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FROM GUEST TO HOST RELIGION: The Transformation of Islam In Papua

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the dynamics of Islamic da'wah in Papua, highlighting historical challenges and contemporary transformations within a social, political, and cultural context. This study uses a qualitative approach with historical and social analysis through a review of literature, Islamic organizational documents, and narratives from Papuan Muslim figures. The results show that although Islam was the first Abrahamic religion to arrive in Papua, its spread was hampered by the influence of colonialism and the dominance of Christian and Catholic missions, which relegated Islam to a minority position with an exclusive image. However, over time, Islamic da'wah has undergone significant transformation, particularly through educational and empowerment initiatives undertaken by organizations such as Nahdlatul Ulama, Muhammadiyah, and the Papuan Muslim Council. These changes have fostered the emergence of educated and influential Papuan Muslim figures and strengthened awareness of Islamic identity as an integral part of Papuan culture. These findings confirm that Islamic preaching based on a cultural approach and social empowerment is more effective in transforming the old narrative of Islam as a "newcomer religion," toward recognizing it as a legitimate part of Papuan identity. Going forward, ethnographic-based research is needed to capture the pulse of Papuan Muslims at the grassroots level and understand Islam as growing from within,

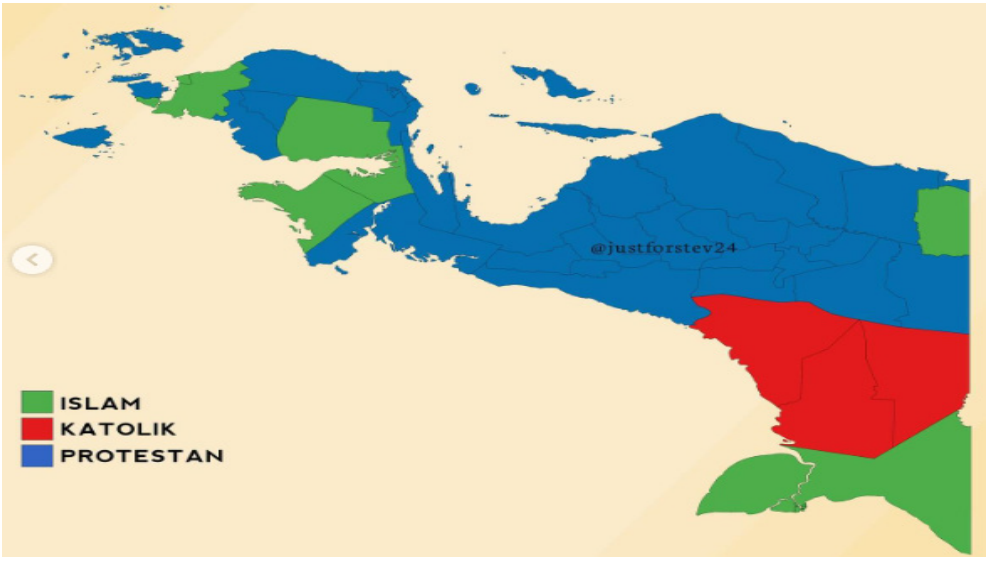
not simply coming from the outside.

Keywords: Transformation of Islam; Guest Religion; Host Religion; Papua

INTRODUCTION

The development of Islam in West Papua is a unique phenomenon of da'wah (propagation) amid the strong influence of Christianity, which has shaped the identity of the indigenous people of Papua. Generally, outsiders perceive West Papua as a predominantly Christian region in Indonesia. Meanwhile, Islam is a minority religion in Papua and is sometimes stigmatized as the religion of immigrants from outside West Papua (Pamungkas, 2015; Yamin et al., 2019). However, historical records about religions in West Papua indicate that Islam was actually the earliest Abrahamic religion to enter the region, especially in the West Coast area of Papua (Wanggai, 2008). Areas such as Fakfak, Kaimana, Bintuni, Sorong, Raja Ampat, and Merauke have a strong Islamic presence. In fact, in regions like Fakfak and Merauke, Islam is the majority religion among the local community.

Map 1.
Distribution of Religion in Papua



Source; Steven The Happer, 2023

There are several records about the period Islam entered West Papua, which is estimated to be around the 14th and 15th centuries (Burger, 1960; Suwiryadi,

2000; Wanggai, 2011; Onin, 2006). This estimate is based on various sources, including oral history, records of the Sultanates in North Maluku, and reports from European explorers. The presence of Islam is evidenced by Islamic communities, mosques, and various artifacts on the West Coast of Papua (Crawfurd, 1956). At that time, Islamic da'wah arrived through trade, marriage, and the expansion of power from the Islamic Sultanates in North Maluku, namely Ternate, Tidore, Bacan, and Jailolo, which are known to have extended their influence to West Papua. Muslim preachers from various countries, supported by the Sultans of North Maluku, played a significant role in introducing Islam to West Papua during that period.

However, in subsequent developments, especially after the 15th century, Islamic da'wah in Papua began to fade. One significant cause appears to be the increasingly strong Dutch colonial expansion in Papua. In addition, the persistent efforts of Christian and Catholic missions penetrating the interior of Papua contributed to Christianity becoming the majority religion. Islam then became a minority religion and, in a certain context, was sometimes perceived as a migrant force attempting to control Christian Papua (Yamin, 2019; Pamungkas, 2015). Local political dynamics further worsened the contestation of religious identities, resulting in resistance at the local level. This included the rejection of Muslim transmigrants from Java who flooded Papua during the New Order regime. Simona Sinkiewicz (2020) described transmigration as an instrument of the systematic Indonesianization and Islamization of Papua, which had been ongoing for decades and fueled the increase in the Muslim population in Papua. This gave rise to resistance and further reinforced the stigmatization of Islam as an outsider seeking to dominate Papua. This resistance is documented in various research studies and scholarly works published in recent years, which generally highlight the opposition to Islamic da'wah (Pamungkas, 2015; Alhamid, 2014; Ernas, 2014; Yamin, 2019).

This situation has prompted Islamic leaders in Papua to modify their da'wah methods. The goal is for Islam, which has been present in Papua since the beginning, to become a religion embraced by the indigenous people and a compelling force for da'wah. Initially, Islam was spread through doctrines, and in part through the influence of the Islamic Sultanates in North Maluku. Now, however, Islamic da'wah is adopting a more cultural, engaging, and transformative approach by integrating into educational services. At present, there is an increase in the Muslim population among the indigenous Papuan people. More importantly, there is a growing awareness to emphasize Islamic identity as part of Papua's heritage (Ernas, 2019). This shift emphasizes that

Papua is not solely Christian but also has a Muslim community that continues to grow in several regions.

Studies on Islam in Papua are a relatively new but increasingly significant area of research, several categories emerge prominently. Firstly, there are studies focusing on the historical trajectory of Islam in the region (Putuhena, 2000; Onim, 2006; Wanggai, 2008). The researchers research delves into the arrival of Islam and the multifaceted dynamics surrounding its establishment. Although these works may present varying perspectives on the exact timing of Islam's introduction to Papua, they collectively acknowledge Islam as the earliest Abrahamic religion to enter the region, facilitated by a number of preachers employing strategies such as trade and intermarriage. The second category comprises studies that delve into contemporary Islamic da'wah efforts, including the da'wah models implemented by various Islamic religious organizations in Papua such. For instance, Ramdani (2022) discusses the da'wah model devised, while Muslim's article (2004) explores the contributions of indigenous Papuan figures to Islamic da'wah from the 1930s onwards. The third category comprises studies examining the intricate relationship between religions in Papua, particularly the interplay between Islam and Christianity within the context of local political dynamics (Cahyo, 2008; Al-hamid, 2014, Ernas, 2014). This research highlights how cultural identities, including ethnicity and religion, serve not only as objective markers but also as symbols of power, constructed, contested, and exploited for political goals.

However, despite the extent of research on Islam in Papua, two critical areas remain relatively underexplored. First, existing studies have not adequately addressed why the initial Islamic da'wah in Papua, as the first Abrahamic religion to enter the region, waned while Christianity, introduced later, emerged as the dominant religion. Second, prevailing studies often portray Islam as an external force competing for dominance in a confrontational manner, while Christianity is perceived as the indigenous or host religion. Consequently, Papuan Muslims are often viewed with suspicion, being deemed "less Papuan" due to their affiliation with a perceived foreign religion. Investigating these issues is important for comprehensively understanding the dynamics at play and how Papuan Muslims navigate their identity in response.

This article aims to address several crucial questions, such as why Islamic da'wah weakened and what strategic factors contributed to this phenomenon, so that Islam is then stigmatized as a guest religion in Papua. In addition, it explores the current methods and strategies developed by Islamic organizations and Muslims in Papua to restore the prominence of Islamic da'wah in Indonesia's easternmost region. The examination of these issues offers a compelling study

on the development of Islamic da'wah in Indonesia and provides insights into new methods of Islamic da'wah in the archipelago amid ever-changing socio-political dynamics.

Methodologically, this study adopted a social history approach (Nata, 1999) complemented by examining Islamic da'wah as a means of investigating the spread of Islam. This approach is crucial for understanding the social context of the history of da'wah and religious dissemination, which unfolds dynamically within Indonesia's plural society. Data for this paper were gathered through a combination of documentation study and library research. The author reviewed numerous existing studies and analyzed various news articles published in electronic media outlets. For this study, the author reviewed over 30 academic works on Islam in Papua and examined more than 50 online news stories and websites related to Papua. The collected data were then categorized and analyzed using an interactive descriptive method (Abdullah, 2008). This method involves careful examination and comparison of all available data to ensure the formulation of accurate information, ultimately facilitating a comprehensive understanding of the topic. Finally, the study culminates in the development of a conceptual conclusion aimed at addressing the significant questions in the research. The objective is to formulate a conceptual framework concerning the history of Islamic da'wah in Papua.

HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT OF ISLAM IN WEST PAPUA

Papua stands out on the Indonesian map not only due to its location at the far eastern tip of the Archipelago but also because of its unique and diverse population. Alfred Russel Wallace, in Materay (2011), described the Papuan people as *having dark, brownish, or black skin color, distinct from the Negroid race but also differing significantly from Malay populations, with rough and dry hair*. Originally comprising two provinces, Papua and West Papua, the region has expanded since 2023 to include four additional provinces, currently with a total of six provinces.

Despite being perceived as homogenous by outsiders, Papua is incredibly diverse in terms of ethnicity, religion, and language. Alongside local religions and beliefs practiced by various tribes, Islam is believed to be the first Abrahamic religion to have reached Papua, around the 14th and 15th centuries. There are multiple scenarios or versions regarding the arrival of Islam in West Papua. Papuan Islamic historian Toni Wanggai (2008) explained five versions of the beginning of Islam's arrival: the Papuan, Acehnese, Arabic, Javanese, and versions associated with Bandan, Bacan, Tidore, and Ternate.

In the book "Study of the History of the Introduction of Islam in Fakfak," published by the Fakfak Regency Government in 1996, it is stated that Islam was present in Papua around 1360 AD, marked by the presence of Abdul Ghafar from the Sultanate of Aceh in the Fatagar Kingdom. Ghafar preached for 14 years (1360-1374 AD) in Rumbati and its surroundings before his death in 1374 AD. Subsequently, around the 14th century, another preacher and Sufi named Syarif Muaz al-Qathan, known as the "Sheikh of the Blue Robe," arrived from the Arab peninsula. This aligns with the presence of the Tunasgain Mosque in Fakfak, estimated to be around 400 years old or built around 1587 (Putuhena et al., 2006). However, these oral sources require further verification to establish scientific evidence.

Other scholars, such as J.F. Onim (2006:85), propose that Islam arrived in Papua around the 17th century. Onim's conclusion is based on an analysis of Miguel Roxo Debrito's report (1581-1582), which indicated that during his visit to the Raja Ampat Islands, King Waegeo had not yet converted to Islam. Thus, the presence of Islam in Papua is estimated to have emerged around the end of the 16th or early 17th century. The spread of Islam in Papua followed the archipelagic route, starting from Aceh at the tip of Sumatra, through Java and Maluku, before reaching Papua. Recent consensus among experts suggests that Islam's presence in Papua marked the very end of its spread, as subsequent efforts to propagate the religion were interrupted and ceased altogether.

Ethnographically, two areas in Papua maintain close ethnic and cultural ties with the Maluku region due to their strategic geographic locations: the Raja Ampat islands and the Onin Fakfak Peninsula. The Raja Ampat Islands are close to North Maluku, while the Fakfak region is not far from Seram and Southeast Maluku. These areas have historically been arenas for power struggles between the two dominant sultanates or kingdoms of North Maluku, namely the Sultanate of Ternate and the Sultanate of Tidore.

Papuan historiography indicates that the Sultanate of Tidore exerted greater influence along the coast of the Raja Ampat islands and the Onin Fakfak Peninsula. Onim (2006) highlights that with the influence of these two Islamic Sultanates in Raja Ampat, Sorong, and Fakfak, Islam likely entered Papua via the southern coast of the bird's head region. However, the spread of Islam in Papua did not occur through direct institutional efforts from the sultanates but rather through trade and migration between culturally interconnected regions. This may explain why Islam's development in Papua was not uniform and did not penetrate all regions equally.

Early Forms of Da'wah and the Spread of Islam in Papua

Historians have observed that the Islamization process in the West Papua peninsula unfolded peacefully. This process is similar to the established pattern of the arrival of Islam in the Indonesian Archipelago, characterized by trade, marriage, and the extension of influence from Islamic kingdoms (Ricklef, 1983). This pattern is evident in the history of the arrival of Islam in West Papua.

First, Islam spread through trading activities, which had been prevalent since the 14th century. Papua, known for its spice production, attracted traders seeking products such as nutmeg, cinnamon, agarwood, resin, and *masoi* bark. Cross-island traders, aiming for higher profits, deliberately ventured into Papua to acquire these sought-after spices. In the process, they fostered closer interactions with local communities, which were initially challenging to engage with (Ernas, 2014). During these interactions, Muslim traders introduced Islam by teaching locals prayers and various worship rituals in accordance with Islamic teachings.

An observer of Islamic history in Papua, Kasibi Suwiryadi, as quoted by J.F. Onim (1997), recounts the process of Islamization in Fakfak:

> Islam was introduced through the efforts of traders who also assumed the role of preachers. Among them was Abdul Gafar, a preacher from Aceh, who arrived in Fatagar Lama. Gafar, in pursuit of spices, traveled to Ternate, Bacan (North Maluku), and eventually Misol Island. The local community took notice of Gafar and his companions' practices, particularly their prayers—especially Zhuhur and Asr—conducted in open spaces. Residents were intrigued to witness them murmuring with their mouths and facing the wall. One resident remarked, *"Iangge Wagamaning wainbi, ma peti mijaai som yamarri marao rara toto weria faur wai"*, which roughly translates to "These people apparently worship the devil, standing facing the wall and talking to themselves."

In fact, traders employed strategies to capture the attention and curiosity of the local people about Islam, gradually introducing them to this new religion. The success of these traders in converting Papuan people also had economic implications, as it fostered trust in trade relations strengthened by religious bonds. Many of these traders settled in the region and formed marital unions with local women.

Second, Islam spread through intermarriage with Papuan women. Muslim traders and migrants who resided in Papua for extended periods often married local women. These marriages served as a means to integrate into society and

introduced Islam to the families of their Papuan spouses. This method of Islamization through marriage was typically employed by traders who stayed in West Papua for prolonged durations, aligning their departure with seasonal changes to shipping routes back to the west. Some traders chose to remain in Papua, becoming influential figures within the community.

Several legendary marriage stories have left a significant change on the map of Islamic da'wah in Papua. For instance, the marriage between Boki Tayyibah, daughter of Sultan Ibnu Mansur from the Bacan Sultanate, and Kapitan Gura Besi on Misol Island, West Papua. This marriage resulted in the emergence of four Muslim kingdoms in the Raja Ampat Islands—the Salawati Kingdom, the Misool/Sailof Kingdom, the Batanta Kingdom, and the Waegeo Kingdom (Wanggai, 2006). Similarly, the marriage between Siti Hawa Faruk, a female preacher from Java (Cirebon), and a Waegeo figure named Kalawen around the 16th century, transformed Kalawen into a prominent Papuan Islamic figure.

During the 17th to 18th centuries, strong cultural ties between Muslims from East Seram and West Papua flourished through marriage and kinship connections. Despite Dutch-managed trading activities concentrated in the Company's markets in Ternate, Ambon, and Banda, Eastern Seram traders continued to play a crucial role in linking Maluku with the Sosolot trading network in the Raja Ampat Islands, Onin, Fakfak, Kowiai, and Kaimana (Budiman, 2019). The presence of cultural remnants between East Seram and West Papua is evident in linguistic similarities, shared family names, and the naming conventions of numerous villages. Cultural acculturation is further illustrated through culinary traditions and historical artifacts obtained from past trade in the Papua region.

Third, Islam spread through the influence of the four major Islamic sultanates in North Maluku: the Sultanate of Ternate, the Sultanate of Tidore, the Sultanate of Bacan, and the Sultanate of Jailolo. The impact of these Islamic sultanates is obvious in the government structures along the coast of West Papua, which adopted the royal system introduced by the rulers of Ternate and Tidore. This differs from the tribal power systems prevalent among Papuan rulers in the interior or mountainous regions (Mansoebon, 1994).

Local kings governing in Papua's kingdoms, such as Waigeo, Batanta, Salawati, and Misol in the Raja Ampat Islands, or the Kingdoms in the Fakfak and Kaimana areas, fell under the influence of the Sultanate of Ternate and Tidore. These rulers were known to periodically pay tribute (taxes) to the Sultan in exchange for protection. Moreover, rulers in North Maluku dispatched preachers to conduct Islamic da'wah in West Papua, spreading Islam and

teaching Malay to the local people. Malay subsequently became the Lingua Franca used for trade and the propagation of Islam throughout the Indonesian Archipelago.

Intensive power dynamics along the west coastal region of Papua have caused rapid growth and development of Islam. Many communities embraced Islam after witnessing their leaders' conversion from traditional beliefs. This Islamic expansion prompted the construction of mosques as places of worship, including the Great Mosque, built in 1870 and still standing today in Pattimburaq Village of Kokas District in Fakfak Regency.

According to Wanggai (2011), the various methods of spreading Islam mentioned earlier—through trade, marriage, and the influence of rulers from North Maluku—occurred within peaceful relations. Muslim traders fostered positive relationships with the local populace, facilitating their access to preach among them. As the traders integrated into the community, they gained social status and respect, leading many to skip returning to their home countries. Consequently, several Islamic villages emerged, such as Arab Village, Bugis Village, and Buton Village in the West Papua region.

Until the 19th century, the history of such Islamic preaching mostly explored areas on the coast of West Papua as ports and centers of trade and local power. That is why, the Muslim population is greater in coastal areas, or are often referred to by local residents as "coastal people." Meanwhile, the interior of Papua remains a mystery that has hardly been touched by preaching for several centuries. Islam began to grow in the interior of Papua, at the same time as Indonesian Independence, which was also encouraged by the transmigration policy of the New Order government.

The End of Islamic Da'wah, Christian Domination and the Stigma of Islam as a Guest Religion

The remarkable development of Islam during the 15th to 17th centuries did not sustain its momentum. Instead, the da'wah of Islam slowed down and eventually halted along the coasts and small islands west of Papua. Since the 19th century, the expansive spread of Christianity and Catholicism replaced Islam. Missionaries from these Abrahamic religions penetrated the interiors and jungles of Papua, winning over the hearts of the Papuan people. Christianity emerged as the predominant religion embraced by Papuans, relegating Islam to a minority status perceived as an external entity. In local discourse, Islam is sometimes labeled a "guest religion,"[1] not indigenous to the Papuans (Kamma,

[1] The stigma surrounding Islam as a "guest religion" is a frequent topic of discussion among Papuans. This perception stems from Islam's minority status and its association with

1972; M. Ali, 2004; Wanggai, 2008;

Therefore, it is crucial to inquire why Islamic propagation in Papua ceased or failed to progress after the advent of Christianity, resulting in its diminished influence. Several explanations can be offered for this phenomenon, with two primary factors standing out: the consolidation of Dutch authority over Papua and the growing dominance of Christianity, shaping Papua into a predominantly Christian region in Indonesia (Ernas, 2015; Ismail, 2019).

Wanggai (2008) reveals in his works that Dutch colonialists, initially lacking a clear vision for West Papua, grew concerned about British presence in the region. Consequently, in 1828, the Dutch built a fort called "Fort Du Bus" near Triton Bay. This fort not only affirmed Dutch sovereignty over Papua but also symbolized their takeover of control from the sultanates of Ternate and Tidore. Muslim communities residing around the fort faced pressure and intimidation from the Dutch. With the Dutch monopolizing the spice trade, they imposed special permits for traders seeking entry into West Papua, gradually diminishing the influx of Muslim traders into the region.

Historian Muridan Widjoyo (2009) in his book "The Revolt of Prince Nuku, Cross-Cultural Alliance in Maluku 1780-1810," reveals the dramatic shift in power dynamics. The Dutch intervention in the authority of the sultans in North Maluku, replacing them with individuals they could manage or cooperate with, reduced the sultanate's influence over the islands of Maluku and West Papua. Moreover, the Dutch restricted trader access to Papua by issuing special permits (passes).

The consolidation of Dutch rule over Papua facilitated the spread of Christianity, highlighted by the arrival of two German missionaries named Carl Willhelm Ottow and Johan Gottlob Geissler on a small island called Mansinam, West Papua, in 1855. Since their arrival, Christian missions have flourished extensively in the interior of Papua. The missionaries diligently studied the socio-cultural structure of Papuan communities and implemented culturally sensitive methods to attract them to the Christian faith. Ottow and Geissler even compiled a Numfor Language Dictionary to aid in mission efforts aimed at winning the hearts of Papuan people (Abineno, 1986).

The absence of a Christian prohibition on the Papuan habit of consuming pork, a traditional pet among the people in the rural area of Papua, also facilitates Papuan acceptance of Christianity. This contrasts with Islamic preachers, who forbid Papuans who have converted to Islam from consuming

immigrants. Christianity, on the other hand, is the dominant religion among native Papuans. See Republika "In Papua Islam is Not a Guest Religion," in https://khazanah.republika.co.id/berita/mc0zn3/di-papua-islam-bukan-agama-tamu-1

pork, in accordance with Islamic teachings. This is not a problem for coastal communities, as other types of animals, such as fish, are readily available. However, for Papuan mountain communities, the prohibition on eating pork is seen as a serious conflict with local traditions and culture.

The missionaries' courage and perseverance to penetrate the isolated interiors and jungles of Papua constitute a remarkable religious phenomenon. Their boldness, coupled with diverse cultural approaches and intensive community empowerment initiatives, deeply resonated with Papuans, prompting many to embrace Christianity. Conversely, systematic efforts by Islamic preachers during the early stages of Islam's arrival in Papua were largely unsuccessful.

In subsequent developments, the Dutch government demarcated areas for the propagation of Christianity and Catholicism in Papua. The Protestant Zending took charge of northern regions such as Manokwari and Jayapura, while Catholic missions oversaw the southern region, stretching from Babo, Fakfak, to Merauke. The Christian and Catholic churches not only spread religious teachings but also established educational institutions or schools for Papuan people during the 19th to 20th centuries. The growing empowerment movement through Christian and Catholic education fostered a generation of educated Christians from indigenous Papuan backgrounds. Many of these individuals ascended to leadership roles within the church and contributed to the development of Christian missions across Papua, thus shaping Papua's educational identity rooted in its rich local culture.

The predominance of Christianity, as the majority religion in Papua, fosters the affirmation of identity through various socio-political channels. For instance, there is a push to enact regional regulations grounded in Christian religious teachings, commonly referred to as Biblical Regulations (Arowidodo, 2019), as evidenced in Manokwari. Simultaneously, there are local ordinances concerning places of worship, stipulating that mosque buildings and minarets should not exceed the height of the Ridwan Church Tower (2022). Such phenomena are frequently cited as examples of how Islam is not regarded as the indigenous religion of the Papuan people. Consequently, these issues often spark tensions and conflicts between the Islamic and Christian communities in Papua.

Education as Basis for Contemporary Islamic Da'wah in Papua

During the New Order regime in Indonesia, the government enforced strict political and security measures in West Papua. A security-centric approach aimed at maintaining social order was adopted to quell the separatist

movement led by the Free Papua Organization (*Organisasi Papua Merdeka* [OPM]). In addition, the government initiated development projects in Papua and introduced a transmigration program from Java to Papua. However, in these processes, the government, particularly through the Ministry of Religious Affairs, did not allocate sufficient space for Islamic da'wah, fearing it could destabilize security and social order.

Subsequently, there emerged a new phase for Islamic da'wah characterized by two significant developments: the establishment of Islamic educational institutions fostering formal religious education, and the increasing influence of Islamic religious organizations such as Nahdhatul Ulama, Muhammadiyah, and new entities like *Al-Fatih Kaffah Nusantara* (AFKN) founded by charismatic Papuan cleric, Ustadz Fadlan Garamatan.

The establishment of educational institutions marks a significant transformation in Islamic da'wah in Papua, which had long been overshadowed by Christian missions in the region. The earliest historical record of an Islamic educational institution in Papua dates back to a religious education center established by Habib Muhammad Ashgar, a cleric from Baghdad, in Jayapura in 1867, during the mid-nineteenth century. Unfortunately, this small Madrasah did not persist after Ashgar's passing in 1908 (Murtadho, 2015). The next trace of a Madrasah emerged in 1929 in Mopah, Merauke, founded by an Acehnese cleric named Teuku Bujang Salim, who, along with several Indonesian freedom fighters, was exiled by the Dutch to Boven Digul, Papua, for opposing Dutch oppression.

The Papua Islamic Education Foundation (YAPIS), established in 1968 by Anwar Ilmar, a Muslim official from West Sumatra, stands as the most influential Islamic educational institution in Papua. YAPIS's establishment stemmed from concerns over the sluggish development of Islamic education in Papua, lagging far behind Christian education. Recognizing that strong Islamic education forms a solid foundation for Islamic da'wah, YAPIS was established to address this gap and unify the efforts of various Islamic religious organizations in Papua, which were often divided along sectarian lines (YAPIS, 1999).

The presence of YAPIS has garnered not only positive responses from Muslims but also from parents of non-Muslim students. Many non-Muslim parents choose to enroll their children in YAPIS due to its reputation for instilling high levels of discipline and prohibiting behaviors such as alcohol consumption—a prevalent cultural practice among some Papuan communities that remains challenging to eradicate. Today, YAPIS holds a position in the eyes of the Papuan people similar to that of Christian educational institutions that emerged earlier. Recent data indicates that YAPIS has 24 branches across

Papua, managing educational institutions ranging from elementary schools to universities, comprising 179 school units and 80 partner schools under its administration. (https://yapispapua.org/data/).

Since 1970, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), through its Ma'arif educational institution, has been instrumental in establishing dozens of madrasas ranging from Ibtidaiyah [elementary] to Aliyah [high school] levels. The largest concentration of these madrasas remains in the Sorong and Fakfak areas. Similarly, around 1984, the leadership of Muhammadiyah initiated the establishment of several Muhammadiyah schools in Papua, culminating in the transformation of a high school in Sorong, West Papua, into Muhammadiyah University. Responding to the advocacy of Papuan Islamic figures, the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia approved the construction of a State College of Islamic Studies, known as STAIN Jayapura in 2004, followed by STAIN Sorong in 2006.

Concurrently, another Islamic organization, Hidayatullah, has begun asserting its presence in Papua by establishing campuses in nearly every district in Papua Province. Currently, Hidayatullah operates in Sorong, Manokwari, Biak, Fak-Fak, Serui, Nabire, Jayapura, Wamena, Merauke, Kaimana, Timika, as well as in Teluk Bintuni, Raja Ampat, and pioneering efforts in Asmat, Enarotali, and Sarmi (http://www.hidayatullah-papuabarat.com/p/sejarah-singkat.html. akses 17/9/ 2014). This strategic focus on education as a cornerstone for da'wah in Papua has proven instrumental in advancing the development of Islam in the region.

DAKWAH TRANSFORMATIONS AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR ISLAM

The continuous growth of Islamic education in Papua has contributed to the development of a more skilled human resource base in the region. Many Papuan children now have access to Islamic education, with some even traveling to Java to receive religious instruction at various Islamic institutions. Upon their return, these individuals often become influential figures within the local Islamic community.

Moreover, government initiatives such as transmigration programs, which have brought many Javanese residents to Papua, have significantly increased the Muslim population. The opening of shipping routes from Java to Papua has further facilitated population movement, leading to greater exposure of Papuans to new developments in various sectors, including economics, agriculture, and socio-cultural aspects. Consequently, new economic hubs are emerging, driven by the growing Muslim community at the forefront of these

developments.

The growth of Islamic education also has broader implications for the Islamic da'wah in Papua. Not only has it led to an increase in the Muslim population, but it has also enhanced the quality of religious life in the region. The number of mosques and prayer rooms has increased, with statistics indicating a significant rise from around 300 to 2100 establishments in Papua-West Papua over the past two decades (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2022). In addition, the growing presence of Papuan Muslims has strengthened their political influence, allowing them to actively engage in various political processes and assert their identity as a transformative force in the region, challenging previous stigmas of Islam as a hegemonic force.

Another intriguing aspect of the development of Islamic da'wah in Papua is the emergence of local figures as advocates for Islamic outreach. Several names gained prominence in the 1980s and 1990s and have since become increasingly recognized by the public. For instance, HM. Aipon Asso, a prominent tribal chief in the Wamena Mountains, underwent conversion to Islam along with his entire community or tribal members. Asso has played a pivotal role in fostering the growth of the Muslim community in the Wamena mountains, a role that continues to garner attention today (Muslim, 2014). Similarly, Papuan Muslim figures like Haji Sofyan Wanggai have been instrumental in the development of the Islamic organization Nahdlatul Ulama in Papua. Additionally, H. Ismail Bauw, also known as Raja Rumbati, has significantly contributed to Islamic preaching in the Fakfak area and its environs.

Among these figures, Ustad Fadlan Garamatan stands out as a prominent contemporary Islamic preacher. His efforts to spread Islam, particularly in remote areas of Papua, have been remarkable. Ustad Fadlan's emphasis on promoting clean and healthy living habits as part of his preaching method has resonated with many Papuans, contributing to the conversion of several tribes to Islam. His organization, *Al-Fatih Kaffah Nusantara* (AFKN), is actively involved in da'wah activities, education, and community empowerment, further solidifying his influence and reputation as a native Papuan religious leader.

Despite the development in Islamic da'wah outlined above, it has not managed to challenge the hegemony of Christianity, which has entrenched itself in various regions over time. Papua continues to be perceived as Christian territory, relegating Muslim Papuans to the status of allies of other Muslim immigrants. This situation is compounded by escalating social conflicts between the Papuan people and the Central Government in Jakarta, which is perceived to discriminate against Papuans. Protests and demonstrations

against the government frequently drag Muslim communities in a climate of conflict and unrest.

While the Muslim population in Papua and West Papua is gradually reaching an equal number with Christians, Muslims are often perceived as immigrants who have contributed to Indonesia's dominance over Papua. Consequently, Islam is viewed as the religion of immigrants rather than a native Papuan religion. Nevertheless, in places like Fakfak, Kaimana, and Merauke, Islam either equals or exceeds Christianity in terms of followers. This growing religious diversity underscores the significance of religious outreach efforts, particularly as an increasing number of native Papuans embrace Islam.

Table. 1
Population Based on Religion
In Papua and West Papua Provinces

Region	Islam	Christi-anity	Cathol-icism	Hindu	Bud-dhism	Others
Papua Province	320.442	689.401	60.374	1484	1602	51
West Papua Province	213.230	298.229	47.009	585	281	27
Total						

Source: Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs, 2023

ASSERTING MUSLIM IDENTITY: EMBRACING THE ROLE OF HOST RELIGION

Despite Christianity and Catholicism maintaining their dominant positions as the majority religions in Papua, the displayed data illustrates a gradual growth of Muslims, both in terms of population and through various missionary movements. This trend is beginning to create opportunities to enhance the position of Islam, moving away from being perceived solely as an outsider religion to being accepted as a 'host' religion. A 'host' religion is one that is recognized as an integral part of Papuan culture and society, free from discrimination due to its minority status. This ongoing struggle for acceptance can be observed during significant moments for Muslims in Papua, particularly following the region's attainment of special autonomy status from the Indonesian government.

A thesis by Cahyo Pamungkas (2008) on *Islamic Papua and Special Autonomy* serves as an illustration of how minority Muslim Papuans navigate their religious identity within the predominantly Christian society of Papua. Pamungkas showcases their efforts to negotiate their identity by adopting a

flexible approach, blending elements of Islam with their Papuan identity. This involves contesting their cultural identity amidst the dynamic of immigrant Muslims and Papuan Christians in the realm of identity politics. Such dynamics became more pronounced during the 1998 reform era in Indonesia, prompting demands for special autonomy among Papuans who perceived unfair treatment.

After extensive study and debate, the Government enacted Law no. 21 of 2001 concerning Special Autonomy for Papua. However, the implementation of Special Autonomy has brought forth several significant implications for socio-political developments in Papua. These implications are not only observed in major cities such as Jayapura and Manokwari but also in regions like Fakfak, Kaimana, Raja Ampat, Sorong, and Merauke, which host considerable Muslim populations. One notable impact is the prevalence of identity politics, which manifests as symptoms of ethnocentrism. According to Levaan (2012), Special Autonomy has been interpreted as the freedom to determine one's destiny based on ethnic sentiments. This interpretation has led the entire political elite in Papua to advocate for the requirement that the Governor, Deputy Governor, Regent, and Deputy Regent in Papua must be native Papuans.

As a consequence of the Special Autonomy provisions favoring the Melanesian race in Papua, many Papuan Muslim communities face challenges regarding their Papuan identity. They are deemed insufficiently aligned with Papuan identity due to various differences in biological and cultural characteristics, including religion. Consequently, their political rights as Papuans are called into question. Papuan Muslims frequently encounter stigmatization through narratives that portray them as less authentically Papuan, aligned with the Indonesian military, or supportive of the Indonesian state. Consequently, they are subjected to numerous attacks and legal challenges.

Furthermore, Special Autonomy is often construed as a right exclusively for Papuans, thereby excluding Papuan Muslims at times. Another emerging issue in the current context of local bureaucratic segregation in Papua is the politicization of Papuan identity, which has led to the division of Papuans into distinct social strata. This informal categorization, often referred to as Papua B1, B2, B3, and B4, delineates the "status" of Papuan individuals based on their lineage. Papua B1 denotes those born in Papua to both Papuan parents, as indicated by specific surnames. Papua B2 refers to individuals born in Papua to Papuan fathers but with mothers from immigrant ethnic groups. Papua B3 comprises those born in Papua to Papuan mothers and immigrant fathers. Meanwhile, Papua B4, the lowest tier, includes individuals born and raised in Papua in recent years but with both parents originating from immigrant

ethnicities. This segregation has become particularly noticeable during civil service recruitment and the promotion of regional officials. Such conditions pose a significant challenge for the multicultural community in Papua, particularly the Muslim minority.

This situation prompted Papuan Muslims to take action, leading to the establishment of a unifying platform known as the Papuan Muslim Council (*Majelis Muslim Papua* [MRP]). This organization, as described by Cahyo Pamungkas (2008), evolved from the Papuan Muslim Solidarity (*Solidaritas Muslim Papua* [SMP]) group, which was founded by 47 Muslim leaders from diverse tribes in Papua on November 21, 1999. It appears that SMP emerged in response to the shifting political landscape in Papua following the implementation of special autonomy, which further entrenched the Christian identity of the region. Muslims representing various tribes in Papua sought to assert their presence and identity through SMP.

On April 10-13, 2007, the Papuan Muslim Solidarity (SMP) was established at the Papua Hajj Dormitory, later renamed the Papuan Muslim Council (MMP). The administrators of MMP focused on forging alliances and uniting key Islamic organizations in Papua, such as Nahdhatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah, as well as the Islamic Student Association (HMI) Jayapura Branch and the Jayawidjaya Muslim Community Forum (FKMJ). Simultaneously, they aimed to strengthen the position of indigenous Papuan Muslims who felt marginalized during the post-reform political instability in Papua. MMP fostered communication and collaboration with the Papuan People's Council (MRP), established in accordance with the Special Autonomy law.

MMP is comprised of indigenous Papuan Muslim figures like Arobi A. Aituarow, who serves as its chairman. Figures such as Arobi act as cultural intermediaries with the diverse tribal groups in Papua (Pamungkas, 2008). In addition, MMP establishes networks with church communities in Papua and frequently advocates against human rights violations faced by indigenous Papuans. Criticisms leveled by MMP against the government, particularly towards the Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI) and Indonesian National Police (POLRI) officials, are sometimes viewed as aligning with the Pro-M faction led by Toha Alhamid. However, this alignment ultimately benefits and solidifies MMP's position as an organization representing Papuan Muslim identity amidst the ongoing political turmoil between the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia [NKRI] and Independence in Papua. The efforts of MMP to advocate for the identity of Papuan Muslims have garnered support from media activists. An editor of the Papua Women's Tabloid (TSPP),

as cited by Cahyo Pamungkas (2008), hailed the establishment of MMP as an example demonstrating that Papua is not solely dominated by Christians but also comprises Muslims. MMP endeavors to portray Islam and Papua as two integrated sub-cultures.

The presence of MMP emphasizes the strong effort to secure a bargaining position, particularly in defining Islam and Papua. It asserts that Muslims are not transient religious adherents who recently arrived in Papua and are relegated to second-class citizenship. Rather, religious communities have a longstanding legacy in Papua with distinctive religious identities that deserve respect. Despite many Muslims not being indigenous Papuans, this reality does not diminish the Muslim identity among Papuans, which continues to grow steadily.

Efforts to articulate Islam as part of Papuan identity, as demonstrated by the Papuan Muslim Council, can indeed be read as an affirmative strategy, presenting Islam as an integral element in Papua's socio-political landscape (Fachruddin, 2020; Pamungkas, 2015). However, an identity politics-based approach that overly emphasizes religious symbolism has the potential to create polarization, particularly in the Papuan context, where relations between Islam and Christianity have long formed a relatively coexistent social space (Widjojo, 2010). Although the Muslim population in Papua is growing, this has not necessarily shifted the social construct that still views Islam as a "newcomer religion," a stigma reinforced by a history of migration and transmigration since the New Order era (Tebay, 2009; Sienkiewicz, 2020).

In this context, Islamic da'wah that emphasizes a cultural, participatory approach and the empowerment of indigenous Papuans holds greater promise as an integrative strategy. As Abdullah (1999) emphasized, Islam has a long history of acculturation with local cultures—and it is precisely through this process that Islam gains social legitimacy. Therefore, redefining Islam's position in Papua should not be solely through representative politics, but through deep-rooted cultural initiatives that establish Islam as a social and cultural partner in building Papua in an inclusive and civilized manner. Thus, Islam in Papua is not simply a "guest religion" but an authentic part of contemporary Papuan cultural entities.

CONCLUSION

This research shows that although Islam was the first Abrahamic religion to enter Papua, its spread did not continue to be widespread and profound, especially in the west coast. As a result, Islam tends to be perceived as a religion

of immigrants, not part of indigenous Papuan identity. Colonial domination and the expansion of Christian missions have reinforced Islam's marginal position in the Papuan religious landscape.

However, recent developments in Islamic da'wah (Islamic outreach) have shown a more transformative direction. Through education-based and empowerment approaches by organizations such as Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), Muhammadiyah, Alhidayah, and the Papuan Muslim Council (MUI), Muslims have begun to play an active role in shaping an inclusive Papuan identity. This signifies an effort to reposition Islam no longer as a "guest religion" but as part of Papuan culture itself.

This interdisciplinary research opens up space for dialogue between the history, sociology, and anthropology of religion. However, limitations of this study lie in the limited ethnographic data from grassroots Muslim communities and the lack of exploration of local religious expressions. Furthermore, more in-depth research into the religious experiences of Papuan Muslims at the community level, as well as integrative studies of the relationship between Islam and local culture, is needed. An interdisciplinary approach combining contextual theology, identity studies, and the sociology and anthropology of religion would be highly relevant to understanding the dynamics of Islam in the ever-changing Papuan context.

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