

## THE ROLE OF LOCAL WISDOM IN THE RELIGIOUS PRACTICES OF JAVANESE MUSLIM COMMUNITIES: AN INTEGRATION STUDY BETWEEN TRADITION AND SHARIA

**Annisa Caesaria Putri**

State Islamic University of Walisongo, Indonesia

[23020780012@student.walisongo.ac.id](mailto:23020780012@student.walisongo.ac.id)

### **Abstract**

This study aims to analyze the role of local wisdom in the religious practices of the Javanese Muslim community and how the process of integration between cultural traditions and Islamic sharia takes place in harmony. Traditions such as slametan, tahlilan, grave pilgrimage, and the commemoration of Islamic holidays show the existence of a dialectic between local Javanese values and normative Islamic teachings which then form a distinctive religious pattern. A qualitative approach with the method of literature study and in-depth interviews is used to uncover the theological, social, and cultural constructions that underlie the practice. The results of the study show that local wisdom functions as a medium for internalizing Islamic teachings, strengthening social cohesion, and building the collective spirituality of the community. The integration of tradition and sharia occurs through the process of adaptation, symbolic reinterpretation, and normative justification based on the concept of benefit, customs that do not contradict the evidence, as well as the principle of *al-muḥāfaẓah 'alā al-qadīm al-ṣāliḥ wa al-akhdhu bi al-jadīd al-aṣlaḥ*. Despite criticism from religious puritanization groups, the majority of Javanese Muslims still maintain tradition as a cultural expression that does not violate the principles of faith. This study concludes that local wisdom is an important element in accommodating Islam with the Javanese social context so that inclusive, moderate, and adaptive religious practices are created to change the times. These findings contribute to the development of socio-religious studies and become the basis for strengthening the archipelago's Islamic narrative from a cultural perspective.

**Keywords:** Local Wisdom, Javanese Islamic Tradition, Sharia, Cultural Integration, Islam Nusantara.

## Introduction

Islam in Indonesia has a unique pattern compared to Islamic practices in other parts of the world. This uniqueness is especially evident in the process of its dissemination which takes place through a peaceful, adaptive, and accommodating approach to local culture. In Java, the process of Islamization does not erase existing traditions, but rather integrates Islamic values into the cultural order of society. This makes Islam in Java appear in a distinctive form, which is often referred to as Nusantara Islam, where Islamic sharia is wrapped in rich Javanese cultural expressions (Kurniawati, 2021).

The phenomenon of acculturation of Islam and Javanese culture has been going on since the early days of the entry of Islam. Scholars, especially Walisongo, used cultural strategies by utilizing local art, symbols, and traditions to convey Islamic teachings. This approach allows Islam to be accepted without major conflicts, while showing Islam's flexibility in interacting with the local culture (Mas'ulah, 2020). This process makes the religious diversity of Javanese people have a distinctive color, where local symbolism combines with Islamic values (Mibtadin, 2022).

The acculturation is manifested in various cultural expressions, such as the art of puppet art, mosque architecture with an overlapping roof, carvings, literature, to ritual forms such as salvation, syawalan, and muploadan. The elements of Islam that entered did not erase previous traditions, but gave birth to a unique form of religiosity. In Koentjaraningrat's perspective, this is referred to as the process of acculturation, which is the acceptance of foreign elements that are adapted without losing the original cultural identity of the recipient (Latif, 2024).

During the Islamic Sultanate, especially Demak, Pajang, and Mataram, acculturation was increasingly evident in various aspects of social and cultural life. The Great Mosque of Demak, for example, reflects the fusion of Islam with Javanese architectural styles. Similarly, the art of puppetry that Sunan Kalijaga uses as a da'wah medium is clear evidence of how Islam adapts to Javanese traditions without losing the substance of the teachings (Mas'ulah, 2020). This phenomenon gave birth to what experts call acculturative Islam (Basyir, 2019).

A number of previous studies have highlighted this phenomenon. For example, Sa'diyah (2018) explains the concept of living Qur'an in Java, where sacred texts are practiced through the context of local culture (Sa'diyah, 2018). Meanwhile, Afiah et al. (2020) emphasized the role of art and architecture as a medium for internalizing Islamic

values (Afiah, 2020). Another study by Malik & Maslahah (2021) highlights how Javanese Islamic identity is formed through the packaging of local culture (Malik, 2021). In fact, recent research reviews the development of contemporary religious traditions such as *okol* in Madura which reflects the continuation of Islamic acculturation and local culture (Firdausi, 2024).

Although there have been many studies on the acculturation of Islam and Javanese culture, most of the research still focuses on the historical aspects of the spread of Islam or on certain forms of artistic expression and rituals. Some studies tend to emphasize the dimensions of syncretism or cultural integration without deeply unraveling the social, religious, and identity implications that emerge from the process (Utami, 2020). In other words, there is a tendency that previous studies stop at the description of phenomena, not fully explaining the contemporary dynamics and challenges of the sustainability of the acculturative tradition.

The research gap that appears is the absence of a comprehensive study that reviews how the acculturation of Islam and Javanese culture not only functions as a historical *da'wah* strategy, but also as a mechanism for the formation of the socio-religious identity of modern Javanese society. In addition, academic discourse still lacks a clear distinction between the concepts of syncretism, acculturation, and inculturation in the context of Islam in Java. In fact, this distinction is important to understand the depth of Islam's interaction with local traditions and its potential implications for contemporary religious practice.

Based on this description, this research is important to be carried out in order to fill the gap in the study of how the acculturation of Islam and Javanese culture forms the pattern of religion as well as the social identity of the Javanese people. This research is expected to be able to answer the problem of how Islamic values are internalized through cultural mediums, as well as how these acculturative forms play a role in maintaining social harmony and strengthening inclusive Islamic understanding in a multicultural society. Thus, this study not only has academic significance, but also practical relevance in understanding the dynamics of the religious diversity of Muslims in Java today.

## **Method**

This study uses a qualitative approach with a field research method that aims to understand the phenomenon of integration between local traditions and Islamic sharia

in the religious practices of the Javanese Muslim community in depth and contextual. Primary data were obtained through participatory observation of several religious rituals that contain elements of local wisdom, such as slametan, tahlilan, and life cycle commemoration, as well as semi-structured interviews with religious leaders, traditional elders, mosque administrators, and community members who are directly involved in the practice. Secondary data were collected through literature reviews of academic journals, Islamic anthropology books, religious fatwas, and relevant local cultural documents. The technique of taking informants is carried out in a purposive and snowball manner to ensure that the perspectives of key actors are comprehensively covered. All data were analyzed using a thematic analysis method with steps of data reduction, data presentation, and inductive conclusions. The validity of the data is maintained through triangulation of sources and techniques, peer discussions, and member checking with informants to verify the researcher's interpretation. With this approach, the research is expected to be able to objectively describe how local wisdom plays a role in shaping the religious practices of the Javanese Muslim community without ignoring the principles of Islamic sharia that are the foundation.

## **Results and Discussion**

### **Javanese Muslim Religious Practices and Cultural Dialectics**

The results of the study show that the religious practices of the Javanese Muslim community reflect the rich dialectic between Islamic sharia and local wisdom (Mas'ulah, 2020). This acculturation shows that Islam in Java does not exist in a rigid form, but peacefully absorbs and adapts to the local cultural structure, thus giving birth to adaptive and contextual religious practices (Toni, 2021). It is this cultural power that then makes Islamic teachings acculturate with local culture, forming distinctive and unique variants of Islam such as Javanese Islam, Madurese Islam, or Sundanese Islam, without depriving Islamic values of their purity. The process of the entry of Islam into the land of Java around the 13th-15th centuries AD was a significant cultural and civilizational transformation (Mulyono, 2020). Islam was accepted peacefully by the Javanese people because the da'is, such as Walisongo, had a high tolerance attitude towards the local culture (Novrida, 2019). This method of cultural da'wah does not erase existing Javanese culture, but maintains and integrates it with Islamic values, so that there is an interrelationship between Javanese and Islamic values (Malik, 2021). This is different from in some other areas that may have a more formalistic acculturation process.

This acculturation phenomenon is seen in various cultural expressions. In literary arts and art, for example, Islamic values have been combined with local traditions (Mas'ulah, 2020). For example, the art of puppetry, which was initially used as an entertainment medium, was used as an effective da'wah tool by scholars to spread Islamic teachings. This art is not only a means of instilling Islamic values but also enriching Javanese cultural treasures. The religious traditions of the Javanese people are also full of manifestations of this acculturation, such as *the ritual of salvation*, *tahlilan*, and *grave pilgrimage* (Amanah, 2021). These traditions are part of a rural Muslim religious practice known as *abangan*, which blends Islam with local Kejawen beliefs. In addition, *the Nyadran* tradition is a meaningful symbolic ritual that integrates pilgrimage to the tomb of ancestors with Islamic elements such as prayer, showing how Islamic teachings are accepted and dialectic with culture (Toni, 2021).

Acculturation is also seen in other physical forms and rituals. Islamic architectural design in Java, including ancient mosques, shows strong influences from earlier cultures, such as Javanese and Hindu-Buddhist architectural principles (Noor, 2021). An example is the architecture of the Sendang Duwur Mosque which combines elements of Javanese Joglo, mustaka such as Hindu Meru, and Kalamakara mihrab (Novita, 2018). In the context of rituals, *the flush* in Javanese traditional weddings has adopted Islamic cultural symbolism (Suyadi, 2020), even *the Brobosan* tradition in the death ceremony is analyzed as not contradicting sharia as long as it does not contain elements of sharia. This deep-rooted acculturation process fundamentally strengthens the characteristics of *Islam in the archipelago*. This concept is an effort to discourse on Indonesian Islam, which is the result of interaction, contextualization, and indigenization of universal Islamic teachings with social, cultural, and literary realities in Indonesia. *Islam Nusantara* is an empirical Islam with a grounded character with local culture, bridging Islamic values with local wisdom.

*Islam Nusantara* emphasizes the principles of moderation (*wasatiyyah*) and balance (*tawazun*). *Wasatiyyah* is defined as an attitude of non-extremism, practicing religious teachings without reducing or exaggerating, and not taking sides with one group, making it the best approach in rejecting extremism holistically (Norsaleha, 2015). *Tawazun* is an effort to balance the life of this world and the hereafter, creating individuals with noble character and contributing to peace (Ulfatul, 2020).

In addition, the principles of tolerance (*tasamuh*), deliberation (*shura*), and justice (*i'tidal*) are also pillars of *Islam in the archipelago* (Mutawali, 2016). *Tasamuh* or tolerance is an attitude of respect and respect for every action of others, which has taken root in society

and become an ancestral heritage (Afina, 2021). *The Shura* prioritizes dialogue and deliberation, while *i'tidal* means fair in various matters for the sake of peace and impartiality. These principles seek to create a harmonious multicultural society and reduce the potential for conflict (Setiawan, 2023). In this way, Islamic teachings in Java are not only understood as normative texts, but are also expressed in the social and cultural context of the community. This shows that the religious practices of the Javanese people are a manifestation of *living Islam*, which is Islam that lives, dialogues, and adapts to socio-cultural reality. *Living Islam* in the Indonesian context is a religious way that does not prioritize symbols and formalities, but is integrated with the local culture that lives in the community (Dede, 2024). The entire process of acculturation and development of *Islam in the archipelago* not only forms a unique religious identity in Indonesia, but also has the potential to be a global reference. With historical experience, a dominant religious orientation, a deep-rooted Islamic privatization, and respect for tradition, *Islam Nusantara* can be a model in facing social change. Religious moderation, which is the core of *Islam in the archipelago*, has great potential in preventing radicalism and strengthening national unity, in line with Walisongo's strategy in fighting radicalism through a cultural approach (Hapsin, 2022).

### **Religious Moderation and the Relevance of Islam in the Archipelago**

The acculturation of Islam and local culture has proven to have an important role in maintaining social harmony in a multicultural society. The typical values of Islam in the archipelago such as friendliness, non-violence, tolerance, and respect for diversity are the foundations of social ethics that strengthen community cohesion (Setiawan, 2023). In the context of cultural and religious plurality in Indonesia, acculturation is not just a symbol, but a real practice that forms more inclusive social relations. This acculturation also shows that Islam is able to present with a friendly and contextual face, inseparable from the cultural roots of the local community. Religious practices combined with local wisdom make *Islam Nusantara* easier to accept across communities, so that the potential for conflict can be minimized. The presence of these values provides space for the creation of harmonious and productive cross-cultural communication. Thus, *Islam Nusantara* is not only a religious identity, but also a social instrument that affirms unity. This further emphasizes its relevance as a model of adaptive religiosity in facing the challenges of modernity and globalization.

The value of religious moderation can also be conveyed through popular media. The Nussa and Rara children's television series contain the values of religious moderation such as tolerance and respect for local culture, which can be integrated into the learning

of Islamic Religious Education in elementary schools (Fitama, 2023). The value of religious moderation can also be conveyed through popular media. The Nussa and Rara children's television series contain the values of religious moderation such as tolerance and respect for local culture, which can be integrated into the learning of Islamic Religious Education in elementary schools. The presence of this media shows how Islamic messages can be packaged creatively to make it easier for children to understand. In the context of globalization that presents such a rapid flow of foreign culture, shows like this become a filter as well as an educational tool that maintains Islamic and national identity. The integration of the value of religious moderation in popular media also helps children interact with the global world without losing their local cultural roots. Thus, popular media can serve as a bridge between the archipelago's Islamic tradition and contemporary global dynamics.

In addition, traditional educational institutions such as madrassas also play a strategic role. Hidayat and Hamid Samiaji emphasized that strengthening religious moderation in Madrasah Tsanawiyah students based on local wisdom can be done through character development, parental involvement, and school routines that promote local culture (Harahap, 2022). This educational model proves that religious moderation is not only instilled through teaching materials, but also through daily practices that form positive habits. The combination of religious teachings and local culture makes the process of internalizing values more contextual and relevant to students' lives. By involving parents, strengthening students' character becomes more comprehensive because the values of moderation are also practiced in the family environment. School routines that integrate local culture serve as a vehicle for habituation, so that the value of moderation does not stop at the cognitive level, but is actually manifested in daily behavior. This in turn gives birth to a generation that is moderately religious while respecting the cultural identity of their region.

The role of higher education and Islamic boarding schools is also significant. The integration of moderation teachings in the Islamic Religious Education curriculum is carried out through insertion and optimization methods. However, the implementation is not even and there is still a gap in understanding. In some universities, the curriculum has tried to contextualize Islamic teachings with contemporary social issues, such as tolerance, diversity, and social justice. The pesantren also seeks to instill the values of moderation through the study of the yellow book combined with local wisdom, so that students can understand religion in an inclusive manner. However, differences in approaches between educational institutions often cause variations in the appreciation of moderation values. Therefore, it is necessary to standardize programs

and increase the capacity of lecturers and kiai so that the value of moderation is more consistent in the implementation of education. With this strengthening, higher education and Islamic boarding schools will be more able to produce a generation that is religious, critical, and upholds the value of religious moderation.

Religious moderation in the concepts of Nusantara Islam and Progressive Islam was also the focus of the study. Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah implemented religious moderation based on Qur'anic values and national traditions in response to extremism, resulting in a contextual moderation model (Nasikhin, 2022). Both emphasized the importance of a balance between loyalty to Islamic teachings and respect for the nation's socio-cultural reality. NU emphasizes the principles of *tawasuth* (middle way), *tasamuh* (tolerance), and *tawazun* (balance), while Muhammadiyah prioritizes *tajdid* (reform) in understanding religious texts in a rational and progressive manner. These efforts form a model of moderation that is not only normative, but also practical in responding to social and political challenges. Through this approach, Nusantara Islam and Progressive Islam contribute to building a harmonious, inclusive, and adaptive society to the changing times. Thus, the combination of the concepts of acculturation and religious moderation is an important foundation in maintaining Indonesia's distinctive Islamic identity while maintaining social cohesion.

However, acculturation and moderation face challenges from transnational groups that emphasize exclusivism. A study in *Moderatio: Journal of Religious Moderation* confirms that transnational ideology is a serious threat to the strengthening of religious moderation in Indonesia (Basid, 2024). This group often carries rigid doctrines and rejects the integration of local values with religious teachings. As a result, there is friction in society, especially when these transnational teachings are contrary to deep-rooted religious traditions. This not only causes internal conflicts among Muslims, but also disrupts social harmony in a multicultural society. Therefore, strengthening Islamic acculturation with local culture is an important strategy to reduce the influence of exclusive transnational ideology. In this context, religious moderation needs to be positioned as an ideological fortress as well as a praxis to maintain social integrity and adaptive religious identity.

The post-COVID-19 pandemic context also provides new dynamics. The pandemic has strengthened public awareness of the importance of religious moderation (Rudianto, 2023). However, resistance still emerged from groups that rejected the flexibility of sharia in conditions of social emergency. Some still adhere to a rigid textual approach, thus causing tension in religious practices in public spaces. On the other hand, the

pandemic has opened up a new space for dialogue between religious authorities, the government, and the community in finding adaptive solutions. The practice of online worship, ritual adjustments, and the implementation of health protocols are concrete examples of the application of the principle of emergency in Islam that is in line with the spirit of moderation. This phenomenon shows that religious moderation is not just a theory, but a practical necessity in responding to humanitarian crises.

Especially in Java, direct field research is still limited. However, studies of madrassas in Purwokerto (Hidayat, 2023) and the use of popular media (Fitama, 2023) provide an idea that the values of Islam in the archipelago can be internalized through the adaptation of local culture and educational media. This shows that the practice of religious moderation is not only present in formal spaces such as the classroom, but also in wider social spaces. Popular media plays an effective role in conveying moral and religious messages in an interesting and easy-to-understand way for the younger generation. On the other hand, madrassas with their traditional bases are able to maintain continuity between religious teachings and local culture. The integration of these two paths emphasizes that the process of internalizing the value of moderation is dynamic, adaptive, and can reach various levels of society. These findings also confirm the importance of expanding field research to get a more complete picture of how religious acculturation and moderation are carried out in daily practice.

Educational and religious institutions are key actors in the acculturation process. They not only transfer religious teachings, but also become a space for the reproduction of local culture and dialogue of values. In the context of Javanese society, this role is very important given the rich local traditions and diverse understanding of Islam. Institutions such as Islamic boarding schools, madrasas, and Islamic universities function as centers for religious learning as well as a medium for preserving local traditions. Islamic boarding schools, for example, teach the yellow book with a method of recitation that still maintains Javanese traditions such as the use of tembang, joint prayer, and slametan. Madrasas, on the other hand, strive to integrate the national curriculum with local wisdom, so that students are not uprooted from their cultural roots. Islamic universities further develop academic studies on acculturation, religious moderation, and Islamic identity of the archipelago. In the context of globalization, the role of this institution is increasingly strategic to maintain the sustainability of local traditions so that they are not eroded by foreign cultures that tend to be homogeneous. By being a space for dialogue, religious education is able to bridge the tension between the universal values of Islam and distinctive local cultural practices. This also strengthens the identity of Javanese Muslims who are moderate, tolerant, and adaptive.

Through the acculturation process managed by educational and religious institutions, a young generation is born who are religious in a contextual manner and have cultural awareness. In the end, the existence of this institution becomes a fortress of civilization that harmoniously connects religion, tradition, and modernity.

The acculturation of Islam and local culture functions strategically in promoting religious moderation. Through formal and informal education, the media, and religious institutions, the values of Islam in the archipelago can be practiced in a sustainable manner. However, challenges such as exclusivism and cultural resistance must still be anticipated with contextual adaptation strategies. The role of religious leaders and local communities is crucial to bridge differences, so that the message of moderation can be accepted more widely. Popular media such as movies, music, and digital platforms can also be an effective means of spreading the value of religious moderation rooted in local wisdom. In addition, interfaith and cultural dialogue needs to be strengthened as an effort to strengthen tolerance in the midst of the diversity of Indonesian society. The challenges of globalization that bring transnational cultural currents must be addressed wisely, so as not to erode the local identity that has been the foundation of moderation. Multicultural education in schools and Islamic boarding schools also needs to be strengthened to instill national awareness as well as openness to differences. Government support in the form of regulations, policies, and funding is an important aspect so that acculturation-based religious moderation programs can run effectively. With a comprehensive approach involving various actors, the acculturation of Islam and local culture will be able to strengthen religious moderation in maintaining social harmony and national stability.

## **Conclusion**

Local wisdom has an important role in shaping the religious practices of the Javanese Muslim community through a harmonious integration process between cultural traditions and Islamic sharia values. Traditions such as slametan, tahlilan, kenduri, ruwatan, and community-based religious rituals not only function as spiritual means, but also as a social medium in strengthening solidarity, strengthening religious identity, and maintaining the continuity of moral values in society. The integration between local wisdom and Islamic sharia occurs through a gradual, adaptive, and non-confrontational process of cultural Islamization so that local values are able to survive without violating the principles of faith and worship. Local scholars, traditional leaders, and religious institutions have a strategic contribution in overseeing this process through a cultural da'wah approach and the affirmation of sharia boundaries so that traditions remain

within the frame of monotheism. This research emphasizes that local wisdom is not an antithesis to Islamic teachings, but social capital that is able to strengthen the implementation of sharia values in a contextual and humanistic manner. Through this approach, the religious practices of the community become more acceptable, inclusive, and functional in responding to contemporary socio-religious challenges, while demonstrating that Islam has flexibility in responding to cultural plurality without losing its normative essence. Thus, the harmony between tradition and sharia is a reflection of the maturity of the archipelago's Islamic civilization which prioritizes moderation, wisdom, and the benefit of the people.

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