

Exploratory Study: Forms of Animism and Dynamism in the Islamic Religious System and Culture in the Indigenous Community of Kampung Kuta, Ciamis District

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ABSTRACT

This exploratory study delves into the intricate interplay between animism, dynamism, and the Islamic religious system within the indigenous community of Kampung Kuta in Ciamis District. Despite the predominant influence of Islam in the region, the inhabitants of Kampung Kuta have maintained a unique blend of traditional animistic beliefs and dynamic cultural practices, shaping a distinctive religious landscape. The research employs a qualitative approach, utilizing ethnographic methods such as participant observation and in-depth interviews to unravel the nuanced expressions of animism and dynamism within the community's religious framework. The results of this study indicate that Nyuguh is an inseparable part of the culture of the Kuta village community and collaborates with the values of Islamic religious ideology. The conclusions of this study can inform future research on the complex relationship between Indigenous spirituality and religious ideology, encouraging a more comprehensive understanding of religious dynamics in diverse cultural settings.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Kampung Kuta, situated in the Ciamis District, reflects Indonesia's cultural diversity and religious plurality. Like much of Indonesia, this region has been significantly influenced by Islam. However, intriguingly, amidst Islam's dominance, the indigenous community of Kampung Kuta maintains a unique amalgamation of traditional animistic beliefs and dynamic cultural practices (Firmansyah, 2017; Ojalehto Mays et al., 2020; Yuliana Putri et al., 2021). This exploratory study aims to delve deeper into and comprehend the nuanced forms of animism and dynamism within the Islamic religious system in the community of Kampung Kuta. As a nation with diverse ethnicities and cultures, Indonesia presents challenges to understanding the dynamics of religion and belief (Ke et al., 2023; Maulina et al., 2022). Kampung Kuta is an interesting example because it is located in an area widely Islamized yet still retains strong animistic elements. Employing a qualitative approach, this research utilizes ethnographic methods such as participant observation and in-depth interviews to explore and elucidate the expressions of animism and dynamism within the religious framework of the community.

Historical perspectives indicate that Islamization in Indonesia has involved assimilation and syncretism with local beliefs (Mahilall & Swartz, 2022; Zhu & Lin, 2022). In this context, Kampung Kuta serves as a window to the past, where an inclusive approach to animistic and dynamic beliefs was integrated into the Islamic religious order (Harvey, 2019; Mahilall & Swartz, 2022). Despite the significant changes brought about by the introduction of Islam in thought patterns and religious practices, the community of Kampung Kuta uniquely preserves elements reflecting a close connection with nature and spirituality, creating a distinctive balance between Islam and their cultural heritage (Zhou et al., 2023; Zhu & Lin, 2022). This research fills a knowledge gap regarding the adaptability of religious systems in diverse cultural contexts (Chen et al., 2022; Jensen, 2021; Laures-Gore & Griffey, 2024; Tanhan & Young, 2022; Tayeb et al., 2023). By examining forms of animism and dynamism within Islamic religious practices, the study seeks to depict the complexity of how the people of Kampung Kuta sustain their religious identity. This understanding provides a deeper insight into how religion and belief evolve within this community and offers broader insights into the dynamics of religious diversity in Indonesia as a whole (Galanter et al., 2023; Helkkula & Arnould, 2022)

While Indonesia is known for having a predominantly Muslim population, this research underscores the importance of acknowledging and respecting diversity in religious practices (Huang et al., 2023; Laack, 2020; Rimoldi et al., 2023; Zong et al., 2023). A better understanding of how animistic and dynamic elements coexist with Islam in Kampung Kuta can contribute constructively to the dialogue on religious pluralism in Indonesia. The study also raises critical questions regarding how religious identity is negotiated and shaped in a continually changing indigenous society. Considering the significant role of local beliefs in the daily lives of the people of Kampung Kuta, this research contributes to the literature on religious syncretism, cultural adaptation, and the dynamics of diversity in Indonesia. As a result, this research is expected to provide in-depth insights into the experiences of diversity in Kampung Kuta and lay the foundation for a broader understanding of religious diversity in various communities in Indonesia and worldwide. The conclusions drawn from this research can provide a basis for further debate on how religion and local beliefs interact, adapt, and change over time, shaping a community's religious identity.

2. METHODS

This research employs a qualitative approach to comprehensively explore the forms of animism and dynamism within the Islamic religious system in the indigenous community of Kampung Kuta, Ciamis District. This research was conducted in September - December 2023. The qualitative method is deemed most appropriate for this study as it allows for an in-depth understanding of the cultural and religious nuances within the community. The research design incorporates ethnographic methods (Ke et al., 2023; Li, 2022; Motiño et al., 2021; Ojalehto Mays et al., 2020), including participant observation and in-depth interviews, to capture the richness and complexity of the local religious practices.

2.1. Participant Observation

Participant observation serves as a fundamental component of this study, allowing the researcher to immerse themselves in the community members' daily lives and religious activities. By actively participating in and observing various religious rituals, ceremonies, and community events, the researcher aims to gain firsthand insights into the interplay between animistic traditions, dynamic cultural practices, and the Islamic religious system.

2.2. In-Depth Interviews

In-depth interviews will be conducted with key informants, including religious leaders, community elders, and individuals with a deep understanding of the local religious traditions. These interviews are designed to elicit detailed narratives and perspectives on how animistic beliefs and dynamic cultural elements coexist with Islam in Kampung Kuta. Open-ended questions will be used to encourage participants to share their personal experiences and interpretations.

2.3. Documentary Analysis

A comprehensive analysis of relevant documents, such as historical records, religious texts, and community publications, will complement the primary data collected through participant observation and interviews. This documentary analysis aims to provide additional context to the historical evolution of religious practices in Kampung Kuta and trace the influences that have shaped the current religious landscape.

2.4. Triangulation

To enhance the validity and reliability of the findings, the study will employ triangulation by comparing data obtained from different sources and methods. The convergence of information from participant observation, in-depth interviews, and documentary analysis will contribute to a more robust and comprehensive understanding of animism and dynamism within the local Islamic religious system. Triangulation of data from participant observation, in-depth interviews, and documentary analysis contributed to the robustness of the findings. The convergence of information across these different sources reinforced the consistency of themes and patterns identified in the study. Triangulation validated the integration of animistic and dynamic elements

within the Islamic religious system and provided a nuanced understanding of the contextual factors influencing these practices.

2.5. Ethical Considerations

Respect for the participants' autonomy, privacy, and cultural sensitivity is paramount. All individuals involved in the study will be given informed consent, and steps will be taken to ensure confidentiality. Additionally, the research will adhere to ethical guidelines and seek approval from relevant institutional review boards and local authorities.

2.6. Data Analysis

Thematic analysis will identify patterns, themes, and variations in the data collected through participant observation, in-depth interviews, and documentary analysis. The qualitative data analysis process will involve coding, categorization, and interpretation, ultimately developing a coherent narrative that encapsulates the complex relationship between animism, dynamism, and Islam in Kampung Kuta.

Through the combination of these research methods, this study aims to provide a nuanced and holistic understanding of the religious dynamics within the indigenous community of Kampung Kuta, shedding light on the coexistence of diverse belief systems and their impact on the local Islamic religious practices.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The investigation into the forms of animism and dynamism within the Islamic religious system in the indigenous community of Kampung Kuta, Ciamis District, has yielded rich insights into the complex interplay of these elements within the local religious landscape. The qualitative research approach, combining participant observation, in-depth interviews, and documentary analysis, has provided a comprehensive understanding of the ways in which animistic traditions and dynamic cultural practices coexist with Islam in this unique community (Helkkula & Arnould, 2022; Nahardani et al., 2022).

3.1. Animistic Elements in Islamic Rituals

Kampung Kuta in Ciamis Regency, West Java, is an attractive community to study from the perspective of the relationship between animist traditions and Islamic practices. Despite the majority of the population being Muslim, many local rituals and beliefs reflect a strong animist influence. In this context, animism refers to the belief that particular objects, places, and creatures have spirits or spiritual powers. This discussion will examine the elements of animism integrated into Islamic religious practices in Kampung Kuta and how they coexist in the daily lives of the community. Kampung Kuta is one of the few communities in Indonesia that have managed to maintain their ancestral cultural heritage despite the intense process of Islamisation. The long interaction history between local beliefs and Islam in this village creates a unique form of syncretism (Huang et al., 2023; Yuliana Putri et al., 2021). Locals often see no contradiction

between animist beliefs and Islamic teachings; instead, they integrate these elements into their daily lives and ritual practices.

The syncretism between Islam and animism in Kampung Kuta shows the adaptation and flexibility of local culture in the face of external influences. Locals do not see Islam and animism as two conflicting belief systems but rather as part of their complex cultural identity. Elements of animism give local meaning and context to Islamic practices, while Islamic teachings provide a broader moral and spiritual structure. The participant observation revealed a fascinating integration of animistic elements within the Islamic rituals practiced in Kampung Kuta. During daily prayers and special religious events, community members engaged in symbolic gestures and rituals that echoed traditional animistic beliefs. For instance, the placement of offerings at specific locations within the mosque, reminiscent of animistic altars, highlighted the syncretic nature of religious practices. The presence of symbolic objects, believed to embody spiritual significance, further underscored the deep-rooted animistic influences on Islamic rituals.

The in-depth interviews with religious leaders and community members shed light on the intention behind incorporating animistic elements. Participants emphasized the belief that these practices served as a means of maintaining a spiritual connection with the natural environment and ancestral spirits. The blending of animistic symbolism with Islamic prayers was perceived as a way to honour the community's cultural heritage while embracing the tenets of Islam. Rather than being seen as conflicting, this integration was viewed as a harmonious expression of spirituality unique to Kampung Kuta. Modernization and globalization bring new challenges to the people of Kampung Kuta. With increased access to formal education and media, the younger generation has begun to experience changes in the way traditional beliefs are viewed. There are concerns that more orthodox interpretations of Islam will further erode animist elements in religious practices. However, many residents are trying to maintain a balance between ancestral traditions and the demands of modernity.

3.2. Dynamic Cultural Practices and Islamic Festivals

Kuta Village, located in Ciamis Regency, West Java, is known for its rich culture and strong local traditions. One tradition that stands out is the Nyuguh tradition, which is part of a series of religious and cultural activities in this village. The Nyuguh tradition reflects how the people of Kuta Village have successfully integrated local cultural practices with Islamic teachings, creating a dynamic practice that is rich in meaning and value. The research also illuminated dynamic cultural practices that intersected with Islamic festivals in Kampung Kuta. Notably, the community engaged in vibrant cultural performances during Islamic celebrations, including traditional dances, music, and theatrical presentations. These dynamic expressions of culture were seamlessly woven into the fabric of Islamic festivities, creating a distinctive celebration that encapsulated religious and cultural significance.

The Nyuguh tradition comes from the ancestral customs of the people of Kampung Kuta, closely related to animist beliefs. This tradition experienced syncretism with Islamic teachings that entered the area in the development of time. This integration between local beliefs and Islam created a unique and distinctive cultural practice. Nyuguh is a form of respect for ancestors and the surrounding nature, which is then packaged in the frame of religious rituals per Islamic teachings. The Nyuguh tradition is usually carried out at certain times, especially those considered sacred or essential in the agrarian and religious calendar of the Kuta Village community. Nyuguh

ceremonies are often held in sacred places, such as sacred forest areas or around large trees believed to have spiritual powers. The execution time usually coincides with important moments in the agrarian calendar or certain times in the Islamic calendar. All community members, from children to adults, are involved in these ceremonies. The community's involvement in this tradition reflects strong social cohesion and respect for shared values.

In the Nyuguh tradition, prayers and mantras play an essential role. The prayers usually combine Qur'anic verses and local mantras passed down from generation to generation. These mantras often invoke protection, blessings, and well-being. Although there is no concept of offerings in Islam, the people of Kampung Kuta still do them as a form of respect for their ancestors. These offerings are usually food, fruits, and other items that are believed to be favored by the spirits of the ancestors. One of the primary purposes of the Nyuguh tradition is to honour the ancestors who have provided cultural heritage and fertile land. This honour is considered a form of gratitude and an effort to maintain natural and spiritual balance. The Nyuguh tradition also aims to invoke prosperity and protection for the community. The prayers usually include requests for a bountiful harvest, healthy families, and avoidance of disasters.

The Nyuguh tradition is a clear example of the cultural syncretism in Kuta Village. Despite Islam being the majority and dominant religion, elements of local culture are not simply lost. Instead, these elements are integrated into Islamic religious practices, creating a unique and distinctive form of worship. This adaptation process demonstrates the community's flexibility and ability to maintain its cultural identity while accepting religious influences coming from outside. Like many other local traditions, Nyuguh faces challenges from modernization and globalization. The younger generation, increasingly exposed to formal education and mass media, may experience a dilemma in maintaining the traditions of their ancestors. However, there are also opportunities to preserve these traditions through cultural education and the promotion of culture-based tourism.



Figure 1. *Process of nyuguh traditional ceremony*

Interviewees highlighted the importance of these cultural practices in fostering a sense of community identity and unity. The dynamic cultural elements were considered integral to the broader understanding of Islam within the community, reflecting a holistic approach to religious expression. Participants expressed a shared belief that the cultural practices enhanced the spiritual experience of Islamic festivals, emphasizing the compatibility of dynamic cultural expressions with the core tenets of Islam.

3.3. Documentary Analysis: Tracing Historical Influences

The documentary analysis complemented the primary data by providing historical context to the coexistence of animism, dynamism, and Islam in Kampung Kuta. Historical records revealed a series of events and cultural exchanges that contributed to the unique religious landscape observed today. The process of Islamization in the region was marked by a gradual assimilation of animistic beliefs rather than a complete eradication. This historical perspective underscores the resilience of local beliefs and the adaptive nature of Islam in accommodating cultural diversity. Kuta Village, located in Ciamis Regency, West Java, has a rich and complex history. It reflects the dynamic interaction between local traditions and external influences, including Islamisation and modernization. This documentary analysis aims to comprehensively trace the influence of history on the development of the culture and society of Kampung Kuta. Kampung Kuta is one of the indigenous villages that has maintained its ancestral traditions and culture despite facing various social and cultural changes. The origin of this village is associated with local legends and myths that mention their ancestors who first opened this area. The early history of Kuta Village is inseparable from animist beliefs that are deeply rooted in people's lives.

The process of Islamisation in Kuta Village began around the 15th to 16th centuries AD, along with the spread of Islam in the West Java region by traders and scholars from the Sultanates of Cirebon and Demak. The influence of Islam began to seep into the lives of the people of Kampung Kuta, changing most of their religious practices and customs. However, this process did not eliminate the pre-existing animist beliefs and practices. Instead, syncretism occurred where elements of Islam and animism coexisted. During the colonial period, especially during the Dutch colonial era, Kuta Village experienced significant social and economic changes. Exploitative colonial policies impacted the economic structure and social life of the community. Despite this, the people of Kampung Kuta managed to maintain many of their traditional aspects, including language, customs, and local beliefs. The modernization that swept Indonesia after independence also reached Kuta Village. Increased access to education, technology, and mass media brought changes in the community's perspective and lifestyle. However, the people of Kampung Kuta still try to maintain their cultural identity through the preservation of traditions and traditional ceremonies.



Figure 2. *Documentation researcher interview*



Figure 3. *Documentation researcher interview*

Moreover, the analysis of religious texts and community publications highlighted the role of local scholars and religious leaders in shaping the narrative of Islamic practices in Kampung Kuta. The reinterpretation of Islamic teachings to accommodate indigenous beliefs was a recurring theme, emphasizing the dynamic nature of religious discourse within the community.

3.4. Ethical Considerations and Community Perspectives

Ethical considerations played a crucial role throughout the research process. Obtaining informed consent from participants was foundational to the ethical framework, ensuring that community members were aware of the research objectives and voluntarily participated. Confidentiality measures were rigorously maintained to protect the identity of individuals, particularly given the sensitive nature of discussing religious practices.

The Nyuguh tradition in Kampung Kuta, Ciamis Regency, is an integral part of the cultural and spiritual identity of the local community. Researching this tradition requires severe ethical considerations to ensure that the research is conducted with respect for the values and perspectives of the community. For the people of Kampung Kuta, the Nyuguh ceremony is a way to honour and communicate with ancestors. They believe that ancestors are essential in protecting and blessing the community. The Nyuguh tradition reflects the integration between animist beliefs and Islamic teachings. The community sees this as part of their unique and flexible religious identity.

The Nyuguh ceremony is an opportunity for community members to come together, strengthen social bonds, and cooperate in the preparation and execution of rituals. This tradition strengthens the cultural identity of the people of Kampung Kuta, helping them maintain and celebrate their cultural heritage amid social change. The people of Kampung Kuta feel responsible for preserving the Nyuguh tradition as an ancestral heritage that must be maintained and passed on to future generations. The tradition also serves as an educational tool for the younger generation, introducing them to essential values, history, and cultural practices. The people of Kampung Kuta demonstrate the ability to adapt to changing times without losing the core of their traditions. They integrate modern elements in the execution of the ceremony without compromising its spiritual meaning. Some community members see the potential of cultural tourism as a way to promote and preserve the Nyuguh tradition. However, this also poses challenges in maintaining the authenticity of the ritual.



Figure 4. *The process of carrying kupat for nyuguh*

The community's perspectives on the research process were also integral to the study. Feedback sessions were conducted to allow participants to share their reflections on the findings and offer insights into interpreting results. This participatory approach ensured that the community remained actively engaged in the research process, fostering a collaborative and respectful relationship between the researcher and the participants.



Figure 5. *The process of praying during the nyuguh traditional ceremony*

3.5. Symbiosis of Animism and Islam

Kampung Kuta in Ciamis Regency, West Java, is a clear example of how animist beliefs and Islamic teachings can coexist and complement each other. The Nyuguh ceremony, a ritual performed by the local community, reflects the symbiosis between these two belief systems. Research on the Nyuguh ceremony provides a deep insight into how the people of Kampung Kuta integrate animist traditions with Islam daily. Animism is the belief that a spirit or soul exists within all things, including nature and artificial objects (Kochan, 2021; Stanford & Jong, 2019). In Kampung Kuta, animism has been part of the culture and ancestral traditions for centuries. With the introduction of Islam to the region in the 15th to 16th centuries, a process of syncretism occurred, in which animist elements were integrated into Islamic religious practices. The Nyuguh ceremony is an annual ritual performed by the people of Kampung Kuta as a form of honour to the ancestors and a wish for prosperity. The ritual involves various elements that reflect the fusion of animism and Islam, such as prayers, offerings, and sacred symbols.

3.6. Cultural Dynamics as Spiritual Enhancements

Dynamic cultural practices during Islamic festivals were perceived as spiritual enhancements rather than divergences from religious norms. The performances were seen as embodying the joyous spirit of communal celebration, fostering a sense of belonging and shared identity. The synergy between dynamic cultural expressions and Islamic festivities reflected a holistic approach to religious observance that transcended conventional boundaries.

3.7. Historical Continuity and Adaptability

The historical analysis highlighted the continuity of animistic influences over time and Islam's adaptive nature in response to local cultural dynamics. Rather than a static imposition of religious doctrines, the historical narrative suggested a dynamic process of negotiation and adaptation, resulting in a unique religious syncretism observed in Kampung Kuta today.

3.8. Community Resilience and Identity Formation

The resilience of local beliefs and the conscious effort to preserve cultural identity within the framework of Islam emerged as a central theme. The community's intentional integration of animistic and dynamic elements was viewed as an assertion of identity and a reflection of their distinct historical journey. This synthesis contributed to forming a religious identity that is not confined to rigid doctrinal boundaries but is dynamic, inclusive, and reflective of the community's ethos.

3.9. Implications and Future Directions

The findings of this research have significant implications for understanding the adaptability of religious systems in culturally diverse contexts. The coexistence of animistic and dynamic elements within the Islamic religious system challenges prevailing notions of religious homogeneity. Recognizing and respecting this diversity is crucial for fostering inclusive dialogues on religious pluralism.

Future research directions may explore the broader implications of religious syncretism in Kampung Kuta on inter-community relations, social cohesion, and the preservation of cultural heritage. Comparative studies with other communities undergoing similar processes of religious adaptation could provide a broader understanding of the dynamics at play.

CONCLUSION

In summary, this research sheds light on the intricate interplay between animism, dynamism, and Islam within the indigenous religious system of Kampung Kuta, Ciamis District. The study unraveled a complex tapestry of religious practices that harmoniously integrate diverse cultural elements through a qualitative exploration employing participant observation, in-depth interviews, and documentary analysis. The findings emphasize the symbiotic relationship between animistic traditions and Islamic rituals, challenging conventional perceptions of religious homogeneity. The community's intentional incorporation of animistic symbolism within their Islamic practices reflects a conscious effort to preserve cultural identity and maintain a spiritual connection with their heritage.

Dynamic cultural expressions during Islamic festivals emerged as spiritual enhancements rather than deviations from religious norms. The vibrant performances were integral to the community's celebration of shared identity and cultural pride, presenting a unique synthesis of religious and cultural dynamics. The historical analysis highlighted the resilience of local beliefs and the adaptability of Islam over time, contributing to the formation of a dynamic religious identity in Kampung Kuta. The synthesis of animistic, dynamic, and Islamic elements in the community's religious practices challenges prevailing narratives of religious purity and underscores the importance of recognizing and respecting diverse expressions of faith. Animist elements in Islamic rituals in Kuta Village, Ciamis Regency, reflect the continuation of local

traditions that have adapted to the influence of Islam. Through traditional ceremonies, honouring ancestral spirits, and the use of jampi, the people of Kampung Kuta demonstrate how animist beliefs and Islam can coexist and complement each other. Despite the challenges of modernization, the community continues to maintain their unique cultural heritage, reflecting its identity as a people rich in tradition and spirituality.

The implications of this research extend to fostering a more inclusive dialogue on religious pluralism, acknowledging the richness that emerges from the coexistence of multiple belief systems. Understanding the adaptability of religious systems in culturally diverse contexts is crucial for promoting tolerance and appreciation for the multifaceted nature of spirituality. As a stepping stone for future research, this study encourages further exploration of the broader societal implications of religious syncretism in Kampung Kuta. Comparative studies with other communities undergoing similar processes of religious adaptation could provide a broader perspective on the dynamics of cultural preservation and religious identity formation. In conclusion, the research contributes to a deeper understanding of the dynamic and resilient nature of religious practices in Kampung Kuta, offering insights that extend beyond the boundaries of conventional religious discourse. The coexistence of animism, dynamism, and Islam in this community serves as a testament to the richness of cultural heritage and the adaptive capacity of religious systems within diverse cultural settings.

Research on the Nyuguh tradition in Kampung Kuta, Ciamis Regency, requires in-depth ethical considerations to ensure respect for the culture and beliefs of the local community. Obtaining informed consent, respecting customs, protecting participants' privacy, and ensuring community benefits were essential. Community perspectives on the Nyuguh tradition reflect deep spiritual meaning, important social functions, and a commitment to cultural preservation. This research can provide valuable insights through an ethical and sensitive approach while supporting efforts to preserve this rich tradition.

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