

## ISLAMIC GENETICS IN INDONESIA: Tracking the Hindu-Islamic Dialogue Concerning the Growth and Development of Javanese Islam

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**Abstract:** This article examines the genetics of Islam in Indonesia, namely Javanese Islam. Through the lens of cross-cultural theology, this research aims to observe the dialogue and interaction between Hindu tradition and culture and Islamic religious practices and behaviors. Employing anthropological and sociological approach with an intensive library research method, this research found out that the style and behavior of Javanese Islam have resulted from the dialogue, interaction, negotiation, and synergy with Hindu (local) culture and traditions. The result also shows that Islam can harmonize and synergize its teachings with the local culture while maintaining its values or doctrines. Hence, Javanese Islam is better called Local Islam or Islam Nusantara rather than Syncretic Islam.

**Keywords:** Hindu culture; Javanese Islam; local tradition; Islam Nusantara; Syncretic Islam.

**Article history:** Received: 05 March 2022; Revised: 24 August 2022; Accepted: 12 December 2022; Available online: 01 March 2023.

### How to cite this article:

Basyir, Kunawi., Abdul Kadir Riyadi, Loekisno Choiril Warsito. "Islamic Genetics in Indonesia: Tracking the Hindu-Islamic Dialogue Concerning the Growth and Development of Javanese Islam". *Religio: Jurnal Studi Agama-agama* 13, no. 1 (2023): 1-19. DOI: 10.15642/religio.2023.13.1.1-19.

## Introduction

Various ethnicities, cultures, religions, and beliefs have enriched the life of Indonesia. Such pluralism requires ideal principles and standards as legal and ethical foundations in realizing a vibrant national and state life. In this case, Indonesia embraces the five principles called Pancasila as the national ideology and puts the belief in the one and only God as the first principle. The significance of the first principle about the awareness of God and, consequently, religion is following Durkheim's definition of religion. He stated that religion is a collective consciousness, and religion is a foothold and norms that become a reference for society. According to Durkheim, human needs norms as the basis of their social (religious) institutions.<sup>1</sup>

Nevertheless, Indonesian pluralism has encountered significant obstacles and challenges in the last few years—for instance, the strong presence of Islamic radical and fundamental movements with their transnational ideology. Fealey's research found that radical or conservative schools result from textual, puritanical interpretations of religion to produce non-tolerant religious concepts. Hence, these movements, with their potentially intolerant religious ideas, can threaten the religious plurality in Indonesia. Some cases show they have successfully influenced moderate Muslims into conservatives, closed-minded, and radical Muslims. In Fealey's research, NU and Muhammadiyah, the most prominent Indonesian Muslim organizations, seem marginalized.<sup>2</sup> In this case, the strategy of intolerant Muslims is effective and efficient by utilizing social media such as Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook.<sup>3</sup>

The religious phenomenon above grew as Indonesia entered the *Reformasi* era. Religious issues are becoming more critical to study from that period as they continually shape national life. In this regard, religion brings enlightenment and conflicts to civilization. Such conflicts occurred in several areas of Indonesia, such as the Ambon - Maluku conflict (1999-2000), the riots in Situbondo (1996), the Poso

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<sup>1</sup> Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Form of the Religious Life*, (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1947), 105.

<sup>2</sup> Greg Fealey, "A Conservative Turn: Liberal Islamic Groups Have Prompted a Backlash," *Inside Indonesia*, 2006, 35-52.

<sup>3</sup> R Sugihartati, "Channelization Strategies of Radicalism Among Muslim University Students in Indonesia," *Journal of Indonesian Islam* 14, no. 2 (2020): 309-333.

conflict (2002), and other conflicts in big cities in Indonesia. All of them carry religious motives.<sup>4</sup>

Moreover, discussing religious ideology is urgent in the academic world at the end of this decade because it is a doctrine that every religious adherent believes. Likewise, in the Islamic tradition, that ideology is adapted from the holy book (revelation), prophetic traditions, and religious texts that result in a doctrine. In addition, the religious adherents' knowledge, vision, and mission mainly build the ideology. A doctrine and teaching of religion have stopped in orthodoxy after undergoing a long process and obtaining authorization amid social life by upholding their respective theology as a form of legitimacy. These characters often embrace exclusivity in religion and assume that their truth comes from definitive texts. This religious model will lead to friction in understanding sacred texts and horizontal conflicts by bringing up religious issues.<sup>5</sup>

Meanwhile, we should also understand that the presence of space and time impacts the practice and behavior of religious ideology and faith. Space and time always determine the dynamics of culture. They produce different cultures and religious traditions. Religion is continuously undergoing a negotiation process with existing space and time. In this case, the face of Javanese Islam will be different from that of Islam in its origin (Arabic).

We need to re-examine the genetics of the practice and behavior of Nusantara Islam, which is identical to its local (Hindu) tradition and culture. Conservative groups have always preferred the "Arabic" style rather than the archipelagic identity of Islam. They are always against local Islam and accuse local Islam of heretics, disbelievers, and the like. The general study of local Islam, including the rivalry between conservative and local Islam, has been documented in many academic articles, books, and literary works. These previous studies focus on the form and type of Javanese or local Islam. However, they have not yet studied the meeting, dialogue,

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<sup>4</sup> Fawaizul Umam, "Pola Pemikiran Majelis Ulama Indonesia Jawa Timur tentang Praksis Kebebasan Beragama" (*Disertasi*, Surabaya: Program Pascasarjana Institut Agama Islam Negeri Sunan Ampel Surabaya, (2012), 102

<sup>5</sup> Munawir Sjadzali, *Islam dan Tata Negara Ajaran, Sejarah dan Pemikiran* (Jakarta: UI Press, 1993), 45; Ainur Rafiq al-Amin, *Proyek Khilafah HTI Prespektif Kritis* (Yogyakarta: LKiS Pelangi Aksara, 2015), 38; Ainur Rafiq al-Amin, *Membongkar Proyek Khilafah Ala Hizbut Tabrir Indonesia*. (Yogyakarta: LKiS Pelangi Aksara, 2012), 105.

and negotiation process between the two cultures (Islam and Hinduism). Hence, this research aims to explore and explain the genetics of the Javanese worldview, the hallmark of Islam in Indonesia.

### **Negotiating Islam with Local Culture**

The strong interaction and negotiation between Islam and local culture (Hinduism) in Indonesia produce a distinctive Islam. This new style of Islam is what Schreier said the local theology. He argued that the formation of local theology through interaction—a dynamic negotiation between scriptures and cultures—follows the needs of the self and society.<sup>6</sup> In addition, Bevans also stated that theological doctrines result from the contextual interpretation of religious texts.<sup>7</sup> In this case, the arguments of Schreier and Bevans show that societal and individual needs and the contextual understanding of the holy sources form local Islam.

Islam in Indonesia, known as Islam Nusantara, cannot be separated from the existing culture and tradition, which is Hindu culture. The culture is so popular throughout the archipelago and has influenced the style and behavior of Islam.<sup>8</sup> Throughout Indonesian history, Islam has experienced significant dynamics of growth and change. It has reduced its original Arabic culture and adopted Javanese culture. The adaptation has made easy acceptance possible without any meaningful resistance through dialogue, interaction, and synergy with the local culture. The modifications, as found, are forms of synergizing Islamic values into Javanese (Hindu) culture.<sup>9</sup> We can see this interaction in literary works, Javanese mosques and *langgars* (smaller mosques) architectures, and religious traditions such as birth and death ceremonies.

Furthermore, Javanese Islam still upholds the monotheistic messages, although it has a different way of practicing and developing

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<sup>6</sup> R.J. Schreier, *Rancang Bangun Teologi Lokal*, trans. Stephen Sulaeman (Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia, 1991), 39.

<sup>7</sup> S.B. Bevans, *Model-Model Teologi Kontekstual*, trans. Yosef Maria Florisan (Mauere: Ledalero, 2020), 3.

<sup>8</sup> Kunawi Basyir, "The "Acculturative Islam" As a Type of Home-Grown Islamic Tradition: Religion and Local Culture in Bali," *Journal of Indonesian Islam* 8, no. 2 (2018): 309-334.

<sup>9</sup> Anjar Nugroho, "Dakwah Kultural: Pergulatan Kreatif Islam dan Budaya Lokal," *Jurnal Ilmiah Inovasi* 4, no. 11(2002): 43.

the doctrine. According to Abdullah, Islam in Indonesia is an immigrant religion because it comes from the Middle Eastern culture, and so does the Hindu religion, which comes from India. Islam came to Indonesia and began addressing existing cultures through dialogue and intense interaction. The famous Islamic preachers, *Walisongo* on Java Island, were the forerunners of Islam-Hindu acculturation. They initiated the assimilation (inculturation) in areas along the northern coast of Java. They believe in their preaching method that Islam does not impose the culture it brings (Arabic) nor tame its target, but Islam has tamed itself (unified with it).<sup>10</sup>

Moreover, I argue that Islam-Hindu encounters in Indonesian land are natural as religion is grounded. The adherents have always constructed Islam according to their cultures, ethnicities, time, and knowledge capacities. Thus, Islam naturally creates many faces. However, its revelation messages are still attached to it. According to Waardenburg, such localization of Islam that he called “Popular Islam” is a religious practice that grows and develops among Muslims without a normative foundation from its authoritative sources but does not conflict with Islamic values (*syar’i*).<sup>11</sup>

We can take critical points from several social perspectives to make sense of the phenomenon. Theologically, Islam is a value system with a metaphysical relationship between humanity and divinity. In sociology, Islam is a social reality and has become a collective consciousness tied to civilization. In anthropology, Islam is not present in a vacuum. It is present in a place that inevitably has a pre-existing culture and has become a part of its life. Accordingly, we should also critically distinguish between Islam as a value and Islam as a religion. Islam as a value is the esoteric idea, *syar’i*. In this realm, the truth of Islam is universal in the grip of revelation beyond the senses. At the same time, Islam as a religion is exoteric. As the exoteric and particular, the adherents’ knowledge and culture have constructed Islam. Thus, the truth of Islam as a religion is no longer of universal value but of singular importance.<sup>12</sup>

Furthermore, the Qur’an and al-Hadith are the primary references for Islam. Their adherents understand the two sources

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<sup>10</sup> Taufik Abdullah, *Sejarah dan Masyarakat: Lintasan Historis Islam Indonesia* (Jakarta: Yayasan Obor Indonesia, 1987), 3.

<sup>11</sup> Waardenburg, *Official and Popular Religion* (Paris: Mouton Publisher, 1979), 65.

<sup>12</sup> Frithjof Schoun, *The Transcendent Unity of Religion* (Illinois: Theosophical Publishing House, 1984), 93.

through various interpretations resulting in different religious texts in theology and *fiqh*. As every human has different culture and abilities, they develop interpretations and apply variations. This fact is the beginning (genetics) of differences in religious understanding and practice. The difference has always been an ongoing issue that is never final in the academic and practical worlds. Thus, we can underline that the dynamics of time-space development will impact the model and style of Islam. When Muslims bring Islam into a particular condition, it will adapt to the space and time, creating varieties of practice and religious behavior. For example, when the Iranian community and its surroundings brought Islam, it produced a model of Shia Islam. We also know that the Saudi Arabian Community made a Sunni Islamic style with Wahhabi nuances. Thus, when Indonesian Muslims brought Islam, it created a Sunni archipelagic model, popularly known as Islam Nusantara. In the Indonesian context, Mulkhan, through his book "Pure Islam in a Peasant Society," analyzed the fundamental differences in religious practice between Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul' Ulama (NU). Most of the Muhammadiyah community belongs to the Malikiyah school of thought, while the NU community has the Syafi'iyah school of thought.<sup>13</sup> NU circles mainly accept local culture as a construct of their religious rituals. Meanwhile, Muhammadiyah chooses Malikiyah Madzhab as the spiritual basis contrary to the NU's standpoints for three reasons. Firstly, Muhammadiyah is more careful to purify Islamic teachings from the influence of things that would damage the faith. Secondly, Muhammadiyah seeks to reform Islamic doctrine in line with the spirit of modern thought. Thirdly, Muhammadiyah implements these two things by improving the Islamic education system.<sup>14</sup> Regardless of the differences, these Indonesian Muslim organizations have contextualized Islam in Indonesia.

When we look back to the arrival of Islam in Indonesia brought by the Gujarats (Arabs), it is evident that they have successfully popularized Islam. The *ulama* (Islamic scholars) in Java has adopted the local culture in all life aspects, such as the government, cultural, social, and artistic spheres. They did not destroy the existing culture.

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<sup>13</sup> A. Munir Mulkhan, *Islam Murni: Dalam Masyarakat Petani* (Yogyakarta: Yayasan Bentang Budaya, 2000), 1.

<sup>14</sup> Faisal Ismail, *Pijar-Pijar Islam: Pergumulan Kultur dan Struktur* (Yogyakarta: LESFI Yogya, 2002), 100.

Instead, they take shelter in the culture and develop Islam. By this spirit, Islam can merge into the local culture (Hinduism) and build a civilization on behalf of the nation and religion.<sup>15</sup> Some religious rituals found in rural and urban<sup>16</sup> areas are evidence.

However, there has always been resistance from the Islamic puritan movement. The puritans misunderstood the traditions as “not Islamic” because they believed Arabic culture to be the only possible culture in Islam. This puritanism is a form of failure to comprehend the relationship between religion and culture: When a particular culture identifies Islamic values in the general context, it will lose its meaning because it cannot provide a practical realm of Islamic values, morals, and ethics in life. Implementing Islam based on standardized culture and tradition will cause a cultural shock. On the contrary, integrating Islamic values into the existing cultural structure is far more critical than replacing and destroying it as it has become a social institution. Thus, claiming a particular culture as the authentic style of Islam is problematic. In addition, it is also difficult to objectively look at the phenomenon of Arabism and Islamism, the ideology of which Islamic values and Islamic culture are hard to distinguish.

When we look at the beginning of Islam in mainland Arabia, we know that the pre-existing Arabian culture highly influences the culture of Islam. The prophet Muhammad chose a way not necessarily to adopt pre-Islamic Arabic culture per se. Yet, within the culture, he developed his teachings wholly new and unknown to the Arabs. For example, when Muhammad migrated to Medina, he was greeted by the Ansar group with typical Arabic music art of drums and the beat, added by the singing of *tala'a al-badr 'alaynā*. This acculturating art is, in fact, not yet known by Islam before.<sup>17</sup> Thus, the discussion above shows that adaptation to the local culture is critical to the success of Islam in Indonesia.

Furthermore, several Javanese traditions show that Islam has demonstrated tolerance since it arrived in Java toward other religious

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<sup>15</sup> Taufik Abdullah, *Sejarah dan Masyarakat: Lintasan Historis Islam Indonesia* (Jakarta: Yayasan Obor Indonesia, 1987), 3.

<sup>16</sup> Such as *neloni*, *mithoni* (*tingkeban*) ceremonies, *babaran* (birth) ceremonies to death ceremonies which are carried out for up to 40 days, 100 days, and 1000 days.

<sup>17</sup> Anjar Nugroho, “Dakwah Kultural: Pergulatan Kreatif Islam dan Budaya Lokal,” *Jurnal Ilmiah Inovasi* 4, no. 11(2002): 54. [https://doi.org/10.32332/ath\\_thariq.v3i2.1548](https://doi.org/10.32332/ath_thariq.v3i2.1548).

communities<sup>18</sup> as pre-existing religions before Islam. For instance, there is a religious ceremony in Yogyakarta called *sekaten*, the tradition of the *ketupat Eid day*, carried out five days after the *Eid al-Fitr*. In addition, some other Javanese Muslim cultures include the *telonan* ceremony—three months of pregnancy ceremony, *tingkeban*—seven months of pregnancy ceremony, the *babaran* ceremony—the ceremony after giving birth, the *selapan* ceremony for children reaching 36 days old of age, and the *medun lemah* ceremony for a seven-year-old kid. Hindus call it the teething ceremony.<sup>19</sup> They also have death ceremonies known as *tablilan*. They would usually hold the ceremony to commemorate the day of the corpse's death from the first day up to the seventh day. Then, they continue the ritual on the hundredth and the thousandth days, known as the *nyenu* ceremony (*sewu* means 1000 in Javanese). The form and style of this cross-cultural theology are the apparent icons of Javanese Islam.

Thus, Islam exists through a long dialogue, interaction, acculturation, and habituation process. In this case, Abdurrahman Wahid uses the term indigenization of Islam. According to him, Islam is a religion in which the teachings are normative and come from God, which is then absorbed and accommodated in the form of culture without losing each other's identity so that it becomes an established culture. Furthermore, Wahid said that Arabization or the process of assimilation and identification with Middle Eastern (Arabic) culture means losing our cultural roots: the established social institutions. In this case, we need to think that the indigenization of Islam does not mean an effort to insist on the strength of local cultures. Instead, it is to improve and preserve existing cultures, so that cultural damage does not occur and does not threaten national disintegration.<sup>20</sup> The concept of indigenous Islam does not destroy and eliminate the original culture because the dialogue between religion and local culture does not defeat each other. The discussion has produced a thinking pattern that functions as religious reasoning, not by imagining the authentic form of religion but by trying to build a bridge that connects religion and culture. As I observed, fundamentalist groups have been growing in Indonesia. They reject

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<sup>18</sup> Andrew Beaty, *Variasi Agama di Jawa Suatu Pendekatan Antropologi*, trans. Achmad fedyani Saifuddin (Jakarta: Raja Grafindo Persada, 2001), 67.

<sup>19</sup> A. Syahrizal, "Sejarah Islam Nusantara," *Jurnal Islamuna* 2, no. 2, (2015): 224.

<sup>20</sup> Abdurrahman Wahid, *Pribumisasi Islam, Hak Minoritas, Reformasi Kultural* (Yogyakarta LKiS, 1998), 111.



local culture to purify their doctrine. This movement is what we often call the Islamic puritan movement.

Based on that, indigenous Islam is urgently implanted in the country to answer the flood of Arabization projects in Indonesia and worldwide. The indigenization of Islam offers several interpretations of the diversity in religious practices and rituals. It proposes that Islam cannot have a singular methodology. The Arabic version of Islam cannot be the purest. The presence of Islam in different places does not lose its monotheistic messages as it naturally lives in various spaces and times.<sup>21</sup> According to Kuntowijoyo, religious and cultural marriage should develop varieties of existing traditions while maintaining religious values to glorify cultures as the essence of human recognition.<sup>22</sup>

Islam is not an instant and ready-to-use religion because it is always in the negotiation process and depends on historical periods and places. The indigenization of Islam is thus a continuous process.<sup>23</sup> Its teaching interpretation considers a local context. In addition, Islam has a liberating character capable of answering human problems. In this regard, Javanese Islam desires to liberate puritanism, authenticate, and preserve local wisdom. Indigenous Muslims maintain their cultural ideology to avoid radicalism and extreme religious understanding contradicting world peacemaking.<sup>24</sup> Indigenous Islam, which later became the identity and characteristic of Indonesian Islam, also known as Islam Nusantara, resulted from the marriage between Islam and Javanese (Hindu) culture. Achmad Jainuri, in his book “The Ideology of the Reformers,” said Islam in Java, popularly known as traditional Islam, is identical to the expression of Javanese society as outlined in the form of religious rituals. Furthermore, Jainuri argued that the traditional style of Islam is the opposite of

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<sup>21</sup> Khamami Zada, “Islam Pribumi: Mencari Wajah Post-Tradisionalisme Islam,” *Tashwirul Afkar: Jurnal Refleksi Pemikiran Keagamaan dan Kebudayaan* 10, no.14 (2001): 2-5.

<sup>22</sup> Kuntowijoyo, *Paradigma Islam Interpretasi Untuk Aksi* (Bandung: Mizan, 1991), 235.

<sup>23</sup> Read for instance Zaenuddin Mansyur, “Penerapan Ajaran Islam Wetu Telu di Tengah Ajaran Islam Waktu Lima: Upaya Melestarikan Kearifan Lokal Muslim Sasak,” *Religio: Jurnal Studi Agama-Agama*, vol 9 no 2 (September-2019), 222–243. <https://doi.org/10.15642/religio.v9i2.1206>.

<sup>24</sup> Khamami Zada, “Islam Pribumi,” 4.

modernist Islam, an Islamic group that wants to distance itself from local characteristics.<sup>25</sup>

Moreover, the role of religious figures is crucial in the Javanese Muslim worldview. For instance, according to anthropologists such as Andrew Moller, *kiai* in traditional Javanese society has similarities with a *shaykh* (Sufi master). The fact illustrates that *kiai* in Java was an 'ulama' and a *sufi*. The Sufi teaching of tolerance and coexistence has made Javanese Islam appreciate local traditions. These traditions usually include visiting ancestral graves of saints and *ulama* and the death commemorating ritual (*slametan*) on the third, seventh, fortieth, hundredth, and the thousandth days after a person's death.<sup>26</sup>

Besides tradition, the dialogue between Islam and local (Javanese) culture also produces architectural arts, such as mosque buildings, tombs, and *joglo* houses, as well as the names of other places of worship, such as *langgar* and traditional houses. The buildings reflect the mixture of Islam and Hindu cultures in Java. Islam and Hindu cultures also collaborated for local strength and nationalism against Dutch colonialism.<sup>27</sup> The end of the 18th century AD was an era that marked the rise of Islam and resistance to colonialism in Indonesia. Under Diponegoro's leadership, many Muslims, with the spirit of Islam and nationalism, began to fight against Dutch colonialism. The *ulema* and followers of Diponegoro have established *pesantren* (Islamic boarding schools) as a medium to defend their national and religious ideology. The academics view *pesantren* in Java as a distinctive Islamic cultural heritage (Islam Nusantara).<sup>28</sup> Accordingly, the strength of negotiations and interactions between Islam and local culture, which produces a distinctive character, creates a style of Islam with a powerful force toward peaceful change. It possesses a comprehensive impetus to build and develop civilization.

## **Javanese Islam as a Synergy between Islam and Javanese Tradition**

The relationship between religion and culture has always been a dynamic religious discourse among academics in the country. Despite the debate, I argue that religion and culture are two sides of a coin

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<sup>25</sup> Achmad Jainuri, *Ideologi Kaum Reformis* (Surabaya: LPAM, 2002), 5.

<sup>26</sup> Andre Moller, *Ramdlan di Jawa* (Jakarta: Nalar, 2005), 94.

<sup>27</sup> A. Syahrizal, "Sejarah Islam Nusantara," *Jurnal Islamuna* 2, no. 2 (2015): 236.

<sup>28</sup> Tjandrasasmita, *Indonesia Dalam Arus Sejarah* (Jakarta: PT. Ichtiar Baru, 2012), 35.

because both are the basis for life direction. They interact and define each other. However, they have their respective orientations. While religion is a sacred guide from God, culture is the human's work, creation, guidelines, and instructions from a collective agreement. This definition has its opponent, which I refer to as the Salafi group.

Besides the political discourses, Salafi issues address a particular theology and *fiqh*. The Salafis are related to Wahabbism. Hasan bin Ali al-Seggaf, quoted by Abdul Matin Bin Salman, stated that the Wahhabis Salafis see religious practices the prophet never practiced as sinful and idolatrous.<sup>29</sup>

Their views are different from that of moderate Muslims. Haidar Baqir<sup>30</sup> views that the form of religious rituals does not have to be like the Islamic tradition in Arabia once carried out by the Prophet because Arabia and Indonesia have different rules and cultures. Thus, practicing Islam does not necessarily refer to an Arab cultural orientation. Islam can live with various cultures as long as it does not conflict with its messages of values, morals, ethics, etc. Therefore, these messages will adapt to the conditions and situations in which Muslims practice Islam.<sup>31</sup> Waardenburg called it Popular Islam.<sup>32</sup>

Baqir believes that when Allah prays with the Arabs, He will form an Arab culture. Hence, He will develop Indonesian culture when He prays with the Indonesian people. In his view, the local culture is sacred and must be filtered by the *shari'ah* although it is not necessarily contrary to the *shari'ah*. This ideology known as *wahdat al-wujud* (God is everywhere, including in objects and culture) becomes the spirit of the local culture in the archipelago.

Furthermore, he said that the manifestation of Allah to every creature is according to their readiness. For instance, when Indonesian are ready to filter Allah's manifestation (*tajalli*), He will make Indonesian able to shape and develop their culture. Baqir

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<sup>29</sup> AM. Salman, "Gerakan Salafiyah: Islam, Politik dan Rigiditas Interpretasi Hukum Islam," *Mazahib: Jurnal Pemikiran Hukum Islam*, 16, no. 2 (2017): 140.

<sup>30</sup> Haidar Bagir, "An Irfani Perspective on the Relation Between Islam and Local Culture and Wisdom "Islam Nusantara," *Proceeding International Conference: Epistemology and Methodology for A New Paradigm of Human Sciences in Islamic Perspective (18-19 November 2015)*: Sadra Press.

<sup>31</sup> Samsuddin & Khadijah, "Pemeriksaan Keharmonian Masyarakat Beragama," *Journal Afkar*, (16 Januari-Jun 2015): 16.

<sup>32</sup> Waardenburg, *Official and Popular Religion* (Paris: Mouton Publisher), 57.

argued that the more someone learns about local wisdom, the more complete his understanding of Allah. This argument is based on an assumption that culture is one of the loci in which they present themselves.<sup>33</sup>

Furthermore, Muhsin Labib sees that religion's cultural aspect has two functions: ontology and epistemology. Ontologically, religion is a social reality not limited by space and time because it originates from revelation, while revelation itself is not information but a reality. Revelation is transcendent, sacred, eternal, and holy because revelation is God's knowledge, often understood as the Essence of God Himself. At the same time, religion as an epistemology is a human perception of revelation. Religion is often interpreted as a cultural product when perceived as information because religion is a collective consciousness.<sup>34</sup> The opinion of Quraish Shihab also reinforces that diversity in life is a necessity that Allah wants. The fact explains the diversity of human responses, interpretations, and the form of their practices regarding the truth of the holy books.<sup>35</sup>

Based on the explanations above, we can illustrate that before Islam was present in the world, humans already had a guideline for their lives that came from themselves. With or without religion, humans must have a way of life. However, the presence of Islam in the world created something new. With its shari'a laws, Islam came into contact through dialogue and interaction with the local culture, whose cultural values sometimes differ from those brought by Islam. Then, the universal capability of Islam gradually produced a new culture from the culture that may be similar or different from the previous tradition. For instance, the presence of Islam in Arabia had to dialogue with the existing culture and produced Islamic culture. The same thing happened when Islam greeted Indonesian culture. It made Indonesian Islamic cultural products that we refer to as Islam Nusantara.

Regarding the existence of Islam and Javanese culture as a process of cross-cultural theology, we need to realize that Islam as a

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<sup>33</sup> Haidar Bagir, "An Irfani Perspective on the Relation Between Islam and Local Culture and Wisdom 'Islam Nusantara'." 231.

<sup>34</sup> Muhsin Labib, "Islam Nusantara: Socio-Historical –Theological Perspective," *Proceeding International Conference: Theory and Practice, Human Science in Islamic Perspective,* (16-17 November 2017): Sadra Press.

<sup>35</sup>M. Quraish Shihab, *Secercah Cabaya Ilahi: Hidup Bersama Al-Qur'an* (Bandung: Mizan, 2007), 52.

revealed religion is both sacred and profane.<sup>36</sup> The profane characteristic leads to the fact that Islam will negotiate with the culture in which Islam is present. This negotiation process becomes the center of cross-cultural theological studies (Islam and Hinduism). Through this process of inculturation, Islam spread its influences in the northern coastal area of Java not by taking over the existing culture and replacing it with a new one. Thus, it confirms Azra's argument that Islam did not tame its target (culture). It tamed itself to adapt to its new world.<sup>37</sup>

The existence of Javanese (Hindu) culture and traditions is challenging for Islam to make a proper place in its new life. Islam, as a new religion embraced by the Javanese people, encounters various religious symbols different from the signs of Islam in its origin. Hence, Islam has to adapt without reducing the meaning and message of Islamic values. Under certain conditions, Islam refrains from interpretations contradictory to the holy book (revelation). By implementing this strategy, Islam can adapt quickly to the existing culture and make it acceptable.

Diversity in Indonesia is inevitable. However, diversity often creates social boundaries and tensions. In recent cases, the strength of Islamic syncretism in the countryside balances the tension between moderates and puritans. While the moderate group—represented by educated people (academics)—accepts and respects their local cultures as media for the growth and development of Islam, the purist group has a mission to purify the teachings of Islam in the country by replacing the local culture with the Islamic Arab culture. They identify the Arab culture as Islamic teachings. For them, moderates' ancestral or local Islamic culture is considered westernized and liberal.

Meanwhile, I argue that the substance of every religion present in the world is a mission of peace and humanity. The presence of Islam as a religion is not a tool to destroy a civilization, including the existing culture. The religious mission is to guide and improve a more dynamic and civilized culture. In the Indonesian case, the existence of Islam was widely officially promoted by the legacy of Javanese-Hindu, namely the Demak kingdom, an Islamic empire in Java. A long

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<sup>36</sup> Mercia Eliade, *History of Religious Ideas* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981), 32.

<sup>37</sup> Azyumardi Azra, *Islam Nusantara: Jaringan Global dan Lokal* (Bandung: Mizan, 2002), 34.

process existed before the empire adopted Islam as the official religion. The nine saints (*Walisongo*) culturally introduced and expanded the influence of Islam. During the saints' period, Islam faced the Hindu-Buddhist culture with animism and dynamism culture. This culture is the background to the birth of the rituals (styles) of Javanese Islam, Abangan Islam, Santri, and Priyayi.<sup>38</sup> Javanese culture's tolerant, non-doctrinal, and accommodating characteristics have allowed other beliefs to be part of the culture. Many of them are still practicing their belief system rooted in animistic traditions to the present day. The academics call them *kejawen* communities. They practice sacred rituals and respect their ancestors. They believe in a figure's charisma in society, especially those with a significant role in preaching their religion. They have preserved and developed this Javanese character from the Hindu period to the arrival of Islam in Java.

The arrival of Islam on the islands of Java and Bali has significantly influenced the social order in terms of ethics, norms, and rules of life for the Javanese people. Through Islam as a dynamic and unifying force, they can generate social enthusiasm and create common good and prosperity, including caring for and developing established cultures such as life cycle ceremonies in Hinduism and Islam.<sup>39</sup> In Hinduism, the tradition is called *manusa yadnya* ceremony, namely the *tingkeban*, *babaran*, *selapan*, and wedding ceremonies. In addition to life ceremonies in the Hindu tradition, we also know the *pitra yadnya* ceremony, which is a religious ceremony for Hindus to respect their ancestral spirits because they are the ones who make us happy until adulthood.<sup>40</sup> Traditions like this are also found in the modern Muslim community, known as the *selamatan* or *tablilan*. In these ceremonies, they recite a *surah* of the Qur'an (*surah yāsīn*) and chant *tablil*, starting from the first day of the death up to seven days.

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<sup>38</sup> Asep Abdurrohman, "Eksistensi Islam Moderat dalam Perspektif Islam," *Rusyan Fikir* 14, no. 1 (2018): 29. See Clifford Geertz, *The Religion of Java* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1976), 121.

<sup>39</sup> Adrian Vickers, "Hinduism and Islam in Indonesia: Bali and The Pesisir World," *Indonesia Journal* 44, (1987): 35. Cornell University Press: Southeast Asia Program.

<sup>40</sup> Sadena, "Panca Yadnya dan Kematian", *Prabu Kalianget: Agama Spiritual*, November 29, 2009, <https://www.bacaanmadani.com/2018/02/10-contoh-tradisi-islam-di-nusantara.html>.

Then, they continue the ritual on the 40th, 100th, and 1,000th (*nyenu*).<sup>41</sup>

This cultural acculturation exemplifies how Islam creates a new civilization from the existing social order. Throughout Indonesian history, Islam has made significant contributions to Indonesian society. The presence of Islam in Java does not simply absorb existing forms of culture but filters and synergizes current culture and traditions with Islamic values in a non-destructive manner. The religious rituals above are examples of how Islam incorporated its values into the new culture. In this case, Islam makes reading Quranic verses and traditional Islamic prayers the content of the rituals. Through this negotiation, Islam has successfully extended its influence in the archipelago.

Thus, one of the Javanese Islam characteristics is the tendency to develop a local culture to carry out the Islamic mission. They do not damage the original culture in the slightest and do not leave the most nuanced Islamic values described in the holy book. This condition is a form of Islamic professionalism when encountering various cultures other than Arab culture. This fact is in line with Hegel's thesis quoted by Bakker, that all the results of human imagination embodied in the building of science in the form of art, law, and others are the result of the realization of the divine spirit.<sup>42</sup>

Belief, also called faith, is a guidance and gift from God, so this term is often called God's guidance. Meanwhile, culture results from human creation and imagination implemented in everyday life. In the anthropologist's view, as previously mentioned, religion is a cultural system and a collective consciousness rooted in society, and every human being has diverse intellect and knowledge to interpret existing religious symbols.<sup>43</sup> Their knowledge is always limited by space and time, and human understanding cannot reach the complete meaning and essence of the verses contained in Divine revelation. They are only able to interpret the verses according to their limited knowledge.

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<sup>41</sup> Andrew Beaty and Achmad Fedyani Saefuddin, *Variasi Agama di Jawa: Suatu Pendekatan Antropologi* (Murai Kencana, Division Rajagrafindo Persada, 2001). See Thomas Wiyasa Bratawidjaja, *Mengungkap dan Mengenal Budaya Jawa* (Yogyakarta: Pustaka, 1997), 36.

<sup>42</sup> Adam Badrullisham & Khadijah, "Konsep Roh Suci menurut Islam dan Kristian," *Journal Afkar* 20, no. 1 (2018): 85-108. See P.J. Bakker, *Filsafat Kebudayaan: Sebuah Pengantar* (Yogyakarta: Kanisius, 1984), 51.

<sup>43</sup> Koentjaraningrat, *Pengantar Ilmu Antropologi* (Jakarta: Rineka Cipta, 1990), 34.

Thus, we can say that Islam will always experience historical changes and developments. Likewise, Islam in Java has also undergone changes and developments following the knowledge and experience of its adherents. Bassam Tibi's argument supported the fact. He argued that religion is a form of reality (reality model), meaning religion has changed historically. Muslim knowledge and space-time contextuality determine the change.<sup>44</sup>

Hence, customs and traditions in religious life embody a virtue, although sometimes they are not based on sacred texts. In other words, reason occupies a strategic role in *ijtihad* or making efforts to reach the divine truth. Thus, Islam requires a set of thinking tools to determine a virtue. Islam has offered divine laws, while culture is a product and creation of human thought and is mainly not based on religious texts.<sup>45</sup> Nevertheless, reality tells us that Many Muslims often claim the sacred text interpretation implemented in real life to be accurate and come from the divine (revelation).

## Conclusion

Local culture (Hinduism) is essential in forming the character of Islam in Indonesia, known as Islam Nusantara. The dialogue, interaction, and negotiation between Islam and Javanese Hindu culture have created a style and typology of Islam different from its origin, namely Arabic Islam. This interaction thus defines Islamic practice and behavior when meeting with various cultures. Tolerant character toward Javanese traditions has made Islam the most accepted religion in the archipelago. Islam has inculturated the faith by adopting the Javanese tradition through dynamic interaction, causing the transformation of several traditional rituals. Meanwhile, Islam has also maintained its faith through enculturation and invitation to follow its religious values. This interaction shows that Javanese Islam is a cross-cultural theology because it has successfully accommodated the local culture while insisting on its theological

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<sup>44</sup> Bassam Tibi, *Islam and the Cultural Accommodation of Social Change* (Oxford: Westview Press, 1991), 2. See, Charles J. Adams, "Islamic Religious Tradition," in *The Study of the Middle East: Research and Scholarship in the Humanities and Social Science*, (New York: A Wiley Interscience Publication, 1997), 23. See, Abu Rabi', *Intellectual Origins of Islamic Resurgence in the Modern Arab World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 1.

<sup>45</sup> Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (Basic Books, 1973).



matters. Therefore, Javanese Islam is a local Islam, not a syncretic Islam.

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