

Chapter One

Introduction

As said in the Preface, this book examines Islam as it is experienced by Muslims in Bima in Sumbawa, Indonesia. The point I wish to put across is that, although the Muslims in Bima are unified in the name of Islam, Islamic expressions are highly diverse. The Sultan and Raja Bicara (the prime minister), the basic dyadic social and political organization in Bima, who reflect the historical and cultural legacies of the area, has been very significant in the forming of the religious orientations in the region. The Sultan's attachment to the traditionalist Islam and the Raja Bicara's affiliation to the reformist Islam has had a wide impact on the dynamics of Islamization and being a Muslim in Bima. The argument presented in this book is that, being Muslim is not a single trajectory but influenced by many aspects, and is continuously in the making. As discussed later, the book shows that even within one single Islamic community, different religious orientations on the same issue exist next to each other. The focus is on the productive agency of Muslims in the embodied meanings of being Muslim in everyday life. The book investigates Islam in Bima as experienced by the local Muslims.

Focusing on agency places this book in an important shift in the anthropology of Islam, which recognizes that self-cultivation plays a pivotal role in religious practices. I argue that my study represents a turning away from the description of Islam as a "fatalistic religion" in which *Shari'at* (Islamic religious law) predetermines all forms of action to a view that Islam enables Muslims to be active agents. The book introduces readers to a new discourse suggesting that Islamic presentations in the public lives of Bima Muslims, or public religious expressions (PRE) as put by Stewart *et al.* (2017), cannot be always equated with Islamic radicalism and Islamism, a political ideology. My findings show that the vast majority of Bima Muslims simply want their identities as Muslims and their cultural products to be recognized by the outside world. Muslims in the eastern part of Indonesia are proud of their historical legacy and traditions, as I demonstrate within the context of contemporary Bima.

In this respect, this book touches on the process of what local Muslims practice as cultural meanings, religious symbols and systems which are expressed through rituals and festivals. The questions posed in this book are: 1) What are the distinctive features of Islamic practices

in Bima? 2) How do these features reflect the specific history of conversion and the socio-cultural heritage of Bima? 3) How do they express these practices in local terms? 4) How do local Muslims understand their beliefs about God, supernatural beings, stories of jinn and healing rituals? 5) To what extent is the incorporation of their religious practices within an Islamic framework responsible for the gradual process of acquiring Islamic knowledge leading to the formation of Islamic practices? My answers to these questions reveal that the continuous presence of religion in public life represents many experiences of Islam when it comes to the way the local Muslims conceptualize religiosity and piety, Islamic rituals and festivals.

1.1. Why Bima is important?

Before travelling to Bima for the first time in late August 2011, I spent a night in Mataram, Lombok, the capital of West Nusa Tenggara province. The people I spoke to at a small food stall (*warung*) after having a dinner with my family offered their impressions of Bima people. A retired man in his sixties recounted his experiences while stationed in Bima as a government employee. 'Bima Muslims are really assiduous in their religious observance, and they are proud of this identity. I did come across some who do not observe their religious duties, but they would get angry if they were called bad Muslims.' Hearing this assertion confirmed my reading of previous studies on Bima which have said that Bima is a predominantly Muslim region and the Muslims there are truly diligent in their religious practices. However, my scholarly interest was piqued and this determined me to look at more closely at how Muslims in Bima observed Islam on a daily basis.

On July 25, 2011, or just one month prior to my visit to Indonesia, Bima had notoriously become the focus of the world's attention as The Jakarta Post reported that a home-made bomb had exploded at the Umar bin Khattab Islamic (UBK) boarding-school (*pesantren*) located in Sila, the capital of the Bolo sub-district, leaving one man dead. At the time, local police had arrested a sixteen-year-old student of the *pesantren* for allegedly stabbing a policeman to death. According to The Jakarta Post report (August 14, 2011), the police believed the young boy was a member of an Islamic militant group and that he had killed the officer in reprisal for a police manhunt for Islamists. The *pesantren* was allegedly linked to Umar Patek, a wanted terrorist suspect arrested in Pakistan. As said earlier in the Preface, two suspected terrorists were shot dead during a shoot-out in Bima with the Densus 88 counterterrorism squad

personnel in 2017. They were allegedly members of *Jamaah Ansharut Daulah* (JAD) – a terrorist network led by the late Aman Abdurrahman.

Bima's link to terrorism was apparently substantiated when Abrory M. Ali, alias Maskadov, leader of the *pesantren* UBK, was sentenced to seventeen years' imprisonment for terrorism offences in March 2012. Police had found home-made bombs in his *pesantren* in 2011. The incident had attracted international media coverage and been a cause of concern for the Indonesian National Police (POLRI) and the National Agency for Combating Terrorism (BNPT). This dramatic incident in the *pesantren* in 2011 made me realize that understanding local Islam in Bima was of more than just scholarly interest. Looking at history, Bima has a track-record of Jihadist movements which have challenged the national ideology. Under the New Order, several Bima *ustad* (clerics) were imprisoned for their alleged involvement in terror attacks with a Jihadist group. Abrory's father, Ali, was jailed because of his connection with the Warsidi Jihadist group in Lampung in the 1980s. Muma Gani Masykur, one of the leading Muhammadiyah figures in Bima, was also among those imprisoned. Muma Gani, a cell-mate of Ali's, told me of his experiences when he was jailed in the 1990s because the government suspected that he had associated with Nurhidayat, founder of the Komando Mujahidin Fisabilillah (KMF), in Talangsri, Lampung (a group which aspired to form an Islamic state). Nurhidayat is notoriously associated with the Talangsari Incident, a confrontation which occurred between Warsidi's group and the security forces, in Talangsari hamlet, Rajabasa Lama Village, Way Jepara District, East Lampung Regency, on February 7, 1989.¹

Muma Gani and twenty-six other prisoners, including Ali, was released in December 1998 under a general pardon issued by the Reform government. Their names were rehabilitated and they were given compensation by President Habibie. As described in Chapter Four, Muma Gani is a graduate of Madrasah Darululum in Bima, which is associated with traditionalist Islam, and he is now also the advisor to the Yayasan Islam (YASIM), a modern organization which has assumed the role of the religious council in the era of the Bima Sultanate. He is now a prominent Muhammadiyah figure and a symbol of reconciliation between members of different religious orientations in Bima today.

During my recent visits to Bima in 2018 and 2019, I saw that the *pesantren* UBK had been closed and its pupils moved to various Islamic boarding schools in other parts of Bima and in Java. While its former religious teachers (*ustadz*) opened places in which to study Islam, for instance, those in Penatoi, Bima, by Abu Bakar As Siddiq and in Kutai, Lagara village, Dompnu, by As-Salam, both located in the island of

Sumbawa. When I visited the two places in late 2018, the *ustadz* there were tending to focus more on how to teach their pupils to memorize the Qur'an (*tahfizul Qur'an*) than inculcate any form of rebellion. Even though *pesantren* UBK no longer exists, Sila is a place well-known for its historical Islamic footprint. The region has a reputation as the home of hardworking people and as the birthplace of teachers in schools all across Bima. In fact, Sila has become the second home after Monta sub-district of the reformist Muhammadiyah organization which has opened schools for the local people in both places.

But to label Sila in particular and Bima in general as the home of Islamic fanatics as Just (2001) did is an oversimplification. Not only that, the local Muslims will feel offended if they hear the pejorative 'fanatic', as it invokes the idea of radical interpretation of sacred texts usually associated with the coercive meaning of *jihād* which allows the killing of innocents. As far as I could observe, the *pesantren* in Sila is not a representative of the traditional-style *pesantren* commonly found in Indonesia in general which advocate moderate views in Islam.

As said earlier, as in any other Muslim community (see Hefner, 2000; and Fealy, 2008: 35), the majority of Bima Muslims have no Islamic political agenda in their public lives. The Muslims in the region are proud of their historical legacy and traditions in the context of 'political and economic uncertainty and increased global interconnections' and eager to show their 'Islam mundane' or 'Islam in the present world' (Otayek and Soares, 2007: 17-19). Except for members of both JAT and JAD in Bima, the overwhelming majority of Islamic practices of Bima Muslims have nothing to do with an Islamist agenda to replace the nationalist ideology of Indonesia's political system. Being Muslim helps local people adapt to the modern world and this modernity is shown in the reinvigorated celebration of the entry of Islam into the region (that is: Bima's anniversary), associated with the Prophet's birthday, locally called the Hanta Ua Pua festival (see Chapter Three). During the ceremony, Muslims from both Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah backgrounds are prominent among the main supporters of the festival. Local women in *rimpu* (local jilbab) parading along the main road are seen by the local people proudly displaying their traditional dress but still adapting to the current world and modernity.

This book will focus neither on whether Bima breeds terrorists nor seek to investigate if Bima Muslims could be included as among those striving for an Islamist agenda. Rather, it endeavours to offer a contemporary account of the everyday experiences of the Muslims of Bima by exploring the ways in which the Muslims in Bima construct notions of the self, the other and community and the ways they express these

publicly in festivals and rituals. As said earlier, being Muslim is highly diverse. It suggests that, even within the same social group, a diversity of Islamic expressions exists. The royal family nurtures the hope that, as it are the sole sponsor of the annual festival in particular, the central government will acknowledge Bima as a distinctive Islamic kingdom or sultanate and accord the region a special autonomy status (*status otonomi khusus*) both culturally and politically. The political elites among the royal family eagerly refer to the example of the Yogyakarta Sultanate as their model for claiming that special status.

In working towards its goal, the royal family has been making a great effort to revive and retain the remnants of the Bima Sultanate through a variety of means, ranging from preserving Bima's regalia (Ind. *benda pusaka*) to the revival of royal festivals. In its eyes, the need to revive the festival of Hanta Ua Pua, for example, is linked to its desire to sustain the legacy and legitimacy of the Bima Sultanate and commemorate its spiritual embrace of Islam through the intercession of a Malay preacher. Under the guidance of Siti Maryam, the royal family has played an important role in the reinstatement of the traditional royal council (*Majelis Hadat Dana Mbojo*) in support of the festival. And this is not the only aim. It is also a vehicle for obtaining more political power in decentralized Indonesia. Since Bima is linked to the dual traditional political leadership between the Sultan and the Raja Bicara, the traditionalist orientation of the Sultan and Sultan mosques means this cultural revival is an instrument for them to wield in their political contestation with the reformist-orientation identified Raja Bicara faction.

On a lower social stratum, it is important to the common people to maintain the soul of the world around them by regularly conducting ritual prayers and village rites as well as engaging in healing rituals which imbue their lives with something out of the ordinary and provide comfort and a sense of well-being. In 2012, I witnessed great crowds thronging to the Hanta Ua Pua festival which can now be considered to be an authentic representation of popular religion of Bima Muslims. These enduring religious practices highlight the point that the 'rationality' offered by the Islamic reformers in the early 1990s failed to take root completely (compare Prager, 2010: 17). I argue that it is right to call the reinvigoration of the popular religion (Hanta Ua Pua festival) in contemporary Bima a kind of 're-enchantment of the world' (see Masud *et al.*, 2009: 139), which is also a counter to current waves of Islamism which are challenging the legitimacy of the historical forms of Islam in the archipelago. For their part, the Bima Muslims have defined the festival as an integral part of their 'agama', religion, within the Islamic framework (see Picard, 2011).

In the perception of ordinary Muslims, the ritual prayers in the mosque (on a daily, weekly and annual basis) enable them to communicate with God but, more pragmatically, also contribute to identity-making. The book shows the observance of Islamic ritual prayers is contested between groups of Muslims as they struggle to define moral frameworks. Although, of course, local Muslims engage in discourses connected to Islamic foundational texts (the Qur'an and Hadith), they do not ignore local sources of religious authority. Both these discourses influence local debates about the observation of the 'true' Islamic ritual prayers. Although Islamic practices are held together by their common values and symbols, differences do arise between Muslims in Bima on scriptural interpretations and meanings of ritual prayers. These different sources of religious authority are found in every village and local Muslims consult them when seeking to build a moral framework for their lives.

1.2. Sultan and Raja Bicara: Dyadic Leadership

This book demonstrates that Bima has been one of the areas in which the diarchic leadership of Sultan and Raja Bicara has contributed to the development of the competing religious orientations in a society which is itself a reflection of an underlying and long-standing political rivalry (Sila 2018). The shaping of the Bima's complementary royal pairing of Sultan and Raja Bicara (or twin political system) is typical of similar historical formations in the Austronesian-speaking societies of eastern Indonesia (Belwood, 1996; Fox and Sather, 1996). The dyadic relationship between the Sultan and the Raja Bicara is sometimes unstable. They have been rivals for centuries – long before the advent of the traditionalist Islam (NU) embraced by the Sultan and that of reformist Islam (Muhammadiyah) espoused by the Raja Bicara in Bima. Unlike the situation in the rest of the Indonesia (for example, in Java), it is noteworthy that both the traditionalist and the reformist strands in Bima are anchored within the palace.

Importantly, the ethos of the political leadership is dyadic rather than hierarchical. The implication of this is that local Muslims do not view the relationship between the NU and Muhammadiyah followers as one of logical contradiction but as a complementary opposition. Hence, unlike the situation in other regions in Indonesia (for instance, the case in Java, Möller 2005), it has been easy for local followers of the two orientations in Bima to reach an accommodation about the performance of collective rituals. This book demonstrates how the historical

and socio-political context has contributed to the shaping of Islamic practices and the configuration of social groups in contemporary Bima.

Despite the fact that royal clerics have become an extension of royal authority, they have not prevented the various ways in which Bima Muslims constitute their rituals, which is heavily influenced by the dyadic leadership which has endured so long within the royal family (namely Sultan and Raja Bicara). This dualism has contributed to the dynamics of the social and cultural settings in Bima society. Sultan and Raja Bicara have become the foci for two differing religious orientations. As is commonly found elsewhere in Indonesia, the two basic religious orientations – usually referred to as the traditionalist and the reformist – have become an instrument by which Muslims can differentiate their positions in the current debate about the observation of Islamic beliefs and practices in Bima. Few studies, however, have related these different religious orientations to the local forms of political authority.

As described in greater depth in this book, although some Muslims in my neighbourhood were a regular congregant of a Muhammadiyah mosque, they also attended a mortuary ritual forbidden by Muhammadiyah organization because they wanted to show their respect to their neighbour. The relationship between Islam and locality highlights the diversity of Islamic practices in contemporary Bima. Although local Muslims accept that Makassar in South Sulawesi was the origin of the propagation of Islam in Bima, the experiences of being Muslim in Bima reveal concepts of religiosity and piety different to those observed in Makassar since they are the product of the distinctive process of Bima's Islamization.

1.3. Being Muslim as Social Phenomena

The focus of this study is directed more towards the discourse than the text (see Asad, 1986). I am more concerned about social interaction, embracing both verbal and non-verbal conduct, in everyday situations. Therefore, the way Muslims in Bima express Islamic practices in rituals and festivals must be understood within the framework of how foundational texts are interpreted, conversed about and contested among Muslims in the making of the Islamic practices, focusing on everyday interaction, also called conversational analysis (Heritage and Clayman, 2010). Studying Islam as practised by Muslims in Bima suggests that Islam is an open corpus as it is represented both through the actions by the royal family of Bima Sultanate in their effort to legitimate the royal authority over the local Muslims and is also embodied in the way

the ordinary people observe the experiences of being Muslim in daily prayers, healing rituals and life-cycle rituals.

Bowen (1989) thinks along the same lines as Asad, arguing that many different pictures of Islam are possible, attributable to, as he put it, the 'multiple identity' every Muslim has in the process of constructing his/her socio-religious identity. I have witnessed how this multiple identity also consists of non-religious elements such as 'cultural', 'economic' and 'modern'. Inevitably, this situation impacts on the construction of an identity which is not secular but a kind of 'hybrid religious identity' (Bowen 1998: 259). Based on my observations of the local constructions of Islam as it is experienced and understood in Bima, I postulate that the prevailing social conditions influence the reproduction of particular religious practices and discourses among Muslims in Bima. As Asad (1993: 13) puts it: 'There cannot be a universal definition of religion, not only because its constituent elements and relationships are historical specific, but because that definition is itself the historical product of discursive process.'

Asad's conception enables us to situate the discourse of different scriptural interpretation of Islamic practices, born of arguments and even manipulation (Anjum, 2008: 667), leads to different religious orientations and the way boundaries of moral communities are conceptualized. Analysing Islam in Bima as a discursive tradition provides a framework for approaching the ways local Muslim actors perform and understand Islamic practices, which can encompass ideas of religious correctness and modification; whether accommodations or amalgamations have occurred in Islamic practices and how this is interpreted as good or 'bad' for local Muslims; arguments for or against religious mixing; and competition over definitions of Islamic practices. In his earlier study, by modifying Asad's 'discursive tradition', Bowen (1993: 10) illustrates the debate within a Muslim society in highland Gayo (Aceh, Indonesia) about how to understand Islamic texts properly in relation to religious practices. Muslims read the same holy books, the Qur'an and Hadith, but they interpret them differently. In the study of Islamic practices, their interpretation is subject to the meanings which people attribute to them. This process of interpretation is therefore both religious and social and illustrates that Islamic practices cannot be detached from social life.

This book posits that the diversity of modes of Islamic practices is evident not only in varying locations and through different rituals of prayers and invocations but also within the same locations and ritual prayers. I demonstrate the way in which Muslims in Bima envisage that the correct form of given practices have social and historical

significance to themselves. It is worth mentioning that Gellner's general theory of Islam (Islam is one), as described in his book *Muslim Society* (1983), seems somewhat inadequate when it comes to scrutinizing various Islamic representations within the Muslim community in Bima and beyond. I follow previous scholars (for example, El Zein, 1977; Asad, 1986; Bowen, 1993, and Beatty, 2004) in using the concept of various manifestations of 'local Islam' rather than conceptualizing 'one Islam'. These distinctive expressions of Islamic practices are the result of a reflection of particular historical cultural legacies and socio-political contexts.

The book highlights a critical aspect of the local experience of being a Muslim in Bima by using examples borrowed from established anthropological insights into the multivocality of rituals and symbolic practices among Muslims across the Indonesian archipelago and elsewhere in the Muslim world. This book engages with other recent publications in this area and with current approaches to the anthropology of Islam and touches on many questions addressed in other studies in Indonesia. Such an approach which recognizes the many ways of Islamic expressions and authorities are evident in other studies conducted by Beatty (2004), Gibson (2005 and 2007), Anjum (2007), Otayek and Soares (2007), Azra *et al.* (2010), Bowen (2012) and Pribadi (2018). Gibson (2005 and 2007), for example, has scrutinized the dynamics of the perpetuation of local practices among the Makassar Muslims of Ara, in South Sulawesi. Gibson describes how Islam has played a pivotal role in the process, in their journey towards the present day. In particular, this study shows that a tolerance of local ritual practices once traditionally condemned as *bid'ah* (heretical innovation) in the past has been re-interpreted Islamically by local Muslims, particularly the traditionalists. A similar situation is also found among *Kiai* in Madura where the same people simultaneously act as cleric and healer. These so-called *dukun Islami* (Islamic healers) frequently "incorporate" Qur'anic verses into their healing practices so that these will be seen and accepted as Islamic (Pribadi, 2018: 91).

Since the reform era, local politicians in a number of districts have made the most of political openness to establish *Shari'at* or Islam-nuanced by-laws, a move popularly called *Perda* (*Peraturan Daerah Shari'at*) (see Salim, 2008, Mietzner and Parsons, 2009, Buehler, 2008 and 2016). Also joining in this trend, local district heads (*bupati*) and mayors (*walikota*) in Bima have issued several by-laws which they regard as representative of the pride of their constituents in their Islamic identity. In addition, concurrent with the rise of both print and electronic media, such as the Internet, media exposure about how to be Muslim broadcast by TV channels from the Middle East to Indonesia

(Azra *et.al.*, 2010), Bima Muslims are being increasingly exposed to concepts of Islamic belief and practices from different sources of religious authority and propounded by various figures.

1.4. Outline of the Book

As the book focuses on the varied representations of Islam in Bima, it examines the many ways of interpreting Islamic rituals and festivals among Bima Muslims. Launching this examination, Chapter Two sets the scene in Bima by describing the transformation of religious identity which has affected the non-religious elements of local life, ranging from the history of conversion to Islam, political orientations, social organization and stratification to family and naming systems. The chapter also contains the theoretical and methodological framework used to support the analysis of these findings. Issues such as the importance of Bima as a research site and the exotic aspects of the lives of the people in Bima are described at length.

Chapter Three records how the royal family of the Bima Sultanate expresses its politico-religious orientation through the celebration of the Hanta Ua Pua festival. This festival commemorates the advent of Islam in the area and the foundation of the Bima Sultanate. In this chapter, I examine the agency of local Muslims in their efforts to incorporate local myths and folk-tales which provide the background to the celebration of the entry of Islam into Bima, underpinning the current accounts of the history of Islam there and its attendant social hierarchy, as well as underlining notions of ancestry, place and alliance in defining individuals and social groups there. Intriguingly, rather than presenting one solid face, notions of origin are contested among individuals within the royal family; a dissension particularly noticeable between the Sultan and the Raja Bicara. Since the revival of the festival in 2003, the royal family has been trying to reassert royal authority and update it for the twenty-first century.

Chapter Four examines the intervention of the royal family in the administration of mosque officials like imam, locally called *lebe* and *khotib*, across Bima. This chapter also discusses the effect of *Shari'at* by-laws (*Peraturan Daerah Shari'at*) in support of the *Jum'at* service in mosques throughout Bima since they were passed in the early 2000s. I argue that Sultanate mosques and their officials have been transformed into vehicles which support the family's claim to be the legitimate leaders and guardians of local practices in their contestation with reformist Muslims.

Chapter Five focuses on the meanings of everyday beliefs and practices according to the ordinary Muslims. It examines local beliefs in supernatural beings and the elements of Islamic mysticism (Sufism) which form the basis for conducting various rituals. It describes the local beliefs in spirits (Bim.: *parafu*), devils, ghosts (Bim.: *henca* or Ind.: *setan*), jinn, spirit possession and healing rituals. A number of local healers (Bim.: *sando*) whom I have met in the field have incorporated Islamic symbols and Qur'anic passages into their local spells, not only to guarantee a 'positive outcome to an endeavour' but also for these to be acceptable to Islamic precepts. This is one of the ways the local healers adapt themselves in the current situation. This chapter portrays the presence of Islamic mysticism in Bima, locally called *fitua*. *Fitua* actually derives from the Sufi teachings of the Martabat Tujuh which arrived in Bima under the auspices of the Buton sultanate, typified by *zikir* (Ar.: *dhikr*) or the use of Islamic invocations in healing rituals and exorcisms.

Chapter Six describes popular understandings of life-cycle rituals among the ordinary Bima Muslims ranging from those performed for an unborn baby to those of the Afterlife to ensure full inclusion into the social group. Here I demonstrate that the people of Bima are an example of Muslims who have fitted their life-cycle rituals into Islamic teachings. I argue that the life-cycle rituals of Bima Muslims convey different meanings and involve different ritual behaviours to the same rituals in other Muslim communities. Nevertheless, Islam has become an incontestable component in these rituals. Therefore, this chapter focuses not only on the concept of being but also on that of becoming a Muslim. This chapter also investigates the veiling practices in Bima which differ from those in other parts of Indonesia.

In Chapter Seven, I describe yet more details of the life-cycle rituals performed at marriages and funerals as well as their significance in the building of solidarity among the villagers and defining the boundaries of different moral communities. In this chapter I posit that solidarity, or getting together, is not just important during lifetime rituals but also in Afterlife rituals. The chapter reveals that these rituals are contested among villagers. For example, in their attendance at a mortuary ritual, the distinction between followers of the Muhammadiyah and those of the NU becomes increasingly uncertain; an indication that solidarity among Bima villagers is far more important than the rigid implementation of reformist doctrines.

Chapter Eight posits the understanding that, by examining the many meanings of Islamic representations among Bima Muslims, no single picture of what being a Muslim is emerges. Given the fact that Bima Muslims are practising Muslims (*Muslim taat*), I postulate that

the growing public religious expressions (PRE) in Bima society cannot always be associated with Islamist ideology. I also make clear that Bima is neither a homegrown hotbed of Islamic radicalism nor a region of superficial Islam (or syncretism) which engages in pre-Islamic practices. Instead it is a place in which the history of dyadic political power has existed for a very long time and over centuries this has led to the formation of a fluid relationship of two differing religious orientations, traditionalist and reformist, within Islam, resulting in new expressions in the post-Soeharto era. This offers new perspectives on what “traditionalist” and “reformist” can mean in Indonesian Islam. In short, it reveals unresolved ambiguities between local orthodoxy and global orthodoxy, and between what “truly” Islamic practices are and what it means of being Muslim in Indonesia today in general.