Anthropological Role

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Abstract

This study aims to explain the urgency of an anthropological approach in the methodology of Islamic studies by examining the basic concepts of anthropology and their relevance in understanding the religious phenomena of Muslims. Using a literature review method, this study compiles and analyzes various references and previous research to gain a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between religion and culture. The results of the study indicate that anthropology plays a crucial role in viewing Islam as a social phenomenon that exists within diverse cultural contexts. Through ethnographic methods, an anthropological approach can uncover symbolic meanings, ritual practices, and social dynamics within Muslim societies. Furthermore, this approach bridges the gap between normative and empirical Islam, while providing a relevant perspective for understanding contemporary religious phenomena influenced by globalization and social change. Thus, an anthropological approach is an essential instrument in Islamic studies, producing holistic, contextual, and in-depth studies.

Keywords: Anthropology; Islamic Studies; Ethnography; Islamic Normative; Empirical Islam

INTRODUCTION

Understanding religion and religious phenomena, particularly Islam, requires a multidisciplinary approach, not a singular one. Religion exists not only as a theological belief system but also as a living, evolving, and interacting social and cultural phenomenon with societal realities. Therefore, Islamic studies cannot be fully understood if approached solely from a normative-dogmatic perspective.

A multidisciplinary approach to Islamic studies is crucial because Islam is practiced by people living in diverse social, cultural, economic, and political contexts. The universal teachings of Islam constantly interact with the local conditions of the communities in which they are practiced. This interaction gives rise to a variety of religious expressions that are not always uniform, even though they originate from the same teachings.

Among the approaches frequently used in Islamic studies are sociology and anthropology. Both approaches have made significant contributions to a more comprehensive and contextual understanding of Islam. Sociology and anthropology view religion not only as a set of normative teachings but also as a social phenomenon intertwined with everyday life.

In general, an anthropological approach in Islamic studies serves as a lens to examine the complex dynamics of interactions between religion and society. Anthropology focuses on how Islamic teachings are practiced, interpreted, and passed down in the social life of Muslims. This approach allows researchers to view religion from the perspective of the actors (insider) within a specific cultural context.

Through analysis of social structures, group dynamics, and social changes occurring within Muslim societies, anthropology helps uncover how religious practices evolve over time. From an anthropological perspective, religion is understood as a living system of meaning that continually negotiates with the social and cultural conditions of a society.

Meanwhile, a sociological approach makes a significant contribution to understanding religion as a social institution. Sociology views Islam not only as a source of individual belief but also as the foundation for the formation of social norms, value systems, and religious and social institutions. Through this approach, it is possible to understand how religion influences patterns of social interaction, power structures, and intergroup relations within Muslim societies.

Furthermore, sociology also helps explain the emergence of various social dynamics and conflicts related to religion. Differences in interpretation, social interests, and the structural conditions of society often give rise to tensions that cannot be understood solely through a theological approach. In this regard, sociology provides an analytical framework for understanding religion in its relationship to power, economics, and social change.

Anthropology in Islamic studies also plays a crucial role in understanding the cultural

diversity of Muslims. Through an ethnographic approach, anthropology explores the daily lives of Muslim communities by observing the rituals, traditions, value systems, and religious practices that shape their cultural identity. This approach emphasizes that Islam does not exist in a vacuum but is constantly in dialogue with the local cultures in which it develops.

Thus, anthropology provides in-depth insights into how Islam is experienced and interpreted differently in various cultural contexts. This demonstrates that Islamic practices in one region can differ from those in another, without necessarily being understood as deviations from Islamic teachings (Nur Saadah Khudri, Tamrin Kamal, Rosniati Hakim, & Halim Hanafi, 2024).

Ultimately, understanding Islam and its religious phenomena requires an integration of sociological and anthropological approaches. Sociology helps to discern the structural and institutional dimensions of religion, while anthropology reveals the cultural and practical dimensions of religion. The integration of these two approaches yields a more holistic understanding of Islam as both a teaching and a living, dynamic, and contextual social practice within the diverse realities of Muslim societies.

METHOD

The research approach used in this study is a qualitative study using a literature review. This study was chosen because the focus of this research is not on field data collection, but rather on an in-depth examination of ideas, concepts, and scientific findings relevant to the research topic. Through this literature review, the researcher seeks to comprehensively understand the problem by examining various written sources directly related to the research object.

Literature studies are conducted by collecting various references from previous research, whether in the form of books, scientific journal articles, proceedings, or other relevant academic works. These references are selected selectively, taking into account the credibility of the sources, the relevance of the substance, and the recency of the publications. As stated by Hartanto (2020), literature studies are a research method that compiles various previous research results for analysis and synthesis to obtain conceptual and theoretical conclusions.

In this study, data collection was conducted through a search of literature sources related to the research topic. The researcher read, examined, and identified the main ideas contained in each reference, then categorized the data based on the research focus and objectives. This step aims to obtain a comprehensive picture of the development of thinking, approaches, and research findings conducted by previous researchers.

The next stage is data analysis, which is conducted by comparing, interpreting, and linking various findings from the collected sources. This analysis is descriptive-analytical, systematically explaining the content and meaning of the data and examining the relationships between concepts found in the literature. Through this process, researchers seek

to identify patterns, similarities, differences, and gaps in the research that can enrich their understanding of the topic being studied.

The results of the analysis are then synthesized to develop a coherent and comprehensive framework. Synthesis is achieved by integrating various perspectives and research findings to yield a deeper and more comprehensive understanding. Thus, the literature review serves not only as a means of gathering information but also as a means of developing scientific arguments and drawing conclusions relevant to the research objectives. This approach is expected to provide significant theoretical contributions and strengthen the conceptual foundation of the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
Understanding the Anthropological Approach

Anthropology is a branch of social science that focuses primarily on understanding the realities of human life within the context of society. This science seeks to explain how humans live, interact, and construct social and cultural systems in various environments. Through its studies, anthropology helps uncover the complexities of human life, which cannot be understood from a single perspective but rather requires a comprehensive and in-depth approach.

Linguistically, the term anthropology comes from two words: anthropos, meaning human or individual, and logos, meaning science or knowledge. Thus, anthropology can be simply defined as the science of humans. This definition demonstrates that anthropology studies humans not only as biological beings, but also as social and cultural beings living within a network of values, norms, and traditions.

Koentjaraningrat, a leading figure in Indonesian anthropology, defined anthropology as the study of humanity in its entirety. This definition emphasizes that anthropology does not limit its study to one specific aspect, but rather encompasses all dimensions of human life, including physical, social, and cultural aspects. This view affirms anthropology's position as a holistic science in understanding humanity.

Etymologically, anthropology is also explained as originating from the Latin "anthropos," meaning human, and the Greek "logos," meaning word or speech. In this sense, anthropology can be defined as "speaking about humans." This meaning indicates that anthropology seeks to uncover the stories, experiences, and realities of human life in various spatial and temporal contexts.

In the Great Dictionary of the Indonesian Language (KBBI) published by Balai Pustaka, anthropology is defined as the study of humans, particularly as it relates to their origins, physical diversity, customs, and beliefs in the past. This definition demonstrates anthropology's strong interest in the history and development of human culture, while also examining how these elements influence contemporary human life.

Anthropologists have provided definitions that further enrich our understanding of this discipline. William A. Havilland, for example, defined anthropology as the study of humankind, attempting to generate useful generalizations

about humans and their behavior. According to this view, anthropology is not only descriptive but also analytical, aiming to discover general patterns in human diversity.

Havilland's view demonstrates that anthropology seeks to understand both the similarities and differences among humans. Through cross-cultural studies, anthropology helps explain why humans have such diverse lifestyles, value systems, and behavioral patterns, while also demonstrating the universal elements that unite humanity.

Meanwhile, David Hunter views anthropology as a science born of humanity's boundless curiosity about others. This definition emphasizes the scientific dimension of anthropology, rooted in an intellectual curiosity to understand who humans are, how they live, and why they act the way they do. This curiosity has been the driving force behind the development of anthropological studies to this day.

Koentjaraningrat also emphasized that anthropology studies humanity in general by examining the diverse physical and cultural forms produced by society. The emphasis on culture demonstrates that anthropology pays special attention to the value systems, traditions, languages, and symbols that shape a group's identity.

Based on the various definitions and perspectives of these experts, it can be concluded that anthropology is a social science discipline that studies humans comprehensively and holistically. Anthropology studies humans not only as individuals but also as part of society and culture. Thus, anthropology plays a crucial role in helping us understand human diversity and explaining the ever-evolving dynamics of social and cultural life.

The Urgency of an Anthropological Approach in the Methodology of Islamic Studies

The anthropological approach is crucial in the methodology of Islamic studies because it can provide a more comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the religious life of Muslims. Islam is understood not only as a set of normative teachings derived from sacred texts, such as the Quran and Hadith, but also as a religion lived and practiced in the social realities of society. In everyday life, Islamic teachings constantly interact with the surrounding culture, traditions, and social structures. Therefore, an anthropological approach helps broaden the scope of Islamic studies, preventing it from being trapped solely in textual understanding and instead focusing on concrete religious practices (Azra, 2019).

From an anthropological perspective, religion is understood as an inseparable part of a society's culture. Islam exists and develops in diverse social contexts, so its religious expression is not singular. Islamic values often interact with customs, local norms, and traditions deeply rooted in society. An anthropological approach allows researchers to understand the reciprocal relationship between Islamic teachings and local culture. In this way, Islam can be understood as a dynamic and contextual system of meaning, rather than a static teaching (Abdullah, 2018).

Islam as a social phenomenon demonstrates

that religious teachings never exist in a vacuum. Religious values are constantly influenced by the social, political, economic, and cultural conditions of the society in which the religion is practiced. Power relations, social stratification, and economic dynamics shape how Muslims understand and practice their religious teachings. Anthropology helps explain how these social factors interact with Islamic values. Thus, Muslim religiosity can be understood more realistically and contextually (Hidayat, 2020).

Methodologically, anthropology offers a distinctive research approach, particularly through ethnography. This method emphasizes the researcher's direct involvement in the lives of the communities being studied. Through participant observation and in-depth interviews, researchers can understand religious practices from the perspective of the religious practitioners themselves. This approach allows researchers to capture the often-hidden meanings behind religious rituals and traditions. Therefore, ethnography is a highly relevant method in Islamic studies that focus on social reality (Moleong, 2019).

An ethnographic approach helps uncover the symbolic dimensions of Muslim religious rituals and traditions. Every religious practice and tradition carries not only theological meaning but also specific social and cultural functions. Rituals can serve as a means of strengthening social solidarity, building collective identity, and maintaining the continuity of cultural values. Anthropology enables researchers to understand these

meanings in depth. Thus, the study of Islam becomes richer and more multi-layered (Nata, 2020).

Furthermore, anthropology provides a platform for understanding the negotiation process between normative Islamic teachings and the realities of everyday life. In practice, Muslims often adapt their religious teachings to align with local social and cultural conditions. This adaptation process does not necessarily constitute deviation, but rather a form of contextualization of Islamic teachings. An anthropological approach helps explain this process objectively and scientifically. Thus, Islam can be understood as a religion that is flexible and responsive to changing times (Suharto, 2018).

The urgency of an anthropological approach is increasingly apparent in efforts to bridge the gap between normative and empirical Islam. Normative Islam refers to the ideal teachings contained in the primary sources of Islam, while empirical Islam describes how these teachings are realized in the real lives of the community. The distinction between the two often sparks debate in Islamic studies. Through an anthropological approach, the dialectical relationship between normative and empirical Islam can be more fully understood. This helps avoid simplistic assessments of people's religious practices.

An anthropological approach also encourages a more inclusive understanding of the diversity of Islamic practices. Variations in religious practices are no longer viewed as deviations from Islamic teachings, but rather as expressions of religiosity influenced by specific

social and cultural contexts. This approach helps foster a tolerant and appreciative attitude toward differences. Thus, Islamic studies are not merely normative but also humanistic and dialogical.

Anthropology's focus on human experience makes Islamic studies more oriented to the realities of people's lives. Studies address not only what should be done according to religious texts, but also how these teachings are understood and implemented by people in daily life. This approach reveals the subjective dimension of religiosity often overlooked in textual studies. Therefore, anthropology enriches Islamic studies with a more empirical and grounded perspective.

In the contemporary context, the relevance of anthropology in Islamic studies is increasing in line with rapid social change. Globalization and urbanization have brought significant changes to the religious practices of Muslims. High social mobility and cross-cultural encounters have also influenced how Muslims construct their religious identities. Anthropology provides an analytical framework for critically and in-depth understanding of these changes (Hidayat, 2020).

The development of digital technology also presents new challenges and opportunities for Muslim religious practices. The phenomena of digital da'wah, online Islamic studies, and virtual religious authorities have become part of the contemporary Islamic reality. These changes influence patterns of religious communication and the way Muslims acquire religious knowledge. An anthropological approach allows for a critical examination of these phenomena within their social and cultural context.

Through an anthropological approach, Islamic studies are no longer limited to classical texts and past history. This approach allows Islamic studies to respond more relevantly to contemporary social realities. Anthropology helps bridge the Islamic scholarly tradition with the dynamics of modern society. Thus, Islamic studies can continue to develop without losing its fundamental values.

Anthropological approaches also contribute to fostering cross-cultural and cross-sectarian dialogue within Islam. By understanding social and cultural backgrounds, differences in religious practices can be more effectively understood. This approach helps reduce exclusivity and strengthen the spirit of diversity within Islam. Therefore, anthropology plays a strategic role in fostering a moderate and inclusive understanding of Islam (Abdullah, 2018).

Thus, the anthropological approach is a crucial methodological tool in Islamic studies. This approach allows Islam to be studied holistically, contextually, and empirically. Islam is understood not only as a normative teaching but also as a social reality that lives and develops within society. Through an anthropological approach, Islamic studies can make a more relevant contribution to the development of Islamic thought in the contemporary era.

CONCLUSION

This article emphasizes that understanding Islam as both a religion and a

social phenomenon requires an adequate multidisciplinary approach, with anthropology as a crucial analytical framework. Islam exists not only as a system of normative teachings derived from sacred texts, but also as a religion lived, interpreted, and practiced in the daily lives of its followers. Therefore, an anthropological approach makes a significant contribution to uncovering the realities of religiosity that cannot always be explained through theological and normative studies alone. Through this perspective, Islam is understood as a living cultural practice that continues to evolve in accordance with the social and cultural context of the society in which it is practiced.

An anthropological approach allows for a more realistic and contextual study of Islam by positioning religious practices as part of the dynamics of social life. The diversity of Islamic expressions emerging in various regions is understood as the result of the interaction between Islamic values and local culture, social structures, and the historical experiences of the community. Thus, anthropology helps explain why Muslim religious practices are not uniform, but exhibit rich and complex variations. This approach also encourages a more inclusive and tolerant understanding of the diversity of religious expressions within Islam.

Furthermore, this article demonstrates that an anthropology-based methodology for Islamic studies provides ample scope for in-depth observation of the behavior, rituals, traditions, and religious symbols of Muslims. Through the use of ethnographic methods, researchers can engage directly with community life to understand the internal meanings attached to religious practices. This approach allows researchers to capture an emic perspective, namely the perspective of religious practitioners themselves, so that understanding of Islam is not merely descriptive, but also interpretive and meaningful.

Anthropological methodology also plays a crucial role in bridging the gap between normative Islam and empirical Islam. Normative Islam refers to the ideal teachings contained in the primary sources of Islam, while empirical Islam reflects the reality of religious practices lived out by Muslims in their daily lives. Through an anthropological approach, the differences between the two are not understood as mere contradictions, but rather as dialectical processes influenced by social, cultural, and historical contexts. Thus, the dynamics of religious interpretation and practice in various Muslim communities can be explained more proportionately and objectively.

This article also emphasizes the strong relevance of an anthropological approach in addressing the development of contemporary religious phenomena. Social changes triggered by globalization, urbanization, and the development of technology and digital media have shaped new ways in which Muslims understand and express their religious identity.

Anthropology provides analytical tools that enable researchers to critically examine these transformations, without becoming trapped in simplistic normative assessments. With this approach, contemporary religious phenomena can be understood as part of a constantly changing social dynamic.

Therefore, this article concludes that the anthropological approach is a crucial methodological tool in Islamic studies. This approach is capable of providing a holistic, contextual, and in-depth understanding of how Islamic teachings are practiced, interpreted, and experienced in a complex and diverse socio-cultural context. Thus, anthropology serves not merely as a complement but as an integral part in developing a methodology for Islamic studies that is relevant to the challenges and realities of the contemporary era.

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