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Islamic Political Perspective on the Practice of Friday Almsgiving among Urban Waste Pickers in Palembang

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ABSTRACT

The practice of Friday almsgiving (*ṣadaqah*) among Indonesian Muslims reflects not merely an expression of individual spiritual devotion, but also embodies the dynamics of Islamic political thought concerning the distribution of social justice and the collective responsibility toward the *mustaḍ'afīn* (the oppressed). In this context, *ṣadaqah* is not simply a personal act of charity, but a manifestation of Islamic political ethics that demands the establishment of a just and non-exploitative social system. This study critically examines the relationship between Friday almsgiving and the socio-economic dependency of marginalized groups—such as waste pickers, beggars, and rickshaw drivers—in two major locations in Palembang: Jalan Ahmad Yani and Jalan Gubernur H. Bastari. Employing a qualitative case study approach, the research found that 56 individuals actively rely on Friday almsgiving for their subsistence, consisting of 12 rickshaw drivers, 35 waste pickers and beggars, and 9 children. This phenomenon indicates the emergence of an informal social ecosystem marked by structural inequalities and the absence of state presence or Islamic political institutions that should uphold distributive justice (*'adl*) and sustainable empowerment. While the practice of almsgiving embodies values of communal solidarity, its resulting dependency may reinforce passive patronage and weaken the work ethic. Therefore, within the framework of Islamic political discourse, there is a need to reconstruct the paradigm of *ṣadaqah*—from one that is merely charitable to one that is also transformative—so that it may serve as an instrument of ethical politics aimed at economic empowerment, social justice, and the reinforcement of the state's role as *ḥāmī al-masālik* (guardian of public welfare).

Keyword: *Practice of Friday almsgiving, social justice, Islamic political ethics*

ABSTRAK

Praktik sedekah Jumat di kalangan masyarakat Muslim Indonesia merefleksikan bukan hanya ekspresi ketaatan spiritual individual, tetapi juga dinamika politik Islam yang menyangkut distribusi keadilan sosial dan tanggung jawab kolektif terhadap kelompok *mustaḍ'afīn* (kaum tertindas). Dalam konteks ini, sedekah bukan sekadar amal personal,

melainkan bagian dari etika politik Islam yang menuntut hadirnya sistem sosial yang adil dan tidak eksploitatif. Penelitian ini mengkaji secara kritis relasi antara praktik sedekah Jumat dan ketergantungan sosial-ekonomi kelompok marginal seperti pemulung, pengemis, dan tukang becak di dua titik utama Palembang, yakni Jalan Ahmad Yani dan Jalan Gubernur H. Bastari. Dengan pendekatan kualitatif berbasis studi kasus, ditemukan bahwa 56 individu secara aktif menggantungkan hidup pada sedekah Jumat, yang terdiri dari 12 tukang becak, 35 pemulung/pengemis, dan 9 anak-anak. Fenomena ini mengindikasikan terbentuknya ekosistem sosial informal yang diwarnai oleh ketimpangan struktural dan absennya kehadiran negara atau institusi politik Islam yang seharusnya menjamin keadilan distributif ('adl) dan pemberdayaan yang berkelanjutan. Meskipun praktik sedekah mencerminkan nilai solidaritas umat, ketergantungan yang ditimbulkannya dapat memperkuat patronase pasif dan memperlemah etos kerja. Oleh karena itu, dalam kerangka politik Islam, diperlukan rekonstruksi paradigma sedekah yang tidak hanya bersifat karitatif, tetapi juga transformatif—menjadi instrumen politik etik yang mendorong pemberdayaan ekonomi, keadilan sosial, dan penguatan peran negara sebagai ḥāmī al-masālik (penjamin kesejahteraan rakyat).

Kata kunci: *Praktik sedekah Jumat, keadilan sosial, etika politik Islam*

INTRODUCTION

The practice of Friday almsgiving (ṣadaqah) among Indonesian Muslims is not merely a religious tradition, but also a tangible manifestation of Islamic politics in the everyday lives of believers. Through the act of giving—particularly on Fridays—Muslims fulfill religious obligations while simultaneously redistributing resources within an Islamic ethical framework that emphasizes social justice and communal solidarity.

In urban contexts such as Palembang, this practice constructs a moral-political relationship between the giver and the recipient, forming a structure of symbolic power that seeks to bridge socio-economic inequalities. Marginalized groups—such as scavengers, beggars, and rickshaw drivers—become subjects within a moral economy of compassion, legitimized by religious doctrines and reinforced by the authority of religious scholars. Prominent figures such as the late Shaykh Ali Jaber, through their religious discourses, have played a critical role in shaping collective Muslim consciousness regarding the importance of almsgiving as a form of social jihad.

From the perspective of Islamic political thought, Friday almsgiving can be understood as a mechanism of wealth redistribution rooted in spiritual values and simultaneously functioning as a symbolic strategy for maintaining the moral legitimacy of the faithful in the face of an exploitative capitalist order. In this regard, urban public spaces where the poor gather on Fridays serve as arenas for articulating Islamic political ethics—spaces where values such as justice, empathy, and solidarity (ukhuwah) are actualized through concrete social acts.

Thus, Friday almsgiving is not merely a ritual expression of piety, but a profound expression of Islamic moral economy—one that challenges the logic of the market and

reaffirms the role of religion in structuring social relations and promoting justice within contemporary Muslim societies. (Mundzir, C., Mahfudz, M., & Amin, R. 2025)

LITERATURE REVIEW

Almsgiving (*ṣadaqah*) constitutes an integral component of Islamic teachings, reflecting both social compassion and spiritual obedience. In the Qur'an, almsgiving is portrayed as a moral obligation for Muslims to assist those in need, particularly the underprivileged. In Surah Adh-Dharyat (51:19), it is stated that within the wealth of the faithful lies a rightful share for the poor, whether they ask or not. This verse not only embodies the spiritual dimensions of worship but also reflects the principle of social justice (Nasution, 2015). Yusuf al-Qaradawi further reinforces the view that almsgiving is a vital instrument within the Islamic economic system. He argues that almsgiving is not merely an act of giving but a form of spiritual discipline designed to protect individuals from materialistic tendencies. Through the practice of giving, Muslims are taught to cultivate empathy, solidarity, and contribute to the creation of economic equilibrium within society (Qaradawi, 2016).

Friday holds a special status in Islam as a day of blessings. As narrated in a hadith by Ibn Mājah, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) declared that almsgiving on Fridays holds greater merit than on any other day. This teaching has subsequently evolved into a widespread tradition among Muslim communities, aiming to optimize acts of piety during especially virtuous times.

In Indonesia, prominent religious scholars such as Shaykh Ali Jaber have played a significant role in popularizing the practice of Friday almsgiving. In numerous sermons, he emphasized that Friday morning is the most auspicious time for giving charity, due to the abundance of divine blessings and the prayers offered by angels. This form of *da'wah* has fostered the development of a collective culture in which Friday is regarded as a moment of generosity, particularly toward those in need. Marginalized groups such as scavengers, beggars, and rickshaw drivers frequently rely on such acts of almsgiving as a means of subsistence.

Wikan Satriyo's research highlights that these groups often face economic precarity and lack access to formal social protection systems. Consequently, almsgiving becomes a strategic form of survival amid the harsh realities of urban life. Within the framework of the moral economy theory advanced by James C. Scott, the act of soliciting alms may be understood as a survival strategy grounded in social norms and communal values. Scott argues that communities possess a moral economy that legitimizes acts of generosity as a means to mitigate social inequality. This perspective is particularly relevant when society interprets almsgiving not only as a form of religious devotion but also as a social obligation.

Despite its spiritual merit, recipients of alms are frequently subjected to social stigma. This stigma often stems from prevailing assumptions that beggars or scavengers

are unproductive members of society. Erving Goffman explains that stigma arises when individuals deviate from expected social identities.

Research by Fauzia reveals that public perceptions of almsgiving recipients are highly differentiated. There exists a moral judgment distinguishing between those deemed 'deserving' and 'undeserving' of charity, often based on physical appearance and behavior. This indicates that the practice of giving and receiving alms occurs within a complex space of social negotiation, where religious values, moral judgments, and local norms intersect and influence one another (Fauzia, 2017).

METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative approach using a case study design. This approach was chosen because it enables the researcher to explore in depth the meanings, perceptions, and socio-economic dynamics experienced by scavengers, beggars, and rickshaw drivers in relation to their reliance on Friday almsgiving.

The research was conducted in the Seberang Ulu area of Palembang City, specifically along Ahmad Yani Street and Governor H. Bastari Street. These two main roads serve as centers of public activity on Fridays, where many people engage in religious practices while also distributing alms to vulnerable groups. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The process involved data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. Data validity was strengthened through source and method triangulation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Fieldwork conducted through direct observation and interviews along Jalan Ahmad Yani and Jalan Gubernur H. Bastari in the Seberang Ulu district of Palembang reveals a distinctive socio-economic pattern that intensifies on Fridays. The empirical data collected indicates a significant increase in the presence of marginalized individuals who actively position themselves along these two major roads with the aim of receiving alms from passersby. These locations serve as central points of religious activity every Friday, particularly before and after the congregational Friday prayer (*ṣalāt al-jumu'ah*) held in major mosques across the area.

During the observed timeframe—spanning from morning until late afternoon—a total of 56 individuals were identified occupying public spaces with the explicit intention of receiving alms. These individuals can be categorized into three primary groups: rickshaw drivers, scavengers/beggars, and children, the latter usually accompanying their parents or serving as part of a collective strategy to seek charity. Quantitatively, this population consists of 12 rickshaw drivers, 35 scavengers and beggars, and 9 children.

The 12 individuals identified as rickshaw drivers displayed behavioral patterns that deviated significantly from their usual workday routines. Rather than operating actively as providers of informal transport services, these drivers were observed remaining idle—stationary from morning until late afternoon—without any discernible

attempt to secure passengers. This phenomenon was especially prominent along Jalan Gubernur H. Bastari, a location not commonly known as a rickshaw operation zone during regular weekdays. This behavioral shift suggests a transformation in their work motivation, where reliance on charitable donations, rather than income from labor, becomes the central focus.

This trend can be analyzed through the theoretical framework of the moral economy (Scott, 1976), which posits that members of lower socio-economic classes often develop survival strategies based on social norms and communal relationships rather than on the competitive logic of market economics. In this context, the rickshaw drivers intentionally “pause” their productive activities to capitalize on cultural and spiritual opportunities shaped by the tradition of Friday almsgiving. Such decisions are not merely reactive to economic constraints but also reflect a nuanced understanding of the prevailing social structures and religious norms.

Using the concept of bounded rationality, one can argue that these individuals make calculated decisions by weighing the physical toll and uncertainty of labor against the more energy-efficient and predictably rewarding practice of waiting for charity—particularly on a day perceived as spiritually and socially opportune.

The majority of observed individuals (35 in total) comprised scavengers and beggars. Although most of them carried attributes typically associated with waste collection—such as pushcarts or large plastic bags—interviews revealed that not all were actively engaged in scavenging. Some, particularly housewives, admitted to attending the site not out of economic necessity or occupational identity, but due to social influence from neighbors who had previously benefited from Friday almsgiving. This behavior aligns with Gabriel Tarde’s theory of social imitation (Tarde, 2016), which emphasizes that social behaviors are often shaped through mimicry within shared social environments. Individuals tend to replicate actions that are perceived as effective or rewarding—particularly when those behaviors are observed among peers or within the same socio-economic class. In this context, the substantial number of scavengers and beggars present on Fridays is not merely a response to economic hardship, but also a product of a collective belief that such actions are likely to result in material gain—specifically in the form of food or money.

A total of nine children were also observed at the sites, typically accompanying their parents. However, their presence carries more complex implications than mere passive participation. Within marginal communities, children are often employed as emotional and visual tools to increase the likelihood of receiving alms. In many cases, children were strategically positioned in visible locations, wearing tattered clothing or appearing forlorn to evoke empathy from potential donors.

From the perspective of visual studies and social semiotics, these children function as “icons of innocence” that are leveraged as part of non-verbal persuasive strategies. This symbolism is particularly effective within cultural and religious contexts where the protection and welfare of children are held in high regard. Thus, their presence should not be viewed as incidental, but rather as an intentional and adaptive response by marginalized families navigating economic adversity.

Observational data indicate that the most common form of almsgiving provided by the public consisted of ready-to-eat food, such as boxed rice meals and traditional

snacks. However, a notable portion of the community also offered monetary donations ranging from Rp5,000 to Rp20,000 (approximately USD 0.30 to 1.30). Although these individual amounts may appear modest, the cumulative effect—given the consistent number of donors—translates into a substantial source of income for the recipients, sufficient to meet basic daily needs.

This pattern demonstrates that Friday almsgiving has evolved into an informal, religion-based economic redistribution system operating independently of formal state welfare mechanisms. It creates what may be termed a “parallel economy” with its own logic and ethics, wherein donors view their actions as fulfilling religious obligations, while recipients feel entitled to such charity as a form of “moral right”—an idea supported by Qur’anic references such as Surah Adh-Dhariyat (51:19), which affirms the right of the poor to a portion of the wealth of the faithful.

In the framework of Islamic economic theory, this situation can be interpreted as an instance of faith-based redistribution aimed at achieving social justice and fostering communal empathy. However, while effective in addressing immediate needs, such a system can also produce unintended structural consequences.

Between Worship and Welfare: The Ambivalence of Charity

Findings from this fieldwork underscore the dual character of Friday almsgiving. On one hand, it serves as a religious practice with evident social benefits. On the other hand, it bears the risk of fostering economic passivity and long-term dependency. The theory of social dependency suggests that continuous charitable giving without corresponding empowerment strategies may inadvertently generate a culture of inaction and prolonged reliance on aid (Moser, 1996).

This is particularly evident in the cases of rickshaw drivers who temporarily cease their labor activities and housewives who attend solely to follow the actions of their peers. In these instances, Friday almsgiving transitions from an act of compassion to a predictable and recurring source of livelihood. This raises critical questions about the need for more sustainable, development-oriented approaches to charitable practices.

It calls for an integrative model that reconciles acts of worship with broader goals of social development. In this paradigm, charity should not merely serve as a one-time consumption resource but should be strategically directed to build the economic capacity of marginalized groups in the long term.

The data indicates that Friday almsgiving possesses both spiritual resonance and social utility, effectively creating a solidarity-based ecosystem within urban spaces. However, without an empowerment-oriented paradigm, this ecosystem remains vulnerable to imbalance and stagnation. Therefore, a reorientation of Islamic philanthropic practices is required—one that maintains the centrality of religious devotion while also embracing the values of inclusive social development.

This can be achieved through collaboration among religious institutions, social organizations, and local governments to develop programs that combine direct giving with skill training, access to microfinance, and the facilitation of formal social protection mechanisms. In doing so, Friday almsgiving can evolve beyond symbolic compassion

into a transformative instrument capable of addressing the root causes of poverty and inequality in a sustainable manner.

CONCLUSION

From the perspective of Islamic political thought, field findings along Jalan Ahmad Yani and Jalan Gubernur H. Bastari in the Seberang Ulu area of Palembang suggest that the practice of Friday almsgiving (*sedekah Jumat*) has evolved into an instrument of symbolic and economic power redistribution among marginalized communities. Involving approximately 56 individuals—comprising 12 rickshaw drivers who suspended their regular economic activities, 35 scavengers and beggars, and 9 children deployed as visual agents of empathy—Friday almsgiving has become a socio-religious practice that mediates the relationship between giver and recipient within the ethical framework of Islamic morality. In this context, Friday is no longer understood solely as a spiritual moment; it also functions as a politico-economic arena where symbolic negotiations unfold between marginalized actors and Muslim benefactors. The distribution of food and money constitutes a form of “compassionate economy” which, on one hand, reflects religious solidarity, but on the other, reveals symptoms of structural dependency that risk displacing a productive work ethic with a passive survival strategy.

This phenomenon calls for a critical reading from an Islamic political perspective that goes beyond viewing *sedekah* as a personal act of piety, and instead frames it as a collective moral policy aimed at empowerment, distributive justice, and the strengthening of the economic capacities of the ummah. Without structured empowerment interventions, Friday almsgiving risks being reduced to a mechanism that reproduces socio-economic inequality under the guise of symbolic religiosity.

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