people still believe in spirits and are associated with Islamic teachings. It was shown during the pregnancy ceremony of Kekeba (salvation of seven months of pregnancy) and birth.<sup>26</sup>

In addition to birth, Betawi people also conduct life-cycle religious rituals related to marriages or circumcisions. The second celebration is the most use of art. It can be seen from the list of friends at the sub-district office when applying for a crowd permit. Regional habits adapted to the status of the owner the celebration determined the choice of types of arts during the celebrations. Mask theatre performances are usually not found in Ciputat or Sawangan areas, these two regions perform Lenong theatre instead. In addition, Muslim clerics will usually choose Islamic art performances such as the Kasidahan, tambourine, Samrah. On the other hand, ordinary people choose different types of theatre, film, dance, mask dance, ondel-ondel, Tanjidor, and others. It is distinct from Betawi people of Chinese descent, such as in

<sup>23</sup>Aziz, *Islam & Masyarakat Betawi*.

<sup>24</sup>H. Ajang (Betawi young Ulama), interviewed by Deni Miharja, Cakung, Jakarta Utara, on September 17, 2019.

<sup>25</sup>Fatullah (Betawi community leaders), interviewed by Deni Miharja, Jatinegara Jakarta Timur, on September 20, 2017.

<sup>26</sup>Aziz, *Islam & Masyarakat Betawi*.

Tangerang, who usually use Cokek dance to enliven their celebrations. Betawi culture is quite similar to Sundanese culture in which its people wore a Betawi mask theatre, or Kliningan or farce and comedy.

However, even though ordinary people are still a long way from orthodoxy, Islam remains a reference point for the identification of Betawis. The preachers seem to provide respite and tolerance for things that are not part of Islam in their perspective, such as the administration of Tanjidor or Cokek music. It is a vital indicator of the phase of what is called intimacy assimilation. People also applied tolerance in different faiths among communities during the life cycle ceremonies and even the practice of worship.

Because Betawi identity is increasingly influenced and identified in the direction of Islamic identity, then there is also Islamization in some traditional Betawi arts, such as ondel-ondel. Ondel-ondel costumes, for example, began to contain Islamic components, such as coconut flower, which replaced various colors of it into silver and gold paper. Likewise with the handlebars that turned into resembling a cap, the addition of a sling Cukin that is reminiscent of the pesantren students and the swordsman Si Pitung, as well as Tanjidor music accompaniment who becomes using white Sadariyah with Komprang pants adds to the Islamic impression.<sup>27</sup>

Besides, Betawi people also often practice religious rituals such as pilgrimages or visiting sacred tombs. The Tomb of Luar Batang, for example, was the tomb of Habib Husin bin Abubakar Alaydrus, a respected Hadrami cleric, and always being visited by hundreds of Betawi people by reciting verses from the Qur'an. Betawi people also frequented visit other tombs, such as Tomb of Prince Ahmad Jayakarta in Pulogadung and three Habib tombs (Habib Abdurahman bin Alwi Shatri, Habib Ali

bin Alwi Ahatri [d. 1710] and Habib Muhammad bin Umar Alqudsi [d. 1705]) in Masjid Bandan complex, between Sunda Kelapa Harbor and Ancol Dreamland.

Another practice is Ratiban or Walimatus Safar, where some people conducted a ceremony to release prospective pilgrims or Umrah. For some rich Betawi people, they hold Ratiban every day for as long as the pilgrims return. In addition, Betawi people usually recite azan and Iqamah while marching to release the pilgrims. In some suburbs of Jakarta, people welcomed some prospective pilgrims who came in and out with firecrackers.

In addition, Betawi's religious practices in the form of Zikr and prayer, are also often seen in traditional arts such as Betawi Pencak silat. It is also known as the term martial arts, Maen sense, Teplekan, and the term due to the influence of the Peranakan Chinese tradition, that bhe si, Gisauw, or Kuntao/Kundao. In this tradition, it not only develops aspects of art, martial arts, and sports but also builds mental and spiritual aspects. Such four elements are incorporated into the Pencak silat movement to protect and strike in the form of punches, kicks, and attacks.<sup>28</sup>

After the reform era, the development of the socio-political situation has strengthened certain religious practices in society. Habibs once led the Zikr Akbar event during the Islamic Martial Action 212 together with the Gerakan Nasional Pendukung Fatwa – Majelis Ulama Indonesia (GNPF-MUI) to mobilize a large mass as a form of protest over Governor Ahok's statement which was allegedly blaspheming Islamic teachings. Some people thought that the Zikr ritual, as practiced by the Majelis Rasulullah of the Habib, is considered part of the local culture of the Betawi people.<sup>29</sup> Here, it appears that the practice of religious rituals no longer only reflects the Betawi religious experience, but experiences

<sup>27</sup>Mita Purbasari Wahidiyat, "Ondel-Ondel Sebagai Ruang Negosiasi Kultural Masyarakat Betawi" (ISI Yogyakarta, 2019), 22–23.

<sup>28</sup>Nawawi, *Maen Pukulan: Pencak Silat Khas Betawi* (Jakarta: Yayasan Pusat Obor, 2006), 6.

<sup>29</sup>Ken Miichi, "Urban Sufi and Politics in Contemporary Indonesia: The Role of Dhikr Associations in the Anti-'Ahok' Rallies," *South East Asia Research* 27, no. 3 (July 3, 2019): 225–237, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0967828X.2019.1667110>.

politicization in response to the socio-religious situation it faces.

#### 4. Religious Social Institutions in Betawi Muslims

Several forms of religious institutions have been developed among the Betawi Muslim. The institutions demonstrated the growing strength of Betawi ethnic political identity after the Reformation era. Examples of those institutions are Islamic Defenders Front (FPI), Zikr Community (Majelis Rasulullah, Nurul Musthafa, Nurussalam), Betawi organizations (Betawi Rempug Forum, abbreviated FBR), the Ulema and Habaib Communication Forum (FKUH) and others. As has already been stated, some of these institutions strengthened their position among Betawi people, particularly since the post-reform era. At the end of 2016, Ahok's case blasphemy on Seribu Island sparked a series of mass protests under Islamic Defendant Act 212, one of which was inseparable from Jakarta-based religious organizations such as the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI) and the Zikr communities such as Majelis Rasulullah.

In fact, an improvement in the Betawi ethnic identity politics was apparent in the establishment of the Betawi Rempug Forum (herein FBR) organisation. Although the initiators of such organizations initially formed as a social organization for the Betawi people, They are almost always connected to religious issues, such as the eradication of a place they considered to be religiously disobedient in Jakarta. Some activities are also synonymous with religious ritual activities of other Muslims, such as recitation and Yasinan.

Some people formed the FBR, an association for the Betawi people, in response to the introduction of regional autonomy during the reform period. The unfair treatment of other ethnic groups against them was the reason behind the creation of this organization. For example, the 2001 incident in Cakung East

Jakarta. Some Madurese are mugging Betawi men and women. The Betawi people responded to such brutal actions, and they ultimately united to fight back Madurese people in Jakarta.<sup>30</sup>

Based on this incident, some young Betawi figures gathered led by (late) Kiai Fadloli El Muhrir to launch a forum that could accommodate and fight for the aspirations of the Betawi people. The outcomes of the deliberations held on 29 July 2001 at the Islamic Boarding School Ziyadatul Mubtadin Cakung finally agreed on the establishment of FBR. This organization claimed that their principles followed the teachings of the Quran and Sunnah, Pancasila, and the Indonesian 1945 Constitution. FBR is an organization that seeks to encourage Betawi people to be able to come forward and take a role in the development of Jakarta. Before the advent of FBR, Betawi people were merely spectators; they did not have the ambition to take part in the event. They only feel the effects of development, until they are increasingly marginalized. They sold their land and moved to suburbs, such as Bekasi, Bogor, Depok, and Tangerang.<sup>31</sup>

The leadership of the FBR consists of the Central Leadership as the highest leader in charge of the Regional Coordinating Leaders (Korwil) at the municipal level and in charge of the Substation Leaders at the sub-district level. Communication between FBR leaders uses the command model (instructions). The FBR membership consists of ordinary members, extraordinary members, and honorary members. FBR membership is only for Muslim Betawi people who already have a national identity (Kartu Tanda Penduduk – KTP).

FBR focused on community empowerment, such as securing events, managing parking lots, supporting projects, and providing social services in the form of donations for orphans and the needy. Sometimes the FBR is also the executor of specific programs organized by the

<sup>30</sup>Taridi (Betawi young leaders), interviewed by Deni Miharja, Jatinegara Jakarta Timur, on September 17, 2017.

<sup>31</sup>Sarih (Betawi community leaders), interviewed by Deni Miharja, Bekasi, on September 17, 2017.

local government. As a regional mass organization, FBR also organizes regular programs to strengthen its members' solidarity, such as recitation, Yasinan every Friday, martial arts training, and gatherings to have coffee together.

Each member of the organization has vowed to follow the organizational leadership, in particular, Ulema as an advisor. Anything related to the needs and concerns of the Betawi people is returned to the Ulema and must also receive the blessing of the leadership. Therefore, the Ulema's decision is an absolute decision which must be complied with and carried out by members of the FBR, including in political choices such as the elections. For example, in the 2018 gubernatorial election in Jakarta, FBR was among those involved in demanding the resolution of the Ahok legal case and suggested the people not vote on Ahok politically. Although some Muslims believed that Governor Ahok's performance was excellent, most Muslims felt that he had hurt Muslim sentiments through his controversial issue in the case of Thousand Islands. He accused of denounced the Ulema so that it was no longer appropriate to become a governor in the Betawi lands.

In addition to its adherence to the Pancasila and the Indonesian 1945 Constitution, FBR also commits to implementing the Islamic teachings in the DKI Jakarta and surrounding areas. They have nine faithful promises where all members must obey. First of all, they must obey Allah and His Messenger, Mohammad. Second, they must follow their leaders in the organization, Anggaran Dasar and Anggaran Rumah Tangga (AD/ART - organization's principles), and Guidelines Outlines. Third, they must be ready to eradicate places that they consider wrongdoers. Fourth, they must try to waive the ban on Sharia, such as drinking, illegal drugs, adultery, gambling, and drugs. Fifth, they must ready to make a sincere sacrifice to defend and help fellow members.

Sixth, they must ready to apologize if they misinterpret their fellow members. Seventh, they must prepare to comply with the state, authorities, securities, tribes, or ethnic groups as long as they are not in conflict with Tawheed and Sharia. Eighth, they must be prepared to revoke membership card when violating Sharia, AD/ART, and disobeying their leaders. Ninth, after receiving the approval of the members, they must be able to attend the organizational activities.

These faithful commitments have been applied in various activities, such as recitation, Maulid, assistance for orphans, prevention of the distribution of drugs, and closure of immoral places, such as massage sites (that offer sex commercial). The organization has also often been involved in the refusal of the construction of the non-Islamic religious buildings, such as churches. It is according to the organization's commitment to implement Islamic law in the daily life of the Betawi people.<sup>32</sup>

#### **Why is Betawi Muslim identity getting stronger?**

In this paper, the question proposed is essential. After the 1998 reformation, the strengthening of the identity of Betawi Muslims has been seen in various religious experiences, as explained above. For example, political Zikr events, Islamic symbols in Betawi's traditional arts, traditional Betawi clothing, and seen in various social organizations, such as the FBR.

The author used the definition of identity as who we are, who others are, and other people's understanding of themselves and others. A practical case that explains the relationship of similarities and differences, agreements and disagreements, is always negotiated and never fixed.<sup>33</sup> It is because identity is a result of the social and historical interaction between Betawi Muslim identity and other ethnicity and beliefs in Jakarta's cosmopolitan social space. Strengthening the Betawi Muslim religious

<sup>32</sup>Matroji (Betawi religious leaders), interviewed by Deni Miharja, Kampung Srengseng Sawah, Jakarta Selatan, on September 17, 2017.

<sup>33</sup>Richard Jenkins, *Social Identity* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), 18.

identity is a response to the similarities and differences with other ethnic groups. Betawi Muslim identity, like other ethnicities, is not in a set structure but is continuously established in a representation system that allows itself to be different from other religious and ethnic identities.<sup>34</sup>

One of the answers to the above question is that after the fall of Suharto in May 1998, many external political factors have had an effect on the identity of Betawi Muslims. The decentralization policy implemented by the government has given the regional government more power than before. Then all areas began to search for their cultural and historical roots. So that various regional identities, including ethnicity, rapidly strengthened. An identity based on social, political, and religious groups has emerged. In Jakarta, organizations that lift the Betawi identity flag and often overlap with religious (Islamic) identity continue to claim social, political, and economic rights in Jakarta.<sup>35</sup>

Strengthening the ethnic and religious identity of Betawi Muslims then often forgets and ignores inter-cultural relations that have existed for centuries. For example, Arab Betawi, Chinese Betawi, and Indo-European Betawi who have lived for hundreds of years in Jakarta. At present, there is an impression that their Kebetawian identity is unacceptable because they generally like Betawi China, for example, are non-Muslim religions. There is now an effort among Betawi people to rely on Islamic religious identity in defining Betawi. In other words, they limit the Betawi identity in religious terms, namely that the Betawi people are Muslims. A thickening of identity that tends to deny the diversity and hybridity of Betawi identity.

It was therefore easy for Betawi Muslim people to persuade other Jakartans via social media not to vote for Ahok, who is a Chinese Christian, in the 2018 governor election after saying inflammatory words in the Thousand Islands. It was the result of the thickening of religious and ethnic identity among them. Betawi Muslims may be worried about the danger of ethnic non-Muslim Chinese to the fate of their faith if they have political power in Jakarta. However, during the race, Ahok's opponents were Arab descendants, Anies Baswedan. Although in terms of political electivity, Ahok had a great deal of potential to win, owing to his popularity and leadership accomplishments in his previous position as Governor of Jakarta. Nevertheless, throughout the year 2016-2017, the political interests through the sentiments of ethnicity and religious identity in a massive demonstration dominating by Muslims were straightforward. Not surprisingly, the results of the regional head election were eventually won by Baswedan with the capital of ethnic polarization and religious differences. More than 65 per cent of Muslims choose Baswedan.<sup>36</sup> It shows that the issue of religious sectarianism and racism, in the context of the growing identity of Betawi Muslims, plays a vital role in politics, primarily through social media, when used for campaigns to contribute to the polarization of the Indonesian people.<sup>37</sup>

Thus, the factor of political change is very influential in improving the religious identity of Betawi Muslims after the reform. In response to the socio-religious situation in Jakarta, the Betawi people are trying to demonstrate their religious identity as Muslims. The racial, religious, and political issues surrounding them have influenced the identity of Betawi people to this day.

<sup>34</sup>Yekti Maunati, *Identitas Dayak: Komodifikasi Dan Politik Kebudayaan* (Yogyakarta: LKiS, 2006), 1.

<sup>35</sup>Alkatiri, Rizal, and Sohib, "Not like Eating Chili: Constructing Alternative Cultural Space for the Betawians."

<sup>36</sup>Jeremy Menchik, "Moderate Muslims and Democratic Breakdown in Indonesia," *Asian Studies*

*Review* 43, no. 3 (July 3, 2019): 415–433, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10357823.2019.1627286>.

<sup>37</sup>Merlyna Lim, "Freedom to Hate: Social Media, Algorithmic Enclaves, and the Rise of Tribal Nationalism in Indonesia," *Critical Asian Studies* 49, no. 3 (July 2017): 411–27, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14672715.2017.1341188>.

### C. CONCLUSION

The explanation above shows that the religious diversity of post-Betawi Muslims is getting stronger and thickens as a result of the influence of social, political, and religious changes along with the era of regional autonomy. Each region tries to find authenticity and the root of its identity. That is what makes ethnic and religious identities like Muslim Betawi thickened. The strengthening of cultural identity is reflected in the development of religious understanding, the politicization of ritual practices, and the emergence of new religious groups among Betawi Muslims, such as the FBR, Majelis Rasulullah, and others. One proof of the strengthening of Betawi Muslim cultural identity politics, for example, occurred during the Ahok case in 2016-2017. The politicization of Betawi Muslim religions and rituals has taken place, influenced by racial, ethnic, and religious sectarianism. In responding to the social, political, and religious situation, the Betawi people are trying to demonstrate their religious identity as Muslims. It can, therefore, be understood whether the people of Betawi tend to rely on their identity as Muslims when defining Betawi.

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