



ANALYSIS OF PRICE MANIPULATION IN THE SPICE TRADE IN BARUS DISTRICT WAHBAH AZ-ZUHAILI'S PERSPECTIVE

Al Anshori Akbar Sigalingging¹, Rahmat Hidayat²

^{1,2}Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara, Indonesia

*Corresponding Author: anshoriakbar0204211007@uinsu.ac.id

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ABSTRACT

*This study aims to analyze the practice of price manipulation in the spice trade at Barus Market, Central Tapanuli Regency, and to review its compliance with the principles of Islamic economic law according to the thoughts of Wahbah Az-Zuhaili. Using a qualitative approach with juridical-empirical methods, data were collected through interviews, participant observation, and documentation studies, then analyzed thematically with source triangulation. The results of the study indicate the existence of two dominant patterns of price manipulation: price discrimination due to information asymmetry and stock retention to create artificial scarcity. Both practices are considered to violate the principles of Islamic muamalah, particularly the prohibition of *tadlis* (fraud) and *gharar* (speculation), and are contrary to the values of honesty (*shidq*), justice (*'adl*), and willingness (*taradhi*). These findings confirm the relevance of Wahbah Az-Zuhaili's thoughts, which encourage the role of the state in setting prices (*tas'ir*) to protect the public interest when market distortions occur. This research contributes to strengthening the literature on Islamic economic law by providing empirical evidence regarding traditional market practices, while also offering recommendations in the form of increased regulation, price transparency, and consumer education to create a fair, transparent, and sustainable trading system.*

Keywords: Price manipulation, spices, Islamic economics, Wahbah Az-Zuhaili, Barus Market

1. INTRODUCTION

The spice trade has long been a strategic sector in Indonesia's economic history. Since the pre-modern era, spices have not only served as an economic commodity but also held cultural and symbolic value that strengthened national identity (Rasjid, 2014). The Barus region of Central Tapanuli Regency is known as one of the oldest spice ports in the archipelago, thus playing a crucial role in shaping regional and global trade dynamics (Prayitno et al., 2022). However, the

development of modern markets without adequate regulatory oversight has led to the emergence of unfair trade practices, including price manipulation that exploits the weak bargaining power of consumers and local farmers (Lestari, 2023).

From an Islamic economic perspective, markets should operate based on a healthy supply and demand mechanism, upholding the values of honesty (*shidq*), justice (*'adl*), and the prohibition of *gharar* (uncertainty) and *tadlis* (fraud) (Hidayat, 2022). However, the reality on the ground demonstrates distortions caused by trader dominance, information asymmetry, and farmers' limited access to price information. This situation not only creates economic injustice but also violates the *maqasid* of sharia, which aims to safeguard wealth (*hifz al-mal*) and protect fairness in transactions (Sativa, 2024).

The thinking of Wahbah Az-Zuhaili, a contemporary jurist of *muamalah*, offers a normative framework for assessing such practices. According to Az-Zuhaili, every transaction must be based on the principles of consent (*taradhi*) and justice (*'adl*), and free from the exploitation of unequal information. In the context of traditional markets, price manipulation is a form of *tadlis* and *gharar*, which are clearly prohibited by sharia because they harm one party and undermine public trust (Aldi, 2024). This view provides a strong normative basis for assessing trade practices in Barus, while also emphasizing the importance of state intervention through price fixing (*tas'ir*) in the event of market disruption (Taqwa, 2023).

Previous studies have focused more on Indonesia's spice export potential, downstreaming, and challenges to global competitiveness, but have focused less on the dynamics of price manipulation at the local market level from an Islamic legal perspective (Khotimah et al., 2024). For example, Prayitno et al.'s (2022) study emphasized the decline in global spice competitiveness, while Lestari (2023) found the practice of mixing spice qualities that harms farmers, but failed to address the normative aspects of Sharia law. Thus, there is a research gap in integrating the phenomenon of spice price manipulation with a comprehensive analysis of Islamic economic law.

This study aims to bridge this gap by analyzing price manipulation practices in the Barus Market through the framework of Wahbah Az-Zuhaili's thinking. This research not only describes the deviant practices but also assesses their compliance with Islamic *muamalah* principles and offers solutions based on values of justice and sustainability. With the majority of the Barus community being Muslim, this analysis is highly relevant for strengthening a fairer, more transparent, and more competitive Sharia trading system at the local and regional levels.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a field research design with an empirical juridical approach. This approach was chosen to examine direct buying and selling

practices at Barus Market and then relate them to the principles of Islamic economic law according to Wahbah Az-Zuhaili. This empirical juridical approach allows researchers to understand the actual interactions between traders and buyers while assessing the extent to which trading practices conform to or conflict with Sharia principles (Marzuki, 2007).

The data used included primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained through semi-structured interviews with traders, buyers, and community leaders, as well as through participant observation of market pricing mechanisms. Secondary data were collected from various sources, such as local government archives, official documents from relevant agencies, academic journals, and Islamic jurisprudence literature, particularly Wahbah Az-Zuhaili's work, "Al-Fiqh al-Islāmī wa Adillatuhu," which serves as a normative reference (Az-Zuhaili, 2001).

Data collection was conducted in several stages. First, semi-structured interviews with traders and buyers were conducted to explore their experiences regarding pricing practices. Second, participant observation of buying and selling interactions at Barus Market was conducted to understand actual transaction patterns and market dynamics (Moleong, 2017). Third, a documentary study was conducted to strengthen validity with relevant secondary data.

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The analysis stages included data coding, categorization, identification of price manipulation patterns, and linking them to Islamic transaction principles, such as the prohibition of *tadlis* (fraud) and *gharar* (uncertainty). To strengthen validity, this study employed source triangulation techniques, comparing data from interviews, observations, and documentation. The validation process was also conducted through member checking, confirming findings with informants to ensure data interpretation remained consistent with reality on the ground (Miles & Huberman, 2014).

Furthermore, this study upheld research ethics by maintaining the confidentiality of informants' identities and obtaining informed consent before conducting interviews. This aligns with the principles of qualitative research, which emphasize openness, trust, and responsibility towards participants (Creswell, 2018). With this methodological framework, the research is expected to be able to produce valid empirical findings and have normative relevance from the perspective of Islamic economic law.

3. RESULT AND ANALYSIS

Price Manipulation Patterns in Buying and Selling at Barus Market

Price manipulation practices in buying and selling at Barus Market are not merely sporadic or incidental actions carried out by isolated individuals, but rather a systemic and recurring collective pattern in daily trading activities. This pattern has become deeply ingrained in market dynamics, becoming part of the structure

of trader behavior and directly impacting the economic relationship between traders and buyers. Identified price manipulation falls into two main forms, each with different mechanisms and consequences, but both essentially undermine the basic principles of fairness and transparency in the buying and selling process. These include: (Wibowo, 2023)

a) Price Manipulation Based on Information Asymmetry

This price manipulation occurs when traders intentionally set different prices to different buyers (Adelin et al., 2023). This is based on subjective variables such as the buyers' region of origin and their level of understanding of prevailing market prices. In other words, buyers from outside the Barus Market area who are considered less familiar or uninformed about fair prices are prime targets for being charged significantly higher prices than local buyers. This phenomenon reflects a striking information asymmetry, where traders have a far more comprehensive and strategic information advantage than buyers (Wibowo, 2022). This information asymmetry not only creates economic injustice but also undermines consumer confidence in the market as an institution that should be fair and transparent. Theoretically, information asymmetry is a major cause of market failure, as buyers are unable to make optimal decisions due to limited information (Rawung et al., 2024).

b) Stock Retention and Price Speculation

This stock retention is carried out intentionally by traders, both small and large, to create temporary, artificial shortages that trigger significant price increases when demand increases. From an economic perspective, this action can be categorized as an unhealthy form of market speculation, where traders use control of stock as a tool to manipulate market prices (Mufid, 2021). The practice of holding stock can disrupt the natural balance between supply and demand. Prices, which should reflect production, distribution, and consumer demand, become biased and experience inflation that is not based on actual economic reality. In other words, price increases are driven more by artificial interventions aimed at achieving short-term profits, rather than fundamental market factors.

Based on the explanation above, the case is reinforced by interviews with a trader (Mrs. Tiyah), who implemented different pricing strategies depending on whether the customer was known or unknown. This is problematic because the prices set tend to be unreasonable. She then explained that she did this to gain greater profits. This constitutes market manipulation because it is considered an activity that can undermine market integrity and consumer confidence in market activities. Consumer trust is a crucial factor in increasing market efficiency. Price manipulation and market manipulation are prohibited because investors desperately need information about trading activities and market conditions, or

prices reflected by the strength of the buying and selling bids and offers, as a basis for making investment decisions (Balfas, 1998).

Causes and Information Asymmetry in Transactions

Analysis of the root causes of price manipulation indicates that the primary factor is information inequality, or what is known in economic literature as information asymmetry, between traders and buyers. Information asymmetry is not simply a difference in information, but a condition in which one party (the trader) has access to and control over much more complete and accurate information than the other party (the buyer) (Sawaluddin, 2017). This imbalance significantly impacts transaction behavior and creates a loophole exploited for price manipulation. For example, "buyers from outside the region and making their first transaction at Barus Market rely heavily on information provided by traders as their primary source of knowledge about prices and product quality." This situation leaves them in a vulnerable position because they lack valid and reliable alternative sources of information to objectively compare prices. Buyers' inability to access transparent and accurate price data leads to price manipulation, where traders selectively set higher prices based on assumptions about the buyer's level of understanding. This situation is further exacerbated by buyers' limited access to information technology, preventing them from utilizing digital media or other communication networks to check prices in real time. As a result, buyers are not only disadvantaged economically but also lose trust in the market as an institution that should function fairly (Nubahai, 2023).

In addition to informational aspects, cultural and social factors also reinforce the dominant position of traders in Barus Market. Traders not only have an economic advantage through their control of capital and distribution networks, but also possess social advantages in the form of strong networks of relationships among fellow traders and with local community leaders. In this social context, buyers, in particular, often feel intimidated or reluctant to negotiate prices, especially if they come from outside the market community or the surrounding area. This attitude is reinforced by cultural norms that value hierarchy and power relations in social interactions (Khattab et al., 2013).

Review of Muamalah Values from Wahbah Az-Zuhaili's Perspective

Supervision of goods and/or services circulating in the market, whether by the public, consumer protection agencies, or the government, is essentially in line with Islamic muamalah values, which emphasize honesty, fairness, and transparency in transactions. Efforts such as research, testing, providing risk information, labeling, and production quality control demonstrate the application of the principles of amanah (trustworthiness) and shidq (trustworthiness) to prevent fraud (tadlis) or uncertainty (gharar) that harm consumers. From a muamalah perspective, government intervention through regulation and supervision, as stipulated in

Government Regulation Number 58 of 2001, also reflects the role of hisbah (lawful trust) in safeguarding the public interest (maslahah 'ammah) and ensuring that business actors meet ethical business standards in accordance with sharia (Permata, 2016).

According to the perspective of Islamic muamalah jurisprudence, particularly the thinking of Wahbah Az-Zuhaili, the price manipulation practices that occurred at Barus Market not only reflect a violation of trade ethics but also constitute a form of injustice that directly contradicts the basic principles of sharia in buying and selling. Az-Zuhaili emphasized that legitimate transactions in Islam must be built on a foundation of honesty (shidq), justice (adl), and mutual consent (taradhi) (Eti, 2025). When price manipulation practices occur, where traders charge different prices based on the background or unfamiliarity of the buyer, this is considered an act of *tadlis*, namely misleading information that is expressly prohibited in Islam. *Tadlis* undermines trust in transactions and causes one party, in this case the buyer, to suffer losses due to the lack of accurate and transparent price information (Hanifiyah, 2024). Furthermore, the act of intentionally withholding stock to create scarcity and increase prices is a form of *gharar*, namely uncertainty and speculation that are prohibited in muamalah. *Gharar* is considered to disrupt the balance and certainty of contracts, as prices no longer reflect real market conditions but are manipulated for one-sided interests (Hanifiyah, 2024). According to Az-Zuhaili, this practice eliminates the blessings of acquired wealth and shifts transactions from a public interest orientation to a means of economic exploitation (Khattab et al., 2013). If a trader holds back essential goods in large quantities for maximum profit amidst high market demand, their actions not only violate Sharia law but also violate their social responsibilities as an economic actor in the Islamic system. However, in Islamic jurisprudence, there is a consumer protection mechanism through the concept of *khiyar ghabn*, which is the right given to buyers to cancel a transaction if proven to have been deceived or suffered significant losses due to ignorance of the actual price (Anam, 2017). In the practice of price manipulation at Barus Market, *khiyar ghabn* is highly relevant because it reflects the importance of justice and protection for the informationally weak. Az-Zuhaili stated that this right of *khiyar* can be waived if the buyer has used the goods or left them for a long period without protesting. However, this right remains an important foundation for upholding the ethics of balanced buying and selling (Sawaluddin, 2017).

Az-Zuhaili's view also aligns with the definitions of buying and selling by classical scholars such as Sayyid Sabiq and Ibn Qudamah. Sayyid Sabiq emphasized that buying and selling is the exchange of property for goods based on mutual consent, which means there must be legal ownership, benefit from the goods, and compensation justified by Sharia law (Sholihah, 2022). Ibn Qudamah emphasized the legal transfer of ownership in transactions, ensuring that every form of exchange of property must be within a legal and fair framework (Zuhdi, 2017).

Therefore, based on the definitions explained, price manipulation, fraud, and speculation not only harm the technical aspects of transactions but also tarnish the spiritual spirit of economic relations. Islam recognizes various forms of buying and selling, such as salam (ordered sale), muqayadhah (barter), muthlaq (regular sale with money), and even the sale of a medium of exchange. All of these forms must adhere to the principles of transparency, be free from gharar (gharar), and not involve any elements of fraud or deception. The practice of traders at Barus Market, which exploits buyers' ignorance to gain unfair profits, violates these principles and falls into the category of transactions that are invalid under Sharia law.

Overall, price manipulation and the withholding of goods that occur in traditional markets like Barus Market raise not only economic issues but also moral and Islamic legal issues. Reflecting on the framework of muamalah, transactions should not be solely oriented towards material gain but must also uphold ethical values, social responsibility, and the principle of justice (Aziz & Arifin, 2013). Wahbah Az-Zuhaili's thinking provides a strong basis for assessing that this phenomenon requires serious attention from religious authorities and local governments to restructure markets as a means of distributing economic justice, rather than a place for the reproduction of structural inequality.

Price Fixing and the Role of the State According to Wahbah Az-Zuhaili

Wahbah Az-Zuhaili's view on the phenomenon of price manipulation in modern markets, such as that which occurred at Barus Market, is a serious issue that demands active state involvement to maintain justice and economic balance. Az-Zuhaili believes that the principle of market freedom in Islam is not an absolute freedom that must be guarded and restricted if elements of corruption are found, namely actions detrimental to society such as speculation and price manipulation by irresponsible traders (Taqwa, 2023). Within this framework, price fixing (tas'ir) by the government is legitimate as a form of sharia-compliant intervention aimed at creating public welfare and preventing collective loss. Price fixing in Islamic economics, according to Az-Zuhaili, is not merely an administrative measure, but rather part of the implementation of the principles of 'adl (justice) and maslahah (public interest). Price fixing refers to the Maliki and Hanafi schools of thought, which permit the government to set prices under certain conditions, particularly when there are unreasonable price fluctuations due to business arbitrariness. In such situations, the state is not only permitted but also obligated to intervene to maintain market balance and ensure the affordability of basic goods for the public, especially those in economically disadvantaged positions (Sukamto, 2015). This fixing is not done unilaterally, but through deliberation with experts and market players to ensure that pricing decisions remain relevant and fair.

Price fixing is discussed in the Quran and is found in the hadith of the Prophet Muhammad, who literally forbids price fixing (Quran, 2:188).

وَلَا تَأْكُلُوا أَمْوَالَكُمْ بَيْنَكُمْ بِالْبَاطِلِ وَتُدْخِلُوا بِهَا إِلَى الْحُكَّامِ لِتَأْكُلُوا فَرِيقًا مِّنْ أَمْوَالِ النَّاسِ بِالْإِثْمِ وَأَنْتُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ

Meaning: "And do not consume your wealth among yourselves unjustly, nor offer it as a bribe to judges with the intention of consuming some of the wealth of others unlawfully, while you know." (Quran 2:188)

Furthermore, pricing is also discussed in the hadith of the Prophet Muhammad SAW, which literally prohibits price fixing during buying and selling in commerce, namely:

مَنْ غَشَّ فَلَيْسَ مِنِّي اِخْرَجَهُ مُسْلِمٌ اَوْ قَالَ: لَيْسَ مِنَّا مَنْ غَشَّ اِخْرَجَهُ اَحْمَدُ وَاِبْنُ مَاجَهَ وَاَبُو دَاوُدَ وَابْنُ أَبِي حَاتِمٍ اَوْ قَالَ: مَنْ غَشَّ فَلَيْسَ مِنَّا اِخْرَجَهُ التِّرْمِذِيُّ اَوْ قَالَ: مَنْ غَشَّ فَلَيْسَ مِنَّا اِخْرَجَهُ ابْنُ حِبَّانَ وَابْنُ أَبِي حَاتِمٍ

Meaning: "Anyone who commits fraud/cheating is not from my group" (HR Muslim) or "It is not our group who commits fraud or cheating" (HR Ahmad, Ibnu Majah, Abu Dawud, al-Baihaqi) "Whoever commits fraud/cheating is not from our group" (HR at-Tirmidhi) "Whoever commits fraud/cheating is not our group" (HR Ibnu Hibban and al-Baihaqi).

The explanation of the verse above is that Allah SWT. Forbids believers from consuming the wealth of their neighbors in unlawful ways, such as through the practice of usury, gambling, and other fraudulent acts. Az-Zuhaili believes that this prohibition applies in situations where price fluctuations are caused by natural market mechanisms, such as supply and demand (Rani, 2019). However, when price increases are caused by engineering or deliberate hoarding of goods by traders and creating scarcity, then state intervention is not only permitted, but becomes mandatory based on the maqashid sharia, namely the protection of the public interest. This is closely related to H.R Abu Dawud, which means "from Abu Hurairah said: Price fluctuations (rises and falls) are the actions of Allah, indeed I want to meet Him, and I do not commit injustice to someone who can be prosecuted from me". Price fixing in the Islamic view is also not a repressive act aimed at suppressing business actors, but to prevent economic exploitation (Dewantara, 2020). Az-Zuhaili even stated that fixing can be applied to goods that are measured and weighed, both in the form of food and non-food items, with the condition of maintaining justice and balance (Al-Albani & Nashirudin, 2011).

Meanwhile, in the transaction aspect, Az-Zuhaili also highlighted the importance of the khiyâr ghabn mechanism, namely the buyer's right to cancel the contract if there is fraud or a price imbalance that is significantly detrimental. If a buyer is deceived by a price far above the market value due to ignorance or persuasion (taghrîr) from the seller, then he has the right to cancel the transaction to avoid dharar (loss). This is in line with the principle of tadrîs, namely the act of hiding deficiencies or falsifying the condition of goods to increase the price. In the Islamic view, this action is haram because it violates the value of honesty and

places the buyer in the dark of information (azh-zhulmah), so that they cannot make rational decisions in purchasing (Al-Albani & Nashirudin, 2011). Az-Zuhaili acknowledged that in buying and selling, profit is not prohibited, but must be obtained ethically and proportionally, which is in line with the view of Imam Malik who stated that the maximum limit of profit that can be considered fair and blessed is one-third of the capital price (Mardiyah, 2024). Profits beyond reasonable limits obtained through deception or ignorance of the other party are considered a form of ghabn fâkhisy (major fraud) which invalidates the contract (Al-Syeikh, 2001). Based on the perspective of fiqh al-iqtishâd (economic jurisprudence), Az-Zuhaili views the state's role in regulating prices as part of the responsibility of al-imâmah (political power) to protect the people from systemic damage caused by uncontrolled free market capitalism. The state must act as hâris (guardian) and râ'in (regulator) to ensure fair distribution of goods, economic stability, and the survival of the poor.

Therefore, Wahbah Az-Zuhaili's thinking on the issue of price fixing demonstrates a highly contextual, rational, and humanistic approach. He balances freedom of business and consumer protection, and prioritizes the public interest in economic regulation. State intervention, in this framework, is not a form of restriction on individual rights, but rather the implementation of the principle of maslahah and the enforcement of economic justice in accordance with the spirit of sharia. So in the context of price manipulation at Pasar Barus, Az-Zuhaili's view provides normative and syar'i justification that the state is obliged to be present and act, in order to prevent greater damage to the community's economic system.

Case Analysis of Spice Trade in Barus District

Price manipulation in trade, based on observations conducted in the Barus traditional market, indicates systemic, repetitive price manipulation practices that significantly influence the dynamics of market price fluctuations. These practices reflect an imbalance in the trade relationship between traders and consumers and distort the principles of transparency and fairness in economic transactions. One of the most glaring forms of price manipulation is price manipulation based on personal relationships. Traders tend to set different prices for customers they know compared to those they do for regular consumers. Examples found in the field show that white pepper is sold for IDR 200,000/kg to regular or familiar customers, while the price for new or unknown customers can reach IDR 280,000/kg. A similar phenomenon occurs with other spice commodities, such as star anise, which is sold for IDR 100,000/kg to familiar buyers but can soar to IDR 200,000/kg to general buyers. In addition to price discrimination, other manipulative strategies have been identified, such as withholding supply to create artificial shortages and mixing product qualities to achieve disproportionate profits. Such practices not only reflect ethical failures in the trading system but also undermine public trust in traditional market mechanisms.

From an Islamic economic perspective, this phenomenon contradicts the core principles of muamalah, which uphold the values of justice (al-'adl), openness (al-shafa), and honesty (al-sidq) (Rasjid, 2014). Islam emphasizes that every economic transaction must be conducted fairly, without any element of exploitation or unclear information (gharar) (Rosyadi, 2019). Price manipulation based solely on social proximity constitutes a form of structural injustice that harms consumers and undermines inclusive market access. From a social perspective, this practice also demonstrates the power relations inherent in economic activity in traditional markets. Personal proximity serves as exclusive social capital, while consumer groups without ties to traders are vulnerable to economic exclusion. This situation exacerbates the gap in access to commodities that should be openly available to all levels of society. Thus, systematic efforts are needed to promote transparency and price standardization in traditional markets, through strengthening trade oversight institutions, educating traders on business ethics, and revitalizing Islamic economic values as a foundation for building a just trading system. Further research is essential to explore the social, economic, and cultural dimensions of this price manipulation practice in more depth, allowing for the formulation of targeted policies and interventions.

4. CONCLUSION

This study found that the practice of price manipulation in the spice trade at Barus Market is a systemic and recurring phenomenon. The main forms of manipulation identified are price discrimination due to information asymmetry and stock retention to create artificial scarcity. This practice not only harms consumers and weakens the bargaining power of farmers, but also undermines the integrity of traditional markets.

From the perspective of Islamic economic law, this phenomenon clearly contradicts the principles of muamalah, which emphasize honesty (shidq), justice ('adl), willingness (taradhi), and prohibition against tadbis (fraud) and gharar (speculation). Wahbah Az-Zuhaili's thinking asserts that in market situations damaged by the arbitrariness of traders, the state has a sharia obligation to intervene through price fixing (tas'ir) to safeguard the public interest.

The theoretical contribution of this study lies in the integration of contemporary muamalah fiqh concepts with empirical analysis of traditional markets, thereby enriching the study of Islamic economic law in the local context. Meanwhile, its practical contribution is through implementation recommendations in the form of strengthening price regulations, providing information transparency, empowering farmers and consumers with technology, and educating traders about Sharia-based business ethics.

Thus, this study emphasizes the importance of building a fair, transparent, and sustainable spice trading system, in line with the maqasid sharia (the primary

objectives of sharia) to safeguard wealth (hifz al-mal) and achieve socio-economic justice. These findings also open the door to further research on concrete strategies for state intervention and Sharia-compliant institutional models that can be applied to reorganize traditional markets as a means of equitable distribution.

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