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diazzulay@gmail.com  
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Venezuela

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MUHALLING, R.; HASBI, M.; NAJMAH, ST.; ANSELLA, S.  
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## Controversy of the Qibla direction determination in Kendari city, Indonesia

Controversia en la determinación de la dirección de Qibla en la ciudad de Kendari, Indonesia

R. MUHALLING

*Institute Agama Islam Negeri Kendari, Indonesia*  
rusdinmuhalling02@gmail.com

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2386-9908>

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Redalyc: <https://www.redalyc.org/articulo.oa?id=27966514013>

M. HASBI

*Institute Agama Islam Negeri Bone, Indonesia*  
hasbi070767@gmail.com

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7294-4284>

ST. NAJMAH

*Institute Agama Islam Negeri Bone, Indonesia*  
sittinajmah88@gmail.com

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0815-586X>

S. ANSELLA

*Institute Agama Islam Negeri Kendari, Indonesia*  
suman\_ansella@yahoo.com

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7333-8350>

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### ABSTRACT:

Problems arise in Kendari City because a determination of the Qibla on most mosques was not based on the accuracy of geographical direction but rather by consensus and belief. So, it was rather to the issue of aesthetic adaptation related to spatial planning and shaf and the problem of waqf rhetoric. In the process of adaptation, there are those who immediately make adjustments to safekeeping arrangements, and some others delay on the grounds that they must be discussed because they relate to worship more completely.

**KEYWORDS:** Qibla direction, controversy, adaptation, consensus..

### RESUMEN:

Los problemas surgen en la ciudad de Kendari porque la determinación de la Qibla en la mayoría de las mezquitas no se basó en la precisión de la dirección geográfica, sino en el consenso y la creencia. Entonces, se trataba más bien de la cuestión de la adaptación estética relacionada con la planificación espacial y el shaf, y el problema de la retórica del waqf. En el proceso de adaptación, hay quienes inmediatamente hacen ajustes a los arreglos de custodia y algunos otros se demoran con el argumento de que deben discutirse porque se relacionan con el culto más completo.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Dirección de la Qibla, controversia, adaptación, consenso..

### INTRODUCTION

A Qibla which actually becomes the only point of prayer orientation for Muslims turns out to be a problem when applied in the practice of worship in a place far from the Arabian peninsula. People always try to determine the right direction of Qibla when performing prayers because they are related to the validity of

a prayer. Based on this consideration, people used various methods to determine the right direction. Earlier scholars used guidelines based on astronomy with an introduction to the location and motion of celestial bodies to determine the direction of Qibla as technology advances; astronomers created some geometric formulas that are supported by tools such as the theodolite to determine the direction of Qibla more accurately. The latest development is that people can easily find accurate Qibla direction by using an Android device connected with GPS.

In 2010, an initiative emerged from the Rukyah and Hisab MUI Board of Southeast Sulawesi Province to re-calibrate the Qibla direction in Southeast Sulawesi using GPS devices starting from mosques in the city of Kendari. This activity was controversial because most of the direction of the mosque was not built with consideration of geographical accuracy. Moreover, the direction of a Qibla is seen not only related to technical issues of measurement but also touches the realm of interpretation, giving rise to two opposing opinions. In this case, there are skewed towards science and views that are skewed towards socio-mythological aspects. In the first group, accuracy is a non-negotiable keyword, especially now that there is the technology that allows it to be done, while the second group places more emphasis on the aspects of belief that often do not use geographic accuracy considerations first (Alnizar & Munjid: 2020, pp. 29-51). Jamaah (prayer together) tends to never question or question the competence of religious leaders in determining the direction of Qibla. This showed a large hole left in the study of the controversy in determining the direction of Qibla, such as the question of dynamics of authoritative relations between ulama and pilgrims.

This article was written to close the hole by examining any dynamics with the relationship between religion, culture, and technology. The technological sophistication was offered by Islamic applications, such as Qibla finder, Qibla direction, Miqat, Qibla compass, and so on, as well as recommendations from the results of repeated measurements by the MUI were not necessarily accepted and used as a benchmark. Some mosques in Kendari did not make any changes related to the Qibla direction, even though they had been re-measured by the MUI team. For this reason, the focus of this article is (a) How did the controversy in determining the direction of Qibla occur in Kendari? (b) which are any factors influenced by the controversy? (c) how can community acceptance and consensus be achieved about Qibla's direction?

This article was written based on three basic assumptions, such as (a) technology delegitimizes scholars. The logic of science and the ability of technology to present empirical evidence and provide a variety of references in religious practices make millennial worshipers no longer fully believe in the fatwas delivered by scholars; (b) technology with useful about religious practices required adjustment and the infrastructure behind it. Technology and religion have different bases for scientific legitimacy. If technology is built on reasoning and empirical evidence, which is religion can be built on faith and loyalty. Therefore, reconciling these two perspectives required adjusting an open mindset, a participatory process, and institutions that emphasize dialogue; (c) technology can be the basis for strengthening religion through democratic consensus. A new understanding of theological beliefs built on technological evidence will be able to increase faith. The consensus is formed from all the elements and processes that will form a modern and solid religious society.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Controversy in Qibla Direction

Qibla's direction is one of the absolute requirements in determining a validity on worship for Muslims. Hamdani et al. revealed that the direction of Qibla was used as a pointer that must be considered in the context of worship, especially in prayer where the direction of Qibla, which is determined based on the position of the Kaaba (Hamdani et al.: 2020, pp. 82-87). The importance of Qibla for Muslims raises many assumptions and controversies in determining the direction and calculation that is appropriate for the construction of places of worship. Rozi stated that humans are often trapped in interpretation without

regard to accuracy and reality, such a deviation in the direction of Qibla. This often happens because the understanding of the direction of Qibla is based on the previous Qibla of places on worship or adjusting the decisions of ulama (Rozi: 2017). Some mistakes were made and resulted in an MUI fatwa about the better direction of a Qibla heading west. However, these fatwas often experience debates caused by scientific discrepancies with the practice of prayers where many mosques and mashallah deviate from the Qibla direction. While, these considerations did not go through geographic accuracy considerations first (Alnizar & Mun-jid: 2020, pp. 29-51). Correspondingly, Ikbāl writes that the determination of the place or direction of the Qibla is influenced by the interpretation and understanding of fiqh that has been believed by Muslims (Ikbāl: 2019). This triggers the formation of two conflicting groups, such as pro-science-astronomy and socio-mythology, in determining the Qibla.

A wrong orientation is biased in the implementation and validity of worship procedures for Muslims. In this case, there are three ways to determine the correct direction of Qibla in the controversy that appears in some literature. First, geographic can measurements for the distance of mosque construction with the center of a Qibla, such the Kaaba, using distance aids such as Google Earth, GPS, and geographic calculations. Second, use the theodolite method in mapping based on trigonometric calculations and formulas. Third, the al-Qibla method is based on the sun's position right above the Kaaba (Galadari: 2013, pp. 165-193). Based on these points, Saksono et al. explained that a case study in Klaten, Central Java. There are social conflicts and disputes between two groups of people caused by differences in understanding and belief in the changing direction of Qibla (Saksono et al.: 2018, pp. 129-138). The solution was made by agreeing to change the direction of the Qibla by building a new mosque in accordance with the calculation and measurement of the geographical area. But not only a Qibla debated that occurred in several countries, but it also was caused as a result of the polemic of space and boundaries with other spaces (Foley: 2012; Verkaaik: 2012, pp. 161-176). Therefore, understanding the meaning and direction of Qibla needs to be understood and agreed upon as a link between human interaction with God.

### Interest Group

Interest groups become social groups that have an important role and influence in society. Quoting from Klüver & Zeidler discussed that interest groups have power in various sectors of activity, which is the economy. Actors play an important role in shaping the power to govern society. Interest groups have strong access and preferences in sending policies to decision-makers. Just as political power provides existence to interest groups with the relationship between interest groups and political activities such reciprocal (Klüver & Zeidler: 2019, pp. 459-478), strengthening this fact, Finger writes that interest groups have power and dominance with contributing to decision control (Finger: 2019, pp. 852-886). However, interest groups only act as policy givers, but not power over the government (Beyers & Braun: 2014, pp. 93-121). Interest groups usually have high competition between groups. So, to reach the absolute power of individuals, agree on the formation of interest groups with a common goal. Interest groups are a combination of individuals with strong authority and relationship resources, so they are always identified with groups that put pressure on democracy in an institution (Dusso: 2010, pp. 55-67).

Interest groups have various democratic goals in realizing interests. Through agreements and common goals, the actors of interest build power of relations through politicians and the media. Binderkrantz and Krøyer revealed that interest groups have a strategy to realize their ambitions in government by using access and influence in the media to pressure decision-makers. Binderkrantz and Krøyer add that there are two aspects that are relevant in interest groups (Binderkrantz & Krøyer: 2012, pp. 115-138). (1) to become an interest group, each individual needs resources assessed by political institutions related to needed; (2) money is a facility for the law of supply and demand specifically for more or fewer problems. These interest groups are referred to as lobbyists who form practices and rules in certain institutions and are harmonized with rules that benefit the position of interests of this organized group (Klüver: 2012, pp. 1114-1133; Marshall: 2010, pp. 553-575). A very important role in government makes the interest groups have a very good reputation

for getting opportunities from their partners. Therefore, interest groups interpret and glorify reputation as a symbol of identity in gaining trust (Heaney: 2014, pp. 66-81).

### **Social Consensus**

In a debate, social consensus becomes an important element in reaching a mutual agreement between social groups. Quoting from Krueger said that consensus is understood as a decision for a common interest in realizing diversity and consolidation by considering the ideas of context and the rationality of problem-solving among social groups (Krueger: 1998, pp. 163-240). Social consensus can produce interaction and indicated harmony between individuals/groups that form a network with continues to grow and move in the social dimension. Baronchelli and Díaz-Guilera add that communication and technology influence the results of consensus in networks and social interactions where fast and adaptive populations minimize competition between groups (Baronchelli & Díaz-Guilera: 2012). Therefore, social consensus also creates complex and realistic models/forms for common things, so any consensus tends to strengthen the existing relationships. Reaffirming this fact, Clarkson et al. stated that the persistence of consensus is based on the certainty of attitudes of individuals/groups that encourage the search for social identity and equality to relate in groups (Clarkson et al.: 2013, pp. 1019-1022). Therefore, social consensus can be explained as a decision-making phrase that embodies the bonds of trust and regularity and shares expectations, although it is based on differences and debate (Ciao & Lat-ner: 2011, pp. 1768-1774).

Social consensus becomes a form of awareness and solidarity within individuals/groups. The formation of collective / collective awareness creates some agreement, which is realized for the goals and interests that have been aspired. Raeijmaekers and Maesele wrote that consensus is a hegemony, but part of consensus is the result of ideological domination (Raeijmaekers & Maesele: 2017, pp. 647-663). Therefore, consensus can influence the behavior, attitudes, and reasoning of each individual (Prislin: 2012, pp. 327-339). Strengthening this fact, Cheng et al. wrote that there are three levels in social consensus, such as (1) value preferences that contain consensus and influence decision making; (2) alternative actions needed to achieve social consensus; (3) level of relationships between individuals/groups that lead to social status (Cheng et al.: 2020, pp. 30-43). Departing from several things above, Eyadat wrote that a case study aimed at consensus facilitating dialogue between Muslim and non-Muslim groups contributed to the reconstruction of tensions, conflicts, and misunderstandings with a mutual agreement (Eyadat: 2012, pp. 507-516). In this case, social consensus produces pluralism in promoting social and political equality between individuals/groups who disagree. Therefore, social consensus directly implies the resolution of differences/contradictions created for the realization of a social group.

### **METHODOLOGY**

This article was written based on data collected from a series of observations and participation in the process of re-measuring the Qibla direction in 20 mosques in the Kendari City area, or 5.47 percent of the total of 365 registered mosques in the registration of the Kendari City Ministry of Religion mosque. In each district, there are two different categories of mosques chosen as research locations. As a member of the Southeast Sulawesi Province MUI Rukyah and Hilal team, some researchers also visited several mosques (jami', large, grand). The grand mosque, as well as several popular new mosques that were visited by worshippers. The time to re-measure a Qibla direction which is carried out in 2019. Measurements are using the level of the students' devices, theodolite, and several Android GPS devices that use different applications (Google Art, Qibla Finder, Qibla Direction, Miqat, and I pray) to obtain more data accurate as a calibration basis. In addition, a series of in-depth interviews were also conducted with six taking figures/mosque leaders who were re-measured in relation to the history of determining the direction of the previous Qibla. Their views on the measurement results and attitudes/plans to be carried out according to the recommendations given by the team. Sometimes (in atwo-month interval), some teams held a repeat visit to find out the response of the mosque manager's actions and reasons as well.

### **RESULTS**



Some effort can determine the direction of Qibla in Kendari, which has been caused by controversy in the community because it was in direct contact with an idea of the validity of prayer. This controversy also reappeared when there was a viral report on social media about the location of a direction of the sun, which is said to be 'just above the Ka'bah' on a certain date, followed by a recommendation to revise the Qibla direction. Moreover, the idea was supported by MUI North Sulawesi by sending a team to calibrate the Qibla direction. An invitation to determine the direction of a Qibla more accurately with the support of technology, which was responded to very well by many mosques in Kendari by rearranging the shaft despite having to sacrifice the layout of the mosque's room. But, for some mosque managers, the effort to revise the Qibla direction left a fundamental question regarding knowledge that had been believed to be the truth and had been practiced for years.

The revision of a Qibla direction is seen to have fundamental implications in three aspects, such as (a) stability in performing of prayers, (b) aesthetics were related to the rearrangement of shaf that does not fit the original building, and (c) the problem of waqf rhetoric. In terms of worship practices, changes in the direction toward prayer have a direct implication on solitude, especially as this relates to worship that has been going on for years.

Obviously, the solemnness felt will be different, because all this time the direction is considered to be correct and correct, but after knowing that the direction of a Qibla is incorrect, well if this is still followed by not making changes, then clearly disturbing the solemnity in worship and that very disturbing to the spirit of worship. Different spirit before knowing the position of a Qibla direction (Muh. Nawir, SE, 47 years old, Takmir Mosque at Nurul Falah Mosque, West Kendari District)

In addition, adjustments made in revising the Qibla direction are also seen as disturbing the aesthetics (Changing Qibla Direction) is also related to change the beauty of the mosque, which was previously a good form of shape and yard, with changes affecting the shape of any page and shaf (Interview with M. Nawir, S, E., age 47 years). Furthermore, it was also feared that it would violate the waqf Amar...(Changing the direction of Qibla) means violating for the wish that endowment giver, because it is no longer appropriate from its original form (Jabbar, 49 years old, Takmir Madjis al Jaraiyh, Kendari).

The determination of a direction of Qibla in the past, which was the domain of religious leaders and worshipers only fully following the direction of the Imam / Kyai and believed that a Qibla direction was accurate. During this time in the Muslim community in Kendari, it is still believed that the setting of a sunset is a Qibla. As a result, many mosques and prayer rooms were built with non-uniform coordinates. Directives are received from religious leaders when building a mosque, then taken for granted, and worshipers never questioned with the accuracy of a Qibla direction.

'During this direction of a Qibla is right, because the results of the determination for community leaders, based on the view that where any setting of the sun is where the direction of Qibla (Abu Sofian, S.T, 48 years, Takmir Amaliyah Mosque, Kendari District).

'... In the midst of the absence of a clear definition for any direction of Qibla according to the Qur'an and the Hadith, the instructions from religious leaders who were obeyed became the main reference in determining the direction of Qibla (Zul Fadly SB, 49 years, Takmir Masjid At-Taqwa Kec. Kendari).

Some leaders think that actually measurement is not necessary because even in the past, community leaders or scholars used a compass to determine the direction of Qibla (Interview with H. Andi Muh. Sadyad, S. Sos, 51 years, supervisor of the mosque management in the Old City Grand Mosque). Accuracy, in this case, is recognized not as important; what is even more important is the issue of belief and trust in the pious figure. Therefore, changes in the direction of the Qibla that have been believed and have been carried out from generation to generation and based on the provisions of religious leaders do not need to be done because it will only interfere with public confidence (Mulyadi, 40 years, Takmir Babul Jihad Mosque, Kec. Wua-wua). They also stated that the piety of a religious leader who gave directions to the Qibla was unquestionable and doubtful.

Since the beginning of a Qibla direction calibration efforts in the city of Kendari, which is not a mandatory instruction from the Ministry of Religion or MUI, even then, it is only a suggestion, so a manager of the mosque has the right to consider adopting or refusing. According to the Qibla calibration team, the direction to adjust a Qibla is voluntary. "The initiative for this adjustment is purely from us, based on the awareness on the lack of accuracy regarding the Qibla direction. So far, the only important thing is facing west, and sunset is the direction of Qibla. If this is actually followed, it does not lead to Mecca but to Africa. Technological advances in modern astronomy can now be seen in a more accurate direction, around 21o 58 m from West to North. Moreover, technically team went to the mosques; they brought GPS, asked by permission, and took measurements. The result is a recommendation about an accurate Qibla direction which is 21o 58 m from West to North. But, again, this is only informational, whether or not it is up to the mosque's management".

For the MUI team, the main foundation of this activity is a desire to maintain the validity of prayer because facing the Qibla is one of the prerequisites for prayer. This is in accordance with the command of Allah in the Qur'an surah Al-Baqarah: 144 is explicitly stated 'turn your face towards the Grand Mosque, and wherever you are, turn your face towards it.' This command was later strengthened by the Hadith of Al-Bukhari's History that 'one day the Prophet Muhammad prayed on the vehicle (his mount) he faced in the direction of his mount, and when he was about to pray fardhu he went down then faced the Qibla' (Al-Bukhari History). This history confirms that prayer is only valid if in the direction of a Qibla, although there are exceptions to certain conditions, for example, when it is safar (travel). Based on the argument that MUI considers technological advances in determining the location of locations, using GPS (Global Positioning System) allows people to determine the exact and valid location. Thus, there should be no reason for determining the direction of Qibla based on estimates alone.

Until now, efforts to determine the direction of the mosque's qibla only reached about 10 percent of the total 365 mosques in the city of Kendari. A number of mosques were immediately made adjustments to the Qibla direction by rearranging the rows, as happened at the Old City Grand Mosque, Kendari.

"...Yes, it must be admitted with the determination of our Qibla was wrong, and Alhamdulillah, now with the help of this technology, we know for sure where the correct is from Qibla. Therefore, we should just adjust, because this matter is the same as whether or not the prayer is valid' (H.Andi Muh. Arsyad. 51 years, manager for mosque management in Masjid Raya Kota Lama).

Meanwhile, several other mosque administrators claimed to need time to consult with the mosque management to make adjustments.

"However, technology is more accurate, but in practice, we have to consider many things. It is also not possible to tear down the mosque first. If shifting the shaf might be easy, but it feels different, not to mention the strange facing position, the angle of 22o is a lot. Not to mention matters with Amar waqf, we are sometimes afraid to also violate it (Zul Fadly SB. Age 49 years, the mosque of management At-Taqwa Kendari Regency)".

In general, mosque managers in Kendari receive any recommendations about a more accurate Qibla direction, but some do not necessarily make adjustments. For mosques that are not in the right direction for the qibla, by re-measuring based on recommendations from the recked ruling body and MUI, the worshipers who are still pro to traditional do not fight, let alone move the mosque, at least only issue views about the Qibla direction that has been done for years. Then, the issue of the legal status of the prayer so far, after being given an explanation accompanied by a modern application, they understand the position of the actual direction, they accept it well. Then, from the party who wants a chance to avoid a lot of costs, if you do demolition, with enough of the changed by shaft lines.

## DISCUSSION

The controversy that arises from determining any direction of a Qibla is actually a paradigmatic clash between empirical science and emotional beliefs triggered by changing technological contexts. The widespread use of the internet and social media has given rise to new horizons in the mindset of the people that lead to the strengthening of rationality and empiricism. This raises a problem in understanding the foundation of worship that originally originated in the Holy Qur'an and the Hadith. Traditionally, the interpretation of the holy book is the main domain of the scholars who specifically study various aspects of the scriptures, ranging from grammar to semantic. As a result, it appears to be an authoritative regime of knowledge built on competence over interpretation. Only the scholars are allowed and have the right to give an interpretation of the sacred texts, while lay worshipers must follow the interpretations made by the scholars. This can be seen very clearly in the case of determining the direction of Qibla, where almost no questions arise from pilgrims about its accuracy. The instructions given by the ulama, even though they did not master astronomy, were taken for granted and were believed to be the right direction for Qibla.

The presence of technology is also related to the identification of places and navigation that has high precision in this case of delegitimization with the role of the ulama in determining the direction of Qibla. The development of navigation applications that are embedded in Android devices makes people dare to think critically and question information that is deemed inappropriate armed with information obtained from the internet. Or in other words, the presence of technology, in this case, emerged as a breakthrough of authoritative relations, which had been the domain of the ulemas and at the same time imposed a more egalitarian dialogical relationship. The scholars are now required to be able to creatively provide explanations and interpretations that are supported by data or empirical evidence. Explanations about dogma and the basis of religious practice are now not enough if only explained by interpretation and examples of stories mentioned in the scriptures and Hadith.

At the same time, technology can communicate usefully with any categories for people in new groups and understanding new religions as well. This led to the emergence of controversy in religious practice, including in determining the direction of Qibla. The first group has consisted of some people who quickly accepted and revised the Qibla direction of their mosque. The digital evidence shown by the team was fully accepted and was seen as a step to perfect worship. The first group is characterized by being young, progressive, familiar with the internet, and serving in mosques under Muhammadiyah, who are more familiar with the reckoning method. This tradition of thinking facilitates were also acceptance with technological innovations that lead to the improvement of the pillars of worship. The revision of a Qibla direction, as evidenced by the coordinate points, further strengthens the stability of worship.

The second group is the group that feels they have to consider carefully before taking action to adjust a Qibla direction based on the team's recommendations. They consider other aspects related to the belief in the ulama, Amar waqf, the problem of solitude in worship, even the possibility of conflict in the practice of worship. For this group, harmony and cohesiveness are shared values that must be maintained, besides, of course, the reasons for the economic implications related to changes in Qibla's direction. This group actually did not refute or reject the recommendation, but they felt the need for additional consideration, including the advice of the ulama leaders, who traditionally were a source of knowledge. So, mosques are managed by older mosques management, which is less familiar with the internet, and in environments that are thick with authoritative relations tend to take longer and adapt to change.

So, the root also causes of the controversy lies not in acceptance or rejection, but rather a fundamental difference in the tradition of authoritative generalist decision-making versus specialist democratic tradition. In the authoritative group, the role of ulama is broad and overwhelming to fields outside his competence. This can be seen clearly how the scholars of this group are so trusted in determining the direction of Qibla, even though they lack competence in astronomy. In the second group, it does not apply. Science data is



empirical evidence that does not need to be questioned or reconfirmed on the figure of the cleric because it was compiled by a group of experts who have competence in astronomy. So, technological interference in the realm of religious practice is a necessity, but it becomes controversial when it is placed on a framework of authority, both scientific and political.

## CONCLUSION

An absence of rejection of the recommendations of a Rukyah Team and Hisab MUI regarding adjustment to the Qibla direction by the mosque managers in the city of Kendari shown that any controversy related to this issue did not touch the ideological domain. Various groups with different scientific traditions apparently did not question the findings of the MUI Team regarding an average deviation of 21 to 58 m from West to North or 680.2 m from the North. The problem is an adaptation from any recommendation. An implication of the recommendation is an adjustment of direction, which directly impacts the arrangement of shafts and space. For most mosques in Kendari, this is a big problem because it not only makes the layout of the worship space look strange but also related to the waqf issue. This also shows that the determination of a direction of Qibla, which has now shifted into the realm of technology rather than being interpretive. The inevitability offered by technology regarding the Qibla direction is considered to actually support the provisions of fiqh. So, this change does not lead to ideological debate but rather is practical. The implications of the mosque's physical changes and financing are important considerations in implementing the MUI's recommendations regarding the appropriate Qibla direction.

Differences in scientific traditions and authoritative relationships are precisely what make the difference in the adaptation process. In mosques managed by progressive of mosques, managers tend to adopt recommendations more quickly by changing safe because, for them, the direction is related to legitimacy. While, for other management, the mosque was emphasized with the feeling of stability in worship, so that they tended to be slower to adopt the recommendation. A dimension that may be an issue in this article is its emphasis on the manager's perspective. This research does not refer to the perspective of pilgrims at all. Implicitly, pilgrims are placed as users, not agents who participate in owning mosques. Therefore, it would be very interesting if the study of re-measuring the direction of Qibla also considers the pilgrims' side. Notes about the response of pilgrims after the direction of the mosque's qibla adjusted to the MUI recommendations will make this study better able to explain this controversy more comprehensively.

## BIODATA

**R. MUHALLING:** He is a lecturer in Institut Agama Islam Negeri Kendari and teaching any major about Islamic and Economic. The current affiliation of Muhalling is Institute Agama Islam Negeri Kendari; E-mail: rusdinmuhalling02@gmail.com.

**M. HASBI:** He is a lecturer in Institut Agama Islam Negeri Bone and teaching any major about Islamic and Economic. The current affiliation of Hasbi is Institute Agama Islam Negeri Bone; E-mail: hasbi070767@gmail.com.

**ST. NAJMAH:** She is a lecturer in Institut Agama Islam Negeri Bone and teaching in any major about Islamic and Economic. The current affiliation of Najmah is Institute Agama Islam Negeri Bone; E-mail: sittinajmah88@gmail.com.

**S. ANSELLA:** He is a lecturer in Institut Agama Islam Negeri Kendari and teaching in any major about Islamic and Economic. The current affiliation of Ansellia is Institute Agama Islam Negeri Kendari; E-mail: suman\_ansella@yahoo.com.

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