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Religion and Occultism: Contestation of Islam And Local Culture in Malay Society

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Abstract

In Malay Archipelago, Malay is associated with Islam. Malay people who migrate to Malay Archipelago centuries ago have embraced Islam as their faith. Islam is spread across Malay Archipelago peacefully. Those who spread Islam in this region didn't destroy the principles of local communities. Some local traditions were even used to spread Islam. Therefore, Islam in the faith and practice of Malay people still contains local elements, including magic—known by Malay people as ilmu. Ilmu is closely related with belief, ideas, and lifestyles of the practitioners. As a tradition, Ilmu strengthens local beliefs and practices. The arrival of Islam has changed the dialectic ilmu of Malay people. In the dialectic process between local tradition and Islamic elements, there is contestation. This paper describes the relation of a form of contestation between local elements and Islam in the Ilmu of Malay people. The dynamics of the contestation are ongoing. The competition is sometimes won by local elements, so its strengthened. But, sometimes local elements are defeated and fully replaced by Islamic elements. However, some Islamic and local elements are found to exist side-by-side.

Keywords: 'Occult, Local element, Islam, Dialectic, Contestation.

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INTRODUCTION

In the past, occultism among Muslims in Malay Archipelago was quite popular, as reported in some works, including Maxwell (1883), Skeat (1967), and Hamilton (1926). It was because the tradition has already existed before the arrival of Islam. Moreover, the arrival of Islam, which is accepted by most population in the region, as found by many researchers, was peaceful (Azra, 1999: 76). As a result—at least in the beginning—Islam that tolerates cultures, including local beliefs and practices. Therefore, some experts dismissively call Islam in this region “peripheral Islam”, marginal Islam, Islam far from the “original” form that exists and grows in Middle East (Azra, 1999: 5). Islam is only

considered a layer of people's lives. This faith can't reach the heart of their lives (Landon, 1949: 134-164; van Leur, 1955: 169). However, some experts reject this view. To them, Islam in Malay Archipelago is authentic. Many of its followers perform worships strictly (Keddie 1987: 4). Islam doesn't have to be practiced in the same way as Islam in its center, especially when it comes to interpretative teachings.

A religion that arrives and is accepted by a community will definitely face conflict with local beliefs and practices. In the conflict, there is tug of war and mutual influence. From Islamic point of view, the conflict and then acceptance of something local is entirely in line with the Islamic principle of *al-mubafadzatu 'ala qadimi ash-shalih, wal akhdzu bi al-jadidi al-ashlah*, maintaining everything good from the past, while accepting better changes. It means not everything local must be rejected or accepted. Therefore, it can be said that beside acceptance, there is constant contestation between Islam and cultures, both inherited and new.

The contestation could be slow and peaceful or fast and aggressive. Peaceful contestation is usually slow and lasting because it's accommodating. Meanwhile, aggressive contestation is fast and tends to create reaction and historical wound. The first type of contestation happens with Islam and local cultures in Malay Archipelago. It's different from the emergence of Catholicism as the dominant religion in the Philippines and Latin America since the 15th century which was accompanied by military and cultural conquests (Azra 1999: 37).

Since the end of the 19th century to the beginning of the 20th century, occult practices of Muslims in Malay Archipelago have drawn the interest of colonial officials and Western scientists. Many papers on occult practices in the Muslim communities in Malay Archipelago have been published in journals and books. A phenomenal book on the occultism of Muslim communities of Malay Archipelago, especially in Peninsular Malaysia, by Skeat was first published in 1900. For 100 years since the publication of the book, many writings on occult in Malay have emerge as books, articles, and journals. Some of the writings are Maxwell (1883), Winstedt (1920, 1985), Hamilton (1926), Shaw (1972, 1975), Werner (1986) Endicott (1991), Laderman (1991), Hopes (1997), Daud (2001), and Hermansyah (2010).

Today, local occult practice is adjusted with Muslims or specifically Malay people. The adjustment could be viewed as ongoing contestation. This paper discusses forms of contestation between Islam and local beliefs in occultism. This paper is based on a study on texts and practices of Malay occultism, especially Malay people in Peninsular Malaysia and West Kalimantan. The main occultism text and practices analyzed in the present article are the works of Skeat (1967), Haron Daud (2001), and Hermansyah (2010).

DISCUSSION

Malay Occultism

Occultism or magic is a social phenomenon found in many cultures. O'Keefe (1982: 1) states that magic can be found in any period and community, both traditional and modern. Magic is needed by human when they think that the real world can be affected, changed, and manipulated by magical power produced by magical practice. According to Weber (1972: 82), magical belief still plays an effective role in farmers' life, although the pure Islamic belief may encourage rationalization of the relation between farmers and nature to whom they depend on. In reality, not only works related with nature or traditional situations, issues involving educated people sometimes use magic. For example, in politics, the candidates should compare programs and strategies to win election, but they practice magic instead (Humaeni, 2014). Daud (2001: 196) writes a research report and article in a newspaper in Malaysia reporting that politicians there actively go to witch doctors to get voters' support.¹ Similarly, in trade, some Malay people believe certain verses and spells can bring fortune.

In the everyday life of Malay people, occultism is known as "*ilmu*" Endicott (1991:13). *Ilmu* specifically refers to practices designed to affect the world through non-physical means and cover frameworks behind the practices (Endicott, 1991: 7). People who master occultism is known as "people with *ilmu*" among Malay people. The usage of the term *ilmu* to refer to similar abilities is also found among non-Malay people in the Malay

¹ An informal discussion between the author and a regent candidate in a regency in West Kalimantan shows similar phenomenon. The candidate said that during their campaign they experienced many occult attacks. Realizing this, they also used the same. When campaigning to a regency they considered risky, they brought some "people with *ilmu*" to accompany them. (personal communication with AI, May 2016).

Archipelago. Javanese people use the term “*ngelmu*” for similar ability. The prevalence of using the word *ilmu* in this context is comparable with the entry in the dictionary by Wilkinson (1959) to refer to similar meaning.

Because occultism is used in nearly all aspects of life of Malay people, there are many types of it. Hermansyah (2010) finds *ilmu* types by usage consisting of *ilmu* for protection, strength, obtaining something, treatment, harm, weakening enemy, courage, beauty, facilitating problems, and driving out evil spirit.

Ilmu practitioners among Malay people are categorized into: common practitioner and professional practitioner. Common practitioner is an ordinary person who has some *ilmu* usually to be used for their personal interests. Meanwhile, professional practitioner is someone who has a number of *ilmu* who is usually referred to for help, also known as witch doctor, diviner or *bomoh* (Skeat 1967: 56; Endicott 1991: 13). However, some people aren't professional practitioners but are sometimes referred to by people because they're considered to have *ilmu* such as ‘*orang gagah*’, traditional figure, and mosque imam (Hermansyah 2010: 6). Similarly, people of Banten generally consider *kejai*, witch doctor, and *jawara* to have *ilmu* (Humaeni 2015:218-219).

Hermansyah (2010) states that there are two ways to spread and pass down *ilmu*. *First*, giving directly to one's descendant (see also Taib 1989, 71-72). *Second*, through learning. Mat Piah (1989, 487) adds another method to get *ilmu* magically. It's believed that some people are magically approached by figures such as dead saints, syekh, or diviners to teach them *ilmu*.

Ilmu is used among Malay people throughout their lives, from their birth, childhood, adolescence, marriage, sickness, to death (Hermansyah 2010, Daud, 2001: 177; Mulkhan, 2000: 171). Despite the widespread use of *ilmu*, there are shifts among certain groups due to education which brings about rationality and improving religious understanding (Hermansyah 2010; Daud, 2001: 200-201). Many Malay people no longer believe in and practice *ilmu*.

The practice of *ilmu* among Malay people can be traced back to their history. Traces of beliefs before Islam can be found in the *ilmu* of Malay people, both in spells and other

forms. It's understandable as before they embrace Islam, Malay people practice Hindusim, Buddhism, and local beliefs.

There are at least four models of Malay people's acceptance of *ilmu*. First, totally accepting it by being practitioner or using the service of people who master it. The second group accepts *ilmu* as long as it contains Islamic elements, such as *basmalah* and *la ilaha illallah muhammadurrasulullah*. The third group accepts *ilmu* which contains Islamic elements and is practiced in line with Islamic teachings. The last group rejects *ilmu* because it's considered against Islamic teachings. To this group, *ilmu* must be left behind—although substantially certain belief and practice of *ilmu* doesn't contain any element which contradicts Islam—because it has no basis in Islam.

Forms of Relation

Consistent with its dynamic characteristic, the culture of a people always changes. Cultural changes become more complex when the culture of a people meet the culture of another people. Tradition as a part of culture also changes all the time; or at least adapts. The changes may start from tradition practitioner or a result of accepting external tradition. Usually, change from tradition follower is slower than the effect of external tradition.²

This section will describe relation models between local heritage and Islam in the texts of *ilmu* practiced by Malay people. There are at least three relation models in the *ilmu* texts of Malay people.

The First Model, maintaining the substance of local belief and practice in *ilmu* without any influence from Islam. Some *ilmu* they practice even contradicts Islamic teachings such as:

*Sang maya marip marjam
 Aku tahu asal usulmu jin Afrit
 Hei jin Afrit, mendengar perkataanku!
 Hei jin Afrit, mendengar suruhanku!
 Bilamu pergi cucuk benda ini
 Bila bubuh benda ini ke dalam perut dia
 Mu pergi tikam membawa maut akan dia
 Mu pergilah, sebabmu setandang malam*

*Sang maya marip marjam
 Aku tahu asal usulmu jin Ifrit
 Hai jin Ifrit, mendengar perkataanku!
 Hai jin Ifrit, mendengar suruhanku!
 Bilamu pergi tusuk benda ini
 Bila taruh benda ini ke dalam perut dia
 Mu pergi tikam membawa maut akan dia
 Mu pergilah, sebabmu setandang malam*

² Tradition change is in line with the change of other elements in the society. For example, see cultural change described by Malinowski (1961).

Hitam setandang manja
Hitam kelam kabut
Hitam selanggar tubuh
Kuning selanggar malam
Mu pergilah ulit tubuh badan si anu
Biar goyah tubuh badannya
Sebab aku tahu asalmu
(Haron Daud, 2001: 187)

Hitam setandang manja
Hitam kelam kabut
Hitam selanggar tubuh
Kuning selanggar malam
Mu pergilah menidurkan tubuh badan si anu
Biar goyah tubuh badannya
Sebab aku tahu asalmu
(Haron Daud, 2001: 187)

Ilmu above is practiced to summon Ifrit to magically insert an object inside someone to make that person suffer. Black magic has many names, such as *polong*,³ *tuju*, *penanggalan*⁴ etc.⁵ They're still practiced by Malay people despite contradicting Islamic teachings. Interestingly, not all *ilmu* containing local elements are for negative purposes. Some have positive purposes:

Tawar pedora'
Seraut rancang rancang
Solit topi dinding
Antu laut antu kampung
Bulu puki nceredin
(Hermansyah, 2010:153)

Tawar pedora'
pisau rancang rancang
selip tepi dinding
hantu laut hantu kampung
Bulu puki berdiri
(Hermansyah, 2010:153)

Tawar pedora' is *ilmu* to cure *pedora'*. It's some kind of discomfort followed by dizziness and fever, which is usually experienced after going home from forest, orchard,

³ *Polong* is a very small woman or mannequin around the size of the first knuckle of the little finger (Skeat, 1967: 329) According to *dewan* dictionary, *polong* is (1) a ghost believed to disturb people or make people sick (2) nervous sickness due to black magic.

⁴ *Penanggalan* is a kind of vampire who sucks children's blood (Skeat, 1967: 327)

⁵ The prevalence of using *ilmu* categorized as black magic is also evident in the method to stop the *ilmu* as follows:

Mantera Pendinding Tuju
Bismillahirrahmanirrahim
Hei besi sangga besi sanggi
Datang dari kanan aku sangga dari kanan
Datang dari kiri aku sangga dari kiri
Datang dari depan aku sangga dari depan
Datang dari atas aku sangga dari atas
Datang dari bawah aku sangga dari bawah
Aku sangga jin seratus sembilan puluh
Bukan kata aku, kata Allah
Berkat doa la ilaha illallah muhammadarrasulullah
(Haron Daud 2001: 48)

lake, etc. To cure it, this *tamar* is read. The *tamar* implies that the cause of *pedora*' is *antu laut antu kampung* (sea ghost, village ghost). To cast them away, *bulu puki nceredin* (*bulu puki* is standing) is read. Despite having positive purpose, the cause and treatment use entirely local words and aren't in line with Islamic teachings.

Similarly, there is *ilmu* for invulnerability. The practitioners of this *ilmu* believe they're invulnerable to sharp objects.

Ilmu kebal
 Naga ulang ulit
 Naga ulit kanan jalan
 Tulangku tiada memberi kulit
 Kulit tiada memberi jalan
 (Hermansyah, 2010: 180)

Ilmu kebal
 Naga ulang ulit
 Naga ulit kanan jalan
 Tulangku tiada memberi kulit
 Kulit tiada memberi jalan
 (Hermansyah, 2010: 180)

This invulnerability *ilmu* shows native belief passed down by Malay people that people can be invulnerable to sharp objects by practicing it. That *ilmu* shows the lack of Islamic influence or element. This practice and belief is comparable with traditional Javanese belief which hasn't been affected by Islam as follows:

Mantera pagar tubuh
 Om, song song gora
 Sumongsong tekanira
 Kang asipat guguh
 Geni jadi banyu
 Banyu dadi geni sapakonku
 Kuh-kukuh tekane
 Kang asipat puguh
 Payungana ragaku
 Pagerana jasadku
 Tan krasa ginawa bayu sayuta
 (Haron Daud 2001: 17)

Mantera pagar tubuh
 Om, kekuatanku yang melindungi
 Melindungi (datangnya)
 Yang bersifat teguh
 Api jadi air
 Air jadi api menurut perintahku
 Kukuh kuat datangnya
 Yang bersifat teguh
 Payungilah tubuhku
 Pagarilah badanku
 Tidak terasa dibawa angin sejuta

The Second Model, relation in maintaining the old formula of *ilmu* but changing its orientation to Islam or maintaining tradition while adding Islamic elements. The model is found in *ilmu* texts which partially contradict the spirit of Islamic teachers, but the names used as foundation of power in the *ilmu* are parts of Islamic belief. Below are some of the examples:

Pembenci orang laki-bini
Burung chandrawasi
Sa' ekor terbang ka laut
Sa' ekor terbang ka bukit
Tiadalah bertemu ka-dua-nya,
Benchi-lah Si Anu akan Si Anu
Jikalau angkau tiada demikian,
Neraka (derhaka) engkau kepada Allah,
Berdosa 'kau kepada aku,
Dengan berkat betua (bertuah atau
petuah) guru
La ilaha illallah
(Skeat, 1967: 671)

Pembenci pasangan suami istri
Burung cendrawasih
Seekor terbang ke laut
Seekor terbang ke bukit
Tiadalah bertemu keduanya,
Bencilah Si Anu akan Si Anu
Jikalau engkau tiada demikian,
durhaka engkau kepada Allah,
Berdosa 'kau kepada aku,
Dengan berkat petuah guru
La ilaha illallah
(Skeat, 1967: 671)

Ilmu above is practiced by reading the text above while burning 14 left cat whiskers of two different cats (seven from each cat), worn out cloth, and lime betel. The ash is used to make a cross under the door of the house of the couple to be separated. It's so that the couple in the house hate each other. The couple's marriage is expected to end. It's clear that the objective of this *ilmu* contradicts Islamic teachings which hope for harmonious marriage (QS. 30:21). In fact, if a couple don't get along, they're advised not to divorce, but reconcile first (QS. 4:35). The contestation is in the usage of La ila ha illallah which means "there is no deity but God". It's intended to be the foundation of the power of an *ilmu*. Muslims believe that God can bright together and end everything. The practitioners believe that the ilmu will work if God desires, although it's against the spirit of Islamic teachings. Another example is the following Spirit *Ilmu*:

Hong 'ku panah bulan gobar
'ku panah matahari padam,
'ku panah bulan malap, bukannya aku
memanah bulan bintang matahari
Aku memanah tangkei hati anak sidang
Si Anu
Kur! Semangat Si Anu mari sa-jalan
dengan aku
Mari sa-duduk dengan aku,
Mari sa-tidur sa-bantal dengan aku!
Kur! semangat anak sidang Si Anu
Kabal berkat la ilaha illallah
(Skeat 1967: 671)

Hong 'ku panah bulan redup
'ku panah matahari padam,
'ku panah bulan suram, bukannya aku
memanah bulan bintang matahari
Aku memanah tangakai hati anak sidang
Si Anu
Kur! Semangat Si Anu mari sejalan
dengan aku
Mari seduduk dengan aku,
Mari setidur sebantal dengan aku!
Kur! semangat anak sidang Si Anu
Kabal berkat la ilaha illallah
(Skeat 1967: 671)

This *ilmu* is used to take the ‘spirit’ or life energy of the person one likes, i.e. the opposite sex. It’s so that the person thinks about the practitioner. The text of this *ilmu* shows that the practitioner believes that human’s ‘spirit’ can be taken—both to harm or to make someone their partner. At the same time, the practitioner believes that the sacredness of ‘spirit taking *ilmu*’ is in the last verse ‘*kabul berkat la ilaha illallah*’. It’s similar with another text below which fully captures local belief for the same purpose as the spirit taking *ilmu*:

Hei Irupi bayang-bayang
 Permeisuri mendapati aku;
 Jikalau Si Anu tak tidor
 Angkau grak juga, ‘kau gunchang
 bangun,
 Angkau ambil ruh semangat dia
 Bawa kamari
 Taroh dalam lambongan kiri aku
 Kalau dia tidor
 Angkau pegang ibu kaki kanan
 Senjak liar bangkit
 Angkau bawa kamari kepada
 Aku juga sabuleh-buleh
 Jika tidak derhaka
 (Skeat 1967: 671)

Hai Irupi bayang-bayang
 Permaisuri mendapati aku;
 Jikalau Si Anu tak tidur
 engkau gerak juga, ‘kau goyang bangun,
 Angkau ambil ruh semangat dia
 Bawa kemari
 Taruh dalam lambung kiri aku
 Kalau dia tidur
 engkau pegang ibu kaki kanan
 Sejak liar bangkit
 engkau bawa kemari kepada
 Aku juga sekuat tenaga
 Jika tidak durhaka
 (Skeat 1967: 671)

The second model also can be found in another example about magical creature in local belief. Malay people believe in ghosts. Ghost doesn’t only have their own world, but also can interact with people and even cause someone to experience difficulty or be sick. It’s believed that ghosts live in certain places such as mountains, trees, caves, etc. Some diseases are believed to be caused by ghosts in certain areas because one passes the area without permission, as shown in *tawar antu kayu ara* below:

Kayu ara selika-lika
 Bait tumuh di tanah mirah
 Buta gana kayu ara
 Kena tampar rasulullah
 Berkat doa la ilaha illallah
 Berkat muhammadurrasulullah
 (Hermansyah, 2010: 147)

Kayu beringin selika-lika
 tumbuh subur di tanah merah
 Buta gana kayu beringin
 Kena tampar rasulullah
 Berkat doa la ilaha illallah
 Berkat muhammadurrasulullah
 (Hermansyah, 2010: 147)

Ilmu above is practiced to treat people who are believed to be sick after passing under a banyan tree. The text curses ‘buta gana’⁶ ghost in the banyan tree to be slapped by rasulullah—Prophet Muhammad—so that they don’t disturb the sick. The ilmu is believed to remove the evil effects of ‘*hantu kayu ara*’ with the power of ‘*tampar Rasulullah*’. The trace of old belief in ‘buta gana’ ghost which can cause one to be sick compete with Islamic belief on rasulullah and symbolic sentence at the end of the sentece to show that one is a muslim, i.e. “la ilaha illallah muhammadurrasulullah”. They believe that that ghosts exist and can affect human—in this case causing sickness—on one hand. On the other hand, it’s cured by ‘tampar rasulullah’ and ‘Berkat doa la ilaha illallah dan Berkat muhammadurrasulullah’.

Another evidence of the second model is found in the following text:

Mantera Mencacak Tiang Rumah
Hei Raja Guru Maharaja Guru
Engkaulah anak Betara Guru
Aku tahu asal kau jadi
Dari kilat sabung menyabung
Aku tahu asal kau jadi
Dari embun setitik,
Aku tahu asal kau jadi
Dari fajar menyingsing
Hei hantu tanah jembalang bumi
Undur kau dari sini
Ke laut yang dalam
Ke rimba yang sunyi
Antara aku dan engkau
Dibahagi oleh Adam
(Haron Daud 2001: 29-30)

Mantra Mendirikan Tiang Rumah
Hai Raja Guru Maharaja Guru
Engkaulah anak Batara Guru
Aku tahu asal kau jadi
Dari kilat sambung menyambung
Aku tahu asal kau jadi
Dari embun setitik,
Aku tahu asal kau jadi
Dari fajar menyingsing
Hai hantu tanah jembalang bumi
Undur kau dari sini
Ke laut yang dalam
Ke rimba yang sunyi
Antara aku dan engkau
Dibagi oleh Adam
(Haron Daud 2001: 29-30)

Ilmu above is practiced by Malay people in Peninsular Malaysia when they build a house, i.e. when they erect the first column. This ilmu is practiced to chase away ghosts in the land which may disturb the construction or the inhabitants after the building is lived in. There are three beliefs in the *ilmu* text above. *First*, Hinduism, Betara Guru. The term

⁶ According to Shaw (1976:9) *Buta* (*Bhuta* or *Preta*) is a ghost in Hindu belief that comes from dead people who are treated inappropriately, or people who are killed or kill themselves. Wilkinson (1959: 323) has two entries on the word *gana*. The first entry of *Gana* with uppercase ‘G’ is *Betara Gana* or *Sangyang Gana*, Hindu God with elephant head, i.e. Ganesha. The second entry of lowercase ‘g’ means evil creature.

Betara is a loan word from Sanskrit through Hinduism, but is different from the concept of Betara in Hinduism.⁷ Although Osman (1989: 68) states there's very little Hindu influence in including Betara Guru and other Hindu deities in the ilmu of Malay people, there is another example below:

Mantera Pengasih (panah ranjuna)
 Hai sang rajuna dewa agung
 Senjatakan aku berpanah emas
 Aku panah laut, laut kering
 Aku panah gunung, gunung meletup
 Aku panah bulan, bulan terbelah
 Aku panah matahari, matahari cair
 Bukan aku yang panah
 Sukma aku yang panah
 Berkat doa la ilaha illallah,
 muhammadarrasulullah
 (Haron Daud, 2001: 228)

Mantra Pengasih
 Hai sang Arjuna dewa agung
 Senjatakan aku berpanah emas
 Aku panah laut, laut kering
 Aku panah gunung, gunung meletup
 Aku panah bulan, bulan terbelah
 Aku panah matahari, matahari cair
 Bukan aku yang memanah
 Sukma aku yang memanah
 Berkat doa la ilaha illallah,
 muhammadarrasulullah
 (Haron Daud, 2001: 228)

In this spell, the practitioner asks for power to conquer the opposite to 'sang rajuna dewa agung' but it's believed that the power of the spell is in the end of the text which is "Berkat doa la ilaha illallah, muhammadarrasulullah". *Second*, in local Malay belief, *tanah jembalang* ghost is a land ghost which is believed to sometimes materialize as cow, deer, buffalo, etc. (<https://kbbi.kemdikbud.go.id/entri/jembalang>). *Third*, Islam belief by mentioning Adam.

The Third Model, maintains ilmu but has fully Islamic substance. This model is shown in the following text:

Tawar sekalian tawar
 Hak Allah
 Allah menawar
 Muhammad punya tawar
 Ilang penyakit bisa tawarku
 Berkat doa la ilaha illallah
 Berkat

Tawar sapu jagat
 Hak Allah
 Allah menawar
 Muhammad punya tawar
 hilang penyakit ampuh
 tawarku
 Berkat doa la ilaha illallah

⁷ According to Wilkinson (1897: 309) *Betara Guru* is the highest magical power in Hinduism, which in Islam is occupied by God. This magical power can revive the dead and becomes the purpose of worship. Perhaps the concept of evil *Betara* comes from the embodiment of *Betara* as *Betara Kala*. One of the meanings of 'kala' is 'deceit' (Gonda 1973: 218). According to Skeat (1967: 90), in the view of the people of Peninsular Malaysian, *Betara* has two characters: "Destroyer" and "Restorer-to-life".

muhammadurrasulullah'
(Hermansyah 2010: 166)

Berkat
muhammadurrasulullah'
(Hermansyah 2010: 166)

The text above clearly shows that '*tawar sekalian tawar*' is *tawar* usually used for all kinds of diseases, fully based on Islamic faith (QS. 26: 80). Allah and Muhammad are mentioned as the main foundations without mentioning any local belief, showing that Islamic influence has fully replaced old beliefs, in line with Islamic belief that God controls everything (e.g. QS. 2: 20, 106. 109, 148, 259 etc.). However, Ilmu as a means to solve problems is still maintained. In this context, they don't replace it with prayer. Another evidence is '*Ilmu of Temporary Vulnerability*' below:

Ilmu kebal sebentar
Tup kunci nur kunci
Kunci Allah kunci baginda rasulullah
Berkat doa la ilaha illallah
Berkat muhammadurrasulullah'
(Hermansyah 2010: 180)

Ilmu kebal sebentar
Tup kunci nur kunci
Kunci Allah kunci baginda rasulullah
Berkat doa la ilaha illallah
Berkat muhammadurrasulullah'
(Hermansyah 2010: 180)

Ilmu of temporary invulnerability above shows that they still believe people can be invulnerable to sharp objects by practicing certain ilmu. However, the ilmu has fully Islamic orientation by asking the help of God and His prophet. Another example using the formula of ilmu with fully Islamic substance is the following *tawar*:

'Tawar botu'
Qulna yanaru kuni bardan wa salaman ala (sebut nama)⁸
(Hermansyah 2010: 148)

'*Tawar botu*' above is used to cure people who are scalded by fire or hot water. It's believed by practicing this ilmu, people scalded with hot water or fire won't feel pain or experience less side effects. The formula is a quote from al-Qur'an verse from verse 69 of surah al-Anbiya on the burning of Abraham by Fira'un. Abraham was saved because the fire became cold. Many believe ilmu with this kind of formula. To them, this kind of ilmu is safer or more comfortable to practice because they read al-Quran verse and have good purpose.

⁸ It says Qulna yanaru kuni bardan wa salaman ala Ibrahim (QS al-Anbiya: 69) which means: We said: "O fire, be coolness and peace for Abraham.

There is even *ilmu* which contains elements close to Sufism traditions in Islam such as the *ilmu* to anticipate bad people below (Bontot, 2008: 67):

Aku zat kau sifat
 Aku Allah, kau Muhammad
 Aku berdiri, kau tunduk
 berkat aku membaca la ilaha illah muhammadarrasulullah

Analysis

The relation between Islam and local elements discussed in the corpus data of *ilmu* of Malay people described in the previous section indicated ‘contestation’. In the contestation, sometimes local elements win, so that the practice doesn’t contain any Islamic influence at. In the communal life of Malay people, “the victory” of local elements is also reflected in the day-to-day lives. For example, to this day, many Malay communities hold local traditional ceremonies inherited from the previous generations. Some examples are “buang-buang” and “menggantung anak” ceremonies. Both ceremonies give offerings to magical creatures believed to affect human life. To make peace with them, ceremonies to give them offerings are required.

There is also contestation which produces compromise in which local and Islamic traditions mix in the *ilmu* of Malay people. In the modern context, *ilmu* is maintained by the practitioners partially because of the belief that the magical can affect life in the empirical world. The practitioners believe that *ilmu* is one of—on in certain cases even the only alternative to solve their problems. There are even cases of distrust to modern formal institution, leading to people using *ilmu* for solving their problems. For example, many people go to witch doctors rather reporting lost possession to the police (Bontot, 2008: 69). In another case, they choose going to witch doctor to solve marital problem instead of consulting with psychologists or marriage counselors. There is even a viral media publication that government employee applicants take tests while carrying amulets which are thought to bring luck.⁹ This phenomenon is reported by Hermansyah (2010: 91), showing that those who practice occultism can also be involved in modern activities, such as education, market economy system, modern social and political organizations, but their actions are believed to not have rational relation with their fates, unless they’re permitted by

⁹ See for example <http://www.tribunnews.com/nasional/2017/09/27/mau-lolos-tes-cpns-orang-orang-ini-gunakan-jimat>, accessed on 26 October 2017.

the Almighty. Compromise between local and Islamic elements among Malay people is also realized in their everyday life in *'tolak bala'* ceremony. Some Malay people believe that bad luck can be caused by certain magical creatures, such as ghosts, *jembalang* or due to 'misfortune'. To solve this, they hold prayer recitation ceremony from Islamic tradition.

Islam's victory over local culture is seen in *ilmu* in which the elements, substance and purpose are fully in line with Islamic. The usage of al-Quran verse as a cure—the function of *ilmu*—to replace local *ilmu* is one of the evidence. The practice of *hizib*¹⁰ and certain dhikr which is entirely from Islam having replaced local *ilmu* is another evidence. This victory is supported by the day-to-day life of Malay people, especially in relatively more educated community with better religious understanding. They're more critical to culture. They accept and practice as long as the content and purpose and consistent with or at least parallel with Islamic values. For example, they perform '*Nyelamat*' and '*Selamatan*' ceremonies. '*Nyelamat*' tradition isn't related with fear of certain magical creature, but asking for safety from the God they believe in. In formal Islamic faith, the universe, including disasters, and the safety of the beings are controlled by the Almighty, Allah.

The contestation phenomenon above can be understood from the perspective of Islamic doctrine and history in the Malay Archipelago. As we all know, from the perspective of doctrine, Islam which proclaims itself to be a universal religion or *salih fi kulli makan wa zaman* implicitly means that it's in accordance with the nature and development of humanity. Therefore, everything good and correct in accordance with the nature and development is in line with Islam. However, not all humanity is in line with the nature. Therefore, not all human cultures are acceptable for Islam.

From historical perspective, it's known that Islam was spread in the Malay Archipelago peacefully. That's why there is compromise between Islamic doctrines and local cultures. Within certain limits, local cultures are even used to spread Islam. The most popular example of this is using shadow puppet in Java to spread Islam. It's also possible that many *ilmu* combine local elements and Islamic elements for the same reason—spreading Islam. According to Budiwanti (2000:342-343), the process shows the cultural dynamism of spreading Islam, which is then adapted, accommodated, and expressed in the

¹⁰ According to Syaikh Waliyullah Ahmad Zarruq (Masrur, 2019), a number of dhikr, prayers, and *tawajjuh* are made for dhikr, asking for protection from evil, hoping for goodness, asking for knowledge and read by uniting the heart with Allah Subhaanahu wa Ta'ala.

region. Cultural dynamism is also the reason why spreading Islam is a long and continuous process in ongoing antagonism and assimilation. In Woodward's words (1999: 80), conversion and transition of people to Islam are gradual, not uniform, and still ongoing.

CONCLUSION

Belief and practice as parts of culture in Malay society to this day are something that grows and develops in an open setting. Various cultures which affect and are captured in Malay occultism called *ilmu*. *First*, the word *ilmu* clearly shows Islamic influence, although *ilmu* here is different from the context of Islamic teachings. *Second*, also Malay is associated with Islam, not all beliefs and practices of Malay people are Islamic. In the data of *ilmu* of Malay people in Peninsular Malaysia and West Kalimantan in the previous section, there are some cultural heritages in it: local beliefs and practices, Hinduism-Buddhism, and Islam. The facts above indicate a continuity of humanity. Borrowing and shifting a culture to form a new culture which is more complex are natural and unavoidable. No culture and civilization in this world is developed without being related to and influencing other cultures and civilization. This continuity shows that local community has living culture which is inherited from generation to generation. Tradition in Malay society supports the theory that the spread of Islam is peaceful and even accommodates local cultures. The spreading of Islam enables the faith to be widely accepted in the Malay Archipelago. *Ilmu* remains to this day because beside meeting Islamic teachings that support belief in the magical, it's believed to be effective in solving day-to-day problems which even modern formal institutions fail to solve. However, actually, there is ongoing contestation between Islam and local elements. In the contestation, sometimes Islam wins, but sometimes local elements remain. Islam's victory over local elements is especially evidence in the removal of local elements which contradict the spirit of Islamic teachings. This contestation is peaceful and ongoing, in line with cultural dynamism. This peaceful contestation happens because Islam is spread by persuading people's hearts instead of confrontational preaching. As a result, Islam is gradually accepted by Malay society.

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