

Ethnic Identity and Islamic Renewal: A Comparative Study of Kalimantan

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Abstract

This paper takes as its starting point the assumption that local socio-ethnic and discursive traditions have strongly influenced religious faith. Examining how ethnic identities have shaped the Islamic revival in three provinces of Kalimantan, this paper argues that increasingly overt expressions of religious devotion have been accompanied by growing regional variation. Accordingly, it finds that local factors have profoundly shaped the Islamic revival in Indonesia.

Islam came first to South Kalimantan, and now over 97 percent of the population is Muslim. Islam has become an integral part of the ethnic identity of the majority Banjar people, whose religious practice is strongly imbued with elements of Sufi mysticism. By contrast, West Kalimantan is very divided ethnically, and its population maintains quite distinct Malay, Dayak and Chinese socio-religious traditions. Islam here is a defining feature of the Malay community, which also maintains many mystical practices associated with the past. Finally, Central Kalimantan is dominated by Dayak ethnic groups that have belief systems with strong Christian, Hindu and local mystical elements. Yet, we find that the movement towards Islamic renewal (*pembaharuan*, *tadjud*) has made rapid progress in this province. Most Dayaks are now Muslim, and this paper reaches the somewhat counter-intuitive conclusion that it is precisely because religion is not such an important element in defining identity within the Dayak community that renewal has made such rapid progress.