

# Islamic Identity in Minangkabau: A Case Study of the Rejection of Minangkabau Bible Translation Application

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## ABSTRACT

This paper tries to see the repudiation of the ‘Minangkabau Bible Translation App’ in Google Play platform by Minangkabau society. By using the translation theory of Eugene Nida and Charles R. Taber that mentioned the religious affiliation in a language is one of the sociological levels of language. This affiliation is a homogenization effort and as a mark of pride in that society. Through this theory, the researchers looked at the reasons for this rejection. The results show that the rejection of the Minangkabau community for the Minangkabau Bible Translation App is based on the language and cultural background of the Minangkabau that is affiliated with Islam as their philosophy “Practice the Customary Philosophy of the Basandi Syarak-Syarak Basandi Kitabullah”. This makes the Minangkabau community's identity disturbed with the existence of this translation.

**Keywords:** *Bible Translation, Language and Religion, Minangkabau Language, Minangkabau Bible Translation Application*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Since June 3, 2020, the Minangkabau Bible scripture application has disappeared from the Google Play Store. This application was taken down by the Minister of Communication and Information following a letter from the Governor of West Sumatra, Irwan Prayitno Number 555/327/Diskominfo/2020 regarding the removal of this application from the Play Store dated May 28, 2020. In that letter, Irwan mentioned the anxiety of the Minangkabau community due to the emergence of this application so he asked to delete it from the Play Store [1].

This incident suddenly invited many comments from various parties. Many parties support this action because they uphold Islamic identity in the Minangkabau [2]. However, some people also regretted this exclusive nature which set a bad precedent for the life of the nation and state in Indonesia [3][4].

This research focuses on the reasons behind the rejection of the Minangkabau tribe for the emergence of this application through the linguistic side or from the side of the Minangkabau language. Minangkabau language (in short Minang) is one of the languages of

the Malay family which has a slight difference from Malay and Indonesian [5]. By using the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis about the relationship between language and culture, the researcher will look at the relationship between Minang language and Minang culture which is identical to Islam. Furthermore, with a sociological approach, the researcher will look at the construction of Islam in Minang culture and language.

## 2. METHOD

This research is qualitative research with a library research model. The primary and secondary data sources come from books, articles, and other literature that discuss the relationship between Minang culture and language with their Islamic identity. The data is in the form of the history of Islamization in Minangkabau culture and the strengthening of Islamic identity in Minangkabau society. After the data is collected, the researcher will analyze the reasons for the rejection of this application based on Minangkabau customs and culture that are understood by the community to then conclude the results of their findings.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### **3.1 Basandi Syarak Tradition, Syarak Basandi Kitabullah: An Acculturation between Islam and Custom**

The Minangkabau tradition existed before Islam came to this area in the XII - XIII AD centuries. At that time, this custom was influenced by Hindu and Buddhist culture spread across the Sumatra Island as the territory of the Sriwijaya Kingdom. However, Hindu and Buddhist culture is not a culture adhered to by all levels of Minangkabau society, but a culture that is limited to that of the aristocracy and royal families [6].

Hindu and Buddhist cultural heritage do not colour the Minangkabau and Malay customs as a whole. This cultural heritage is only physical and has little influence on the arts as for at the level of philosophy, thought and intelligence. This is different from the process of entering Islam in the Malay region, including the Minangkabau, which has participated in changing the structure of society, physically, and spiritually [6].

This significant change can be reflected in the later Malay identity. Malay identity cannot be separated from its Islamic identity. All aspects of Malay life have been coloured with Islamic values and teachings. These changes include aspects of divinity, individual life, social life, education, preaching, Sufism, and even art and literature [7][8]. This is reinforced by the development of Malay literature brought by scholars since the XVI century AD such as Abdullah Munshi, Hamzah Fansuri, Abdurra'uf Singkel, Kemas Fakhruddin, Amir Hamzah to Nuruddin ar-Raniri [6].

In subsequent developments, Malay customs experienced acculturation and assimilation with Islamic values and teachings [8]. One of the philosophies of life for the Malays is the *adaik basandi syarak, syarak basandi Kitabullah* (custom based on Islamic law, Islamic law based on al-Qur'an) [7][9]. This philosophy shows that Malay customs cannot be separated from Islam. In fact, in the Malay philosophy of life, there are 5 foundations of life, namely Islam, cultured, cultured, and knowledgeable [9]. Therefore, it is not surprising that the expression shows 'no culture' which has a synonym for Islam 'not having a Muslim religion' [9].

The same is true in Minangkabau Nature. Ethnically, Minangkabau has several differences with Malay, including in their language. The Minangkabau are an Old Malay (Proto Melayu) tribe who inhabit the area of West Sumatra, half of mainland Riau, northern Bengkulu, the western part of Jambi, west coast of West

Sumatra, southwest Aceh, and Negeri Sembilan in Malaysia [10][11]. Because of their habit of migration, they spread to Malaysia and gave rise to the Young Malay (Deutro Melayu) [12]. This can be understood from the two terms known by the Minangkabau, both are *darek* and *rantau* [10][12][13].

*Darek* in Alam Minangkabau (the Minangkabau World) covers an area called Luhak Nan Tigo. This region consists of 3 regions, those are Agam, Tanah Datar, and Luhak Lima Puluh Kota [14]. These three regions are led in small institutions called Nagari [15] which can often be referred to as "village republics" [13][14]. *Rantau* is the Minang ethnic diaspora found in other areas in Indonesia and Malaysia [12].

Entering Islam to Minangkabau was recorded for the first time through the coast, brought by Acehnese traders from the XVI century AD [12][16]. The first recorded center for the spread of Islam in history was Ulakan, a small town on the west coast of Sumatra, north of the city of Padang [14]. The well-known scholar in this distribution was Sheikh Burhanuddin who died in 1704 who had the title Tuanku Ulakan and studied Islam in Aceh [14][17]. This figure is considered to have a central role in the spread of Islam in the Minangkabau universe, especially in the pacific areas.

At a time that was not much different, there was also an interaction between Minangkabau and Malacca, where Islam had developed there since the XIV Century AD [17]. From this interaction, the name of a scholar from Siak, East Minangkabau known as Syekh Labai Panjang Janggut [17] became known. Until now, the Minangkabau tribe still uses the term *urang siak* 'Siak people' to refer to people who have knowledge of Islam [17][18].

Another source stated that Islamization in Minangkabau went through four stages. The first stage was the presence of Sufis and Muslim traders in the XII century AD. The second stage was when the Aceh Kingdom came to power to Minangkabau in the XII-XIII AD centuries. The third stage was the conversion of the religion of the Minangkabau King, Sultan Bakilap Alam who replaced King Ananggamawarman. This event occurred in the range of the XVI century AD and was a factor that accelerated the development of Islam in Minangkabau. The fourth stage is the emergence of the Islamic reform movement which started from the XVII century to the early XX century AD [17].

The entry of Islam to Minangkabau in the first three stages was the spread of Islam without using violence on a Sufi style [14][17]. This makes Islam penetrate into the joints of the life of the Minangkabau people,

adaik `customs`. Initially, the philosophy of life that was adopted *rumah basandi batu, adat basandi alua patuik* `home based on stone, custom based on the suitable procedure`. At a later stage, Islam had a significant influence in the new formulation of civilized life in Minangkabau. This influence can be seen from their philosophy of life *Adaik basandi syarak, syarak basandi adaik* `custom based on the (Islamic) law, (Islamic) law based on custom` [14].

The acculturation of Islam and custom can also be seen in the government system of Rajo Tigo Selo. Rajo Tigo Selo is three leading institutions consisting of Rajo Alam (the King of the World), Rajo Ibadat (the King of Religion), and Rajo Adat (the King of Adat) [14][16][17]. The last two kings have two different duties and authorities according to their respective competences. Rajo Ibadat is a leader who enforces Islamic teachings (*syarak*) and Rajo Adat is a leader who enforces matrilineal customary laws. This acculturation made Minangkabau an area based on the Islamic religion and a matrilineal kinship system [14][16].

The process of Islamization in Minangkabau resulted in the acculturation of Minang and Islamic customs. In the Indonesian context, the Minangkabau and Islam are two inseparable entities. The political, kinship and customary systems that existed before the arrival of Islam were not completely rejected [14]. The teaching of Sufi focuses more on building morality and cultivating Islamic values and accommodating local cultures that do not conflict with Islamic teachings [6][19]. This is one of the factors in the strong relationship between Minangkabau culture and Islam.

In the Indonesian context, Minangkabau identity cannot be separated from Islam [13][20][21]. In fact, it is not an exaggeration to say that "not Islam, not Minang". This means that even though a person's descent and ethnicity come from Minangkabau, when he leaves Islam and converts to another religion, then he is indirectly removed from the Minangkabau lineage and kinship [21][22][23].

This does not mean that the Minang population is not Christian. In a historical glance, several Minangkabau figures who were Christian, such as Pdt. I.F.M Salim, younger brother of Haji Agus Salim, Pdt. Willy Amrul, Buya Hamka's younger brother, Pdt. Akmal Sani, and Pdt. Yanwardi Koto [24][25]. After they converted to Christianity, they were rejected by custom and they were no longer recognized as Minangkabau people as written by Pdt. Willy Salim in his biography "Putra Minang Mencari Kebenaran"

[24][26]. This shows how strong the ties between Islam and Minang culture are.

Islam and Islamic law have had an important influence in various aspects of life [27]. This makes Minang people who obey customs and at the same time become obedient Muslims [23][27]. This compromise between custom and Islam gave birth to a new ideological foundation which reads *adaik basandi syarak, syarak basandi Kitabullah* `custom based on Islamic law, Islamic law based on al-Qur'an` which was strengthened by the formula *syarak mangato, adaik mamakai* `Islamic law provides, custom practice it` [13][16][23][28][29].

From the explanation above, it can be seen how the position of Islam in the traditions of the Minangkabau people and how they see the world through it [30][31]. In fact, their Islam far exceeds that of the Minangkabau [32]. Minangkabau is also well-known for its strong group sentiments and feelings of superiority from other ethnic groups [33] as reflected in the Regional Regulation of West Sumatra Province Number 11 of 2001 concerning the Prevention and Eradication of Immorality which is often referred to as the Sharia Regional Regulation.

### **3.2 Islamic Identity as Basic of Rejection in Minangkabau**

Based on the linguistics side, Minang language has a close relationship with Indonesian and Malay. However, according to Sudarno [5], linguists agree more that Minang is considered a dialect of Malay than is considered a language of a different family. Minangkabau language itself is divided into 4 dialects, those are Agama, Tanah Datar, Lima Puluh Kota, and the coast, or according to their respective Luhak [5].

The language contact that occurred between the Minangkabau and Muslim traders from Arabic led to the emergence of several loanwords from Arabic. At least 482 vocabularies [34] or 726 vocabularies [18] were found in the Minangkabau language borrowed from Arabic. Some of these vocabularies can be perfectly absorbed in the Minangkabau language at the phonological, morphological, and semantic levels, and others experience changes by adjusting Minang pronunciation, morphology and expansion, constriction, and even changes in meaning [34][35].

This large number of loanwords is a result of the spread of Islam in the region. The spread of Islam to various regions of the world indirectly spread the Arabic language. This can be understood because

Arabic is the language used in Muslim rituals and worship [18][36][37]. However, more than that, Arabic is the vehicle of civilization [38][39].

The influence in the language does not only stop at the level of Minangkabau language and culture but also at the ideology of the Minangkabau people. Arabic loanwords can be found in almost all areas of life, from socio-cultural, political, and religious. The Minangkabau people use the vocabulary to address of someone' rank such as *sutan*, *sidi*, *malim*, *pakih*, *shaykh*, *abak*, and *amak* for example, with almost the same meaning used in Arabic with the expressions *sulthan*, *sayyidi*, *mu'allim*, *faqih*, *shaykh*, *aba* ', *ummun* or *ummahat* [18].

Arabic is the ritual language of Muslims and being Muslim is one of the identities of the Minangkabau people. This makes borrowing Arabic or Arabic vocabulary in the Minangkabau language an attempt to confirm their Islamic and Minangkabau identity [13]. Indirectly, the Minangkabau language, which borrows a lot of Arabic vocabulary, has become a signifying language for Islamic and Minangkabau identity at the same time.

This makes the Minangkabau language have a sacred' position for the Minangkabau people as mentioned by Edwards [36]. Arabic and the vocabulary that is absorbed into the Minangkabau language is a medium for the dissemination of religion as well as a marker for Muslim-Minangkabau identity. Through this background, it is not surprising that there has been rejection of the application of the Bible in the Minangkabau language because it is considered to have polluted the Muslim-Minangkabau identity.

Although many parties regret that the attitude of the Minangkabau tribe is considered too excessive, it should also be understood that Minangkabau customs and language cannot be separated from Islamic identity. This is also an important note in the translation of the Bible into various languages. In Bible translation, it is necessary to pay attention to sociological factors in the target language which include age, gender, education level, occupation, social strata or class, and religion [40]. One of these factors is that language becomes the identity or marker of certain. Translation into the target language with a specific identity makes speakers of these languages feel that their identity is socially and psychologically disturbed and causes rejection [40]. The events that occurred in the Minangkabau community were also violations of the ethics of Bible translation which must pay attention to the audience from religious and political boundaries [41].

The Indonesian Bible Institute (LAI) states that the translation of the Bible into the Minangkabau language has been published since 1996 under the name "Today's Minang Version". They translate the Bible in order to make it easier for Christians to understand God's message in everyday language. However, this Bible distribution did not spread massively. The rejection of the Minangkabau community towards the application of the Bible translation of the Minangkabau that has recently emerged is more about strengthening the Muslim-Minangkabau identity. They also realize that the spread of this application cannot be controlled and can be easily accessed by the Minangkabau younger generation.

The strengthening of the Minangkabau identity did not happen without cause. The religious conversion of the Minangkabau people from Islam to Christianity, which is increasing every year, has made the Minangkabau people do identity thickening [20] and resulted in the rejection of this application. This is in order to ensure the sustainability of their group [20][42], the Muslims-Minangkabau. Research conducted by Kurnial Ilahi shows that in 2009-2010, at least 6,206 Muslims decreased. On the other hand, the followers of other religions increased, such as Catholics from 310 to 1,065 and Protestants from 975 to 2,376 persons [24][25]. This is reinforced by data from the Indonesian Church Fellowship (PGI), until 2012 it was stated that 30,000 Minangkabau people converted to Christianity and 30 of them had become pastors and were active in Christianization activities in the Minangkabau.

This phenomenon puts the identity of ethnic minorities under threat [43][20]. They consider that the arrival of missionaries to Alam Minangkabau poses a Christianization threat to the Minang people who are identical with an Islamic identity. It becomes worse with the increasing number of Christians in West Sumatra. The appearance of the Bible application in the Minang language is suspected of giving a 'new threat' to the Islamic identity of the Minang ethnicity. This is what prompted the chief of custom and the Governor of West Sumatra to issue a withdrawal request letter to the Minister of Communication and Information, Republic of Indonesia.

This is a form of defense for their inherent identity. As mentioned above, the compromise of traditional and Islamic identity in Minangkabau has gone through many phases. The history of his journey has also been marked by wars between the two sides. This history - what Eriksen called a cultural history in ethnic identity [44] - led to the thickening of the Muslim-Minang

identity as the victorious party in the contest of identity in Minangkabau.

This battle for identity can be bridged by communication between these cultures. Mutual understanding needs to be built from various parties as to the way in inter-cultural communication [45] Minangkabau parties need to know and understand the purpose of the translation. As mentioned by LAI and PGI, this translation aims to make it easier for Christians to understand God's messages in their mother tongue and not in the context of Christianization. As for the translation of the Bible, it is also necessary to review how the relationship between the culture of a region and existing religious identities. The development of this communication will increase understanding between the two parties while still allowing a unique culture and identity as a form of respecting cultural heritage and local wisdom.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Language is an inseparable thing from the culture of its people. Minangkabau language has a special relationship with Minangkabau culture, which is also inseparable from their religious identity. This thickening of identity is a natural thing even though it has entered the modern era. The strengthening of Islamic identity in Minangkabau can also be seen from their enthusiasm in carrying out customary rules which are indirectly also religious rules. The Minangkabau language which became the identity of the Muslim-Minangkabau made the Minangkabau community threatened by the emergence of the Minangkabau Bible application. Religious identity in a language should also be a consideration for Bible translation so as not to interfere with (or threaten) the existence of existing sociological identities.

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