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ISLAMIZATION OF JAVANESE RITUAL: RUWAT SANTRI AS A REFLECTION OF INTERFAITH AND CULTURAL HARMONY IN INDONESIA

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Abstract

This study investigates the transformation of the Javanese *ruwat* ritual into *ruwat santri*, a symbolic Islamization that integrates Qur'anic recitation, while preserving local cultural traditions. It explores the social, spiritual and affective dimensions of the ritual using Weber's social action theory and its implications for interfaith harmony and local religious practice The research adopts a qualitative-descriptive fieldwork design, including participant observation, in-depth interviews with religious leaders and ritual practitioners and ritual text documentation. The data analysis combines the Living Qur'an approach to understand the embodiment and meaning of Qur'anic recitation within this ritual context. Findings indicate that the transformation of *Ruwat Jawa* into *Ruwat Santri* constitutes a symbolic Islamization that preserves local cultural roots while embedding Quranic values into the ritual. Viewed through Weber's framework, this practice integrates inherited tradition, emotional-spiritual experience, religious value commitment, and strategic adaptation to socio-economic realities. Community reception of the Quran in this context is performative and existential, treating it not merely as a sacred text but as a spiritual agent of blessing, protection and healing. The novelty of this study lies in highlighting the Quran as the primary actor in ritual transformation, surpassing previous studies that mainly focused on cultural acculturation. Practically, these findings have implications for cultural da'wah strategies, tradition preservation aligned with Islamic law and the promotion of interfaith harmony. This research affirms that integrating Qur'anic values into local traditions fosters a contextual religiosity, enriching the discourse on the Living Qur'an in Indonesia.

Keywords: Living Qur'an, Javanese Rituals, Religious Transformation, Interfaith Harmoni, Indonesia.

Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkaji transformasi ritual *ruwat* dalam tradisi Jawa menjadi *ruwat santri*, sebuah bentuk Islamisasi simbolik yang mengintegrasikan pembacaan Al-Qur'an sambil tetap melestarikan tradisi budaya lokal. Studi ini mengeksplorasi dimensi sosial, spiritual, dan afektif

dari ritual tersebut dengan menggunakan teori tindakan sosial Max Weber, serta implikasinya bagi kerukunan antaragama (*interfaith harmony*) dan praktik keagamaan lokal. Penelitian ini menggunakan desain kerja lapangan kualitatif-deskriptif, meliputi observasi partisipatif, wawancara mendalam dengan tokoh agama dan pelaku ritual, serta dokumentasi teks ritual. Analisis memadukan pendekatan *Living Qur'an* untuk memahami perwujudan dan makna pembacaan Al-Qur'an dalam konteks ritual ini. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa transformasi *ruwat* Jawa menjadi *ruwat santri* merupakan Islamisasi simbolik yang mempertahankan akar budaya lokal sekaligus menyematkan nilai-nilai Qur'ani ke dalam ritual. Dalam kerangka teori Weber, praktik ini mengintegrasikan tradisi warisan, pengalaman emosional-spiritual, komitmen terhadap nilai-nilai agama, dan adaptasi strategis terhadap realitas sosial-ekonomi. Penerimaan masyarakat terhadap Al-Qur'an dalam konteks ini bersifat performatif dan eksistensial, menempatkannya bukan hanya sebagai teks suci, tetapi juga sebagai agen spiritual pembawa berkah, perlindungan, dan penyembuhan. Kebaruan penelitian ini terletak pada penekanan Al-Qur'an sebagai aktor utama dalam transformasi ritual, melampaui kajian-kajian sebelumnya yang umumnya berfokus pada akulturasi budaya. Secara praktis, temuan ini memiliki implikasi bagi strategi dakwah berbasis budaya, pelestarian tradisi yang selaras dengan syariat Islam, serta penguatan kerukunan antaragama. Penelitian ini menegaskan bahwa integrasi nilai-nilai Qur'ani ke dalam tradisi lokal membentuk religiositas kontekstual, sekaligus memperkaya wacana *Living Qur'an* di Indonesia..

Kata kunci: Living Qur'an, Ritual Jawa, Transformasi Keagamaan, Kerukunan Antaragama, Indonesia

INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary Islamic studies landscape, there has been an important shift from normative studies that emphasize textual and legal dimensions to empirical studies that highlight how Muslims bring the Qur'an to life in their social, cultural, and spiritual experiences. (Abdullah, 2017). The *Living Qur'an* approach is key in this shift, because it views the Qur'an not as a mere text to be read or interpreted formally, but as an active entity that shapes and is shaped by social reality. (Rafiq, 2021). Through this approach, the reception of the Qur'an is understood not only through the discourse of interpretation, but also through the manifestation of praxis in local rites, symbols, and practices that are full of religious meaning. (Nakamura, 2020). At this point, religiosity is no longer measured only by obedience to formal law, but also by the extent to which the Qur'an is lived as an integral part of common life. (Bruinessen, 1999).

This phenomenon is evident in the transformation of the *ruwat* tradition in Kedungasri Village, Banyuwangi, from a puppet ritual to remove *sukerta* to *ruwat santri*, which focuses on ritualistic recitation of Qur'anic verses (Ahyat, 2025). This transformation is not just a replacement of symbols, but a rearticulation of spiritual meaning through cultural Islamization that goes hand in hand with Islamic culturalization, a creative process of grassroots communities in harmoniously

blending revelation with local cosmology (Ansori, Parang & Prafita, 2023). More than adaptation, this phenomenon is a form of production of new religious meanings born from the active interaction between sacred texts and traditions, making it important to be studied not only as cultural heritage, but as a concrete model of how Islam lives and develops in the midst of socio-cultural plurality.

Studies on the Living Quran have expanded significantly in contemporary scholarship to explore various forms of Muslim reception of sacred texts within cultural and ritual contexts, including in Indonesia (Rafiq, 2014; Saeed, 2006). This scholarship underscores the deep interweaving of Qur'anic values with local cultures. However, research in the Indonesian context has generally focused on the dimensions of cultural acculturation and the preservation of tradition—as reflected in studies on the Javanese *ruwat* ritual by Miharja & Prasetyo (2021), Nurhidin & Badruzaman (2022), and Suanti & Lestari (2021), without positioning the Qur'an as the central agent driving shifts in ritual meaning (Miharja & Prasetyo, 2021; Nurhidin & Badruzaman, 2022; Suanti & Lestari, 2021). This study critically engages with these works by acknowledging their valuable documentation of how Islamic elements integrate into Javanese ritual life, yet highlighting a conceptual limitation: the Qur'an is often treated as an accompanying symbol rather than an active, transformative force. By contrast, the present research innovates by foregrounding the Qur'an as the primary sociocultural actor in the transformation of *ruwat* into *ruwat santri*. This perspective reframes the Qur'an not merely as a passive textual reference but as a dynamic agent that reshapes ritual purpose, symbolism, and social function through its recitation and embodiment.

In the broader field of religious anthropology, numerous studies have explored the localization of Islam as a dynamic, adaptive process outside the Arab world, including in Indonesia. (Ali, 2011; Ansori et al., 2023; Hadziq, Faiz & Fadhliyah, 2024; Kebingin et al., 2024). Yet, these approaches have rarely interrogated the Qur'an's role as a sociocultural actor actively negotiating the meaning between Islamic teachings and local traditions. Moreover, interpretive approaches combined with Weberian classical sociological frameworks, which enable an analysis of how sacred texts actively participate in the formation or reconstruction of meaning structures in local ritual practices, remain underexplored. This condition reveals a critical gap for research that is not only descriptive but also analytically and theoretically robust, one that examines the Qur'an's active agency in shaping, redefining, and sustaining local cultural practices in Indonesia. By situating the Qur'an at the center of ritual transformation, this study expands the

Living Qur'an discourse and offers a novel lens for understanding the interplay between text, culture, and community.

This gap is important because, as Asad reminds us, Islam cannot be understood solely from its normative text, but rather as a discursive tradition that continues to be shaped by historical and cultural interactions (Asad 2003). This view is in line with Bowen's emphasis that Islamic studies need to see how the teachings are brought to life in everyday practice, not simply interpreted in the space of interpretation (Bowen, 2012). This shows that the reception of the Qur'an is always intertwined with the social context and collective experience of the Muslim community, which often shapes their distinctive religious identity (Dahlan, Hasbunallah & Hidayat, 2022). Meuleman expands this perspective by asserting that the Islamization of social practice is a creative process that connects the universal value of revelation with local wisdom that is deeply rooted (Meuleman, 2002). Taken together, these ideas form a conceptual framework that reinforces the urgency of studying the Qur'anization of local rites more deeply, not just as a cultural adaptation, but as a process of producing new religious meanings born from the creative interaction between sacred texts and local traditions, which have so far been rarely touched upon by Indonesian studies

This research aims to uncover the process of transformation of the Javanese *ruwat* tradition into *ruwat santri* as a form of praxis *Living Qur'an* in Kedungasri Village, Banyuwangi, analyzed its social meaning and function through the framework of Max Weber's social action theory, which includes traditional, affective, value rationality and instrumental rationality, as well as explains the form of community reception of the Qur'an in the context of local culture and how it forms the distinctive religious pattern of the local community. (Putro,2016). This research also aims to show the relevance of the integration of Qur'anic values and local culture as a contextual, spiritual, and adaptive form of Islam in non-Arab Muslim communities.

Based on these objectives, this study seeks to answer the main questions: how the process of transforming the Javanese *ruwat* tradition into the *ruwat santri in* Kedungasri Village; how the meaning and social function of the *ruwat santri* can be analyzed through the perspective of Max Weber's social action theory; what form of public reception of the Quran in the context of the tradition of *ruwat santri*; and how the integration of Quranic values and local culture shapes the religious pattern of the Kedungasri community.

This research has important significance, both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, this study enriches the treasure of Living Quran studies in Indonesia by offering an in-depth analysis of the process of Quranization of local rites using the framework of Max Weber's social action theory. This study fills a research gap that has so far focused more on the dimension of cultural acculturation, but rarely associates the transformation of rites with the position of the Qur'an as the main actor in the production of religious meaning. Practically, the results of this study provide a more comprehensive understanding for the public, academics, and policy makers about how the integration of Quranic values and local traditions can become a model of religiosity that is contextual, adaptive, and still rooted in local wisdom. This research also offers a contribution to the development of a cultural da'wah strategy that respects the plurality of Islamic expressions at the grassroots level, as well as a reference for the preservation of local traditions that are in harmony with Islamic teachings. In terms of social impact, this study emphasizes that Islam can be present as a force that maintains social harmony and enriches cultural identity, making it relevant for efforts to strengthen harmony between citizens and preserve cultural heritage in the midst of religious homogenization.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative-descriptive approach within a field study design (*field research*) to understand in depth the meaning and social structure of the practice *ruwat santri* in Kedungasri Village, Tegaldlimo District, Banyuwangi. The qualitative approach was chosen because it allows the exploration of phenomena in their natural context without manipulating variables. (Denzin & Lincolin, 2000). The research focus is directed at the interpretation of symbolic meaning, social processes, and the integration of sacred texts in local cultural practices.

The study participants consisted of religious leaders, the pilgrims, as well as the family attending the *ruwat santri*. The participants were recruited through purposive sampling to ensure that they had first-hand experience and an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon being studied. Primary data were collected through participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation of ritual texts, audio-visual recordings, and local community archives. (Seim, 2024).

The data collection process adhered to ethnographic principles, which, according to Hammersley & Atkinson (2019), require the researcher's direct engagement in the field to capture social practices within their natural context. In this study, participant observation was not only employed to record the sequence

of stages in the *ruwat santri* ritual, but also to immerse in the ritual's atmosphere, observe participants' nonverbal expressions, examine social interactions among actors, and identify the dynamics of symbolic change taking place. In-depth interviews served to elicit personal narratives, map the range of interpretive meanings from both practitioners and observers, and uncover the rationale behind the replacement of *pewayangan* elements with the recitation of Qur'anic verses. The combination of these methods enabled data triangulation, ensuring that the resulting interpretations relied not only on visual descriptions but also on the subjective meanings embedded in the community's consciousness. This approach allowed the researcher to capture the symbolic and social dimensions of religious practice through layered direct observation, reflective interaction with ritual participants, and the documentation of relevant cultural artifacts (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019).

Data analysis was carried out in a descriptive-interpretive way, following Miles, Huberman & Saldaña's model, including data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing and verification. (Miles & Huberman, 2014). The analytical framework combines the Living Qur'an approach with Max Weber's social action theory as the framework of analysis. The Living Qur'anic approach views the Qur'an not only as a normative text, but as part of the contextual and cultural social actions of the ummah. (Rafiq, 2021). Meanwhile, Weber's theory of social action divides actions into four types: traditional, affective, value rationality, and instrumental rationality. In the *ruwat santri* context, society not only reproduces the heritage of tradition (*traditional acts*), but also expresses religious emotions (*affective),* brings spiritual values to life (*value rationality*), and designs functional (instrumental) forms of social-religious adaptation. This framework helps to understand that the replacement of the element of puppetry with the Quran is not just a form of symbolic Islamization, but a social action that has a clear orientation of meaning and collective purpose. (Kuswandi, 2024), as well as a creative space for people to ground divine messages into their social context (Paraswati, Rosyid & Hidayah, 2024).

Ethically, this research was conducted by obtaining *informed consent* from all informants, maintaining identity confidentiality, and ensuring that participant involvement was voluntary. The researcher is aware of the position as an outside observer who is not directly involved in the ritual, so that reflexivity is maintained with careful field recording and discussion of findings with peer academics to minimize subjective bias. With this approach, the research is expected to be able to

produce a comprehensive and contextual understanding of the transformation of *ruwat* into *ruwat santri in* the framework of *Living Qur'an*.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The Socio-Cultural Context of Kedungasri Village

Kedungasri Village is one of the villages located at the southeast tip of Java Island, precisely in the administrative area of Tegaldlimo District, Banyuwangi Regency, East Java. Its location, which is directly adjacent to the conservation area of Alas Purwo National Park and Pangpang Bay - part of the Bali Strait - gives this village a unique geographical character. Administratively, Kedungasri Village is divided into four hamlets, namely Persen Hamlet, Pondokasem, Kaliwatu, and Dambuntung, with a total area of 2,034.71 hectares. The composition of land use includes 819.54 hectares of rice fields, 241.59 hectares of dry land, 77.58 hectares of public facility land, and 896 hectares of state forest. The topography of the lowlands with an altitude of about 10 meters above sea level has an impact on the average daily temperature, which is relatively hot, hovering around 31°C. Its location far from the administrative center makes this village relatively remote in terms of accessibility, with a distance of 8.2 km to the sub-district office, 47 km to the district office, and more than 330 km to the provincial capital.

Demographically, data in 2018 recorded that the population of this village reached 9,807 people, with a composition of 5,288 men and 4,519 women spread across 2,930 families. The recorded population density of 592 people per square kilometer shows a fairly high occupancy rate for the village area. Population growth tends to be stable, with a growth rate of 0.13% for men and 0.04% for women per year. The existence of four hamlets provides a relatively even distribution of settlements and economic activities. This situation shows that even though it is located in an area far from the city center, Kedungasri Village continues to grow as a community with active social dynamics. This fairly dense demographic is also an important background in the formation of local culture and collective participation in socio-religious activities.

From an economic perspective, the majority of the residents of Kedungasri Village work as farmers, especially in the Dusun Persen, Pondokasem, and Dambuntung areas. The existence of large farmland allows residents not only to grow rice, corn, and soybeans, but also to develop horticultural commodities such as dragon fruit, oranges, papayas, and crystal guava. This choice was made because fruit commodities are considered more economically profitable and have a high selling value. This agricultural activity is also supported by seasonal farm workers,

most of whom come from the students of Islamic boarding schools in the area around Banyuwangi. The locals believe that the existence of the students brings its own blessings to the harvest, as illustrated in the narrative of the residents who associate the prosperity of agriculture with the prayers and presence of the students. On the other hand, the people of Kaliwatu Hamlet, which is directly adjacent to the sea, depend on their livelihood as fishermen, making this village also have a coastal economic character (Paiman, 2025).

"Here, if the person is not a farmer, he cannot live, because from the past, from the time of my ancestors, this village must have been used as a destination for farm workers from afar, because of what? Yes, because the rice fields in this area are relatively large compared to rice fields in other areas. In the past, when my father was still diligent in going to the rice fields, I was still a child, every harvest season came, this house must be visited by people far away, if I slept at night at my father's house, it was cooked with my mother, later in the morning they went to work in the rice fields of the people here. Most of the people who are farm workers in this village are distant students who live around the Banyuwangi area, that's why farmers now live peacefully and prosperously, because they get barkah from the students who work here."

In the aspect of education, public awareness of the importance of education is quite high. It was recorded that in 2018, as many as 302 children participated in kindergarten education, 1,526 children at the elementary school level, 892 in junior high school, 980 in high school, and 136 students who pursued higher education. In addition, as many as 454 children were recorded to be studying at Islamic boarding schools. This data shows that people not only pursue formal education, but also prioritize religious education. According to one of the local figures, Mr. Hadi, the increasing number of students shows that parents prefer the Islamic boarding school education path because it is considered to be able to shape children's character spiritually and morally from an early age. This shows the existence of an educational orientation that not only focuses on academic aspects, but also ethics and personality, which are in harmony with local Islamic values (Hadi, 2025)

"Alhamdulillah, now many children are studying at Islamic boarding schools, even though they are only up to the junior high school level. Parents now prefer their children to go to school in a cottage rather than a school, but not with a monk. Children are now wayward, unlike children in the past. In the past, it was rare for children to go to school in a boarding school, but children were not as stubborn as they are now. Now there are many children in the cottage, as well as many wayward children who are not in the cottage. I now have a desire for parents in this village to want to send

their children to a boarding school, so that their children can know religious sciences from an early age. Already, don't let the school reach a high level but don't have ethics, it's better not to go to school at all, but understand ethics."

In the realm of social-religious life, the people of Kedungasri Village are known as a community that upholds tolerance and interfaith harmony. Although the majority of the population is Muslim, there are also Hindus and Christians who live side by side peacefully. One of the concrete forms of this harmony is seen in the implementation of *the rituals of Takir Sewu* and *Sedekah Bumi*, which involve interfaith prayer and *Istisqā' prayer* in a series of events. The activity was initiated by the "Garuda" Youth Organization as a form of gratitude and a request for rain during the prolonged dry season. The tradition of processions of produce carried out together, accompanied by traditional music and hadrah, strengthens the value of mutual cooperation between residents (Engger, 2025). This fact reflects how religion in Kedungasri is not a barrier, but a social foundation that strengthens the bonds between citizens, as well as showing that plurality can be maintained through inclusive social rites and practices.

Motivation Behind the Transformation of the Ruwat Tradition

Etymologically, the term *Rough-and-tumble* comes from the Javanese language, which means "detached" or "free" from danger or misfortune. (Wahidah and Afandi 2018). In the context of Javanese culture, *ruwat* has become a system of purification rites that are rooted in the community's collective belief in the existence of *Sukerta*, i.e., spiritual conditions or bad luck inherent in individuals based on *Order* birth or certain social conditions. Historically, this practice was believed to be able to resist reinforcements and cleanse the sukerta through sacred art media, such as wayang kulit with plays *Murwakala*. The figure of Bhatara Kala is positioned as a symbol of the dark forces, which can only be "tamed" through ritualistic actions. (Maharsi 2017).

In the Javanese puppet tradition, Batara Kala is depicted as a supernatural creature who asks Batara Guru for permission to eat humans. However, these permits are limited only to those called Sugra, who are considered unfortunate or have external and spiritual disabilities according to community beliefs. To avoid becoming a Batara Kala meal, the Javanese people also arrange various purification rituals, one of which is *siraman*, especially in important moments like weddings. *Ruwatan* is believed to be a form of spiritual effort to cleanse oneself and reject reinforcements, so that one can live a new life with blessings and salvation. *Ruwatan* consists of various symbolic elements such as frankincense, white mori cloth, rice,

market snacks, and water from seven spring sources, all of which are full of philosophical meaning. The procession includes important stages such as *siraman* (innate cleansing), *selametan* (application for security), handing over of means (symbol of social concern), haircutting (removal of bad elements), *tirakatan* (gratitude to God), and puppet performances (the delivery of moral values). From this, it appears that *ruwat* is not only ritualistic but also a meeting space between mythology, social ethics, and spirituality in Javanese culture. (Budhi et al., 2023).

An interesting phenomenon occurred in Kedungasri Village, Tegaldlimo District, Banyuwangi Regency. Since the 1980s, the people in this village have begun to change the form of *traditional ruwat* to *ruwat santri*. This transformation was pioneered by KH. Muhammad Ishad, a scholar and alumnus of the Manba'ul Ulum Islamic Boarding School. He initiated a new form *of ruwat* that no longer uses puppet media, but the holy verses of the Qur'an as the essence of the purification ritual. The process involves the reading of certain letters by the *panjak*, i.e., the individual appointed to read a particular part of the Qur'an, and a leader called *dalang*, who no longer acts as a performance artist, but as a spiritual priest. Although the public does not know the exact origin or sanad of this practice, they believe that the use of Qur'anic verses in *ruwat* brings more values of blessing and religious purification than the use of puppetry elements (Toha, 2025)

The transformation of *ruwat wayang* into *ruwat santri* in Kedungasri Village was rooted in the interplay of economic realities and socio-political structures. In its traditional form, *ruwat wayang* required substantial expenditure to hire professional puppeteers, stage gamelan performances, and provide elaborate ritual paraphernalia. For an agrarian and fisheries-based community, such costs constituted a considerable burden, often outweighing the perceived benefits of the ritual. In this context, *ruwat santri* emerged as a cost-efficient alternative that preserved the ceremonial purpose while eliminating the financial obstacles, a case consistent with Geertz's (1976) observation that costly communal rites tend to undergo adaptive modification to align with local economic capacity.

The innovation was introduced by KH. Muhammad Ishad replaced the performance art element with the recitation of selected surahs from the Quran, while retaining the sequential traditional procedures. The procession opened with *tawassul*, followed by the recitation of Surah Yāsīn, al-An'ām, al-Mulk, al-Wāqi'ah, al-Sajdah, Luqmān, al-A'lā, and concluding with the *Ngakasyah* prayer, translated into the vernacular for communal comprehension. This structural continuity ensured that the ritual remained recognizable to participants, while the medium

shifted towards an explicitly Islamic form. Such adaptation can be read as a process of symbolic Islamization, where pre-Islamic cultural expressions are substituted with Qur'anic recitation, embedding Islamic values without dismantling the ritual's social architecture.

Economic considerations alone, however, cannot account for the community's widespread acceptance of *ruwat santri*. Its success was reinforced by the symbolic authority of KH. Ishad, whose position as a *kiai pesantren* granted him significant moral and spiritual capital. In societies where religious leaders hold charismatic authority, their endorsement often carries greater persuasive force than formal theological argumentation (Kalberg, 2017). Eickelman (1985) similarly notes that in many non-Arab Muslim contexts, innovation gains legitimacy primarily through the sanction of trusted religious figures (Eickelman, 1985). In Kedungasri, this leadership dynamic transformed potential resistance into broad communal endorsement.

The community's religious orientation also strengthened the practice's legitimacy. Residents regarded the recitation of Qur'anic verses not merely as a procedural element, but as a medium for seeking protection, healing, and divine blessing. This reception aligns with Saeed's (2006) concept of the "social reception of the Qur'an" and Gade's (2004) findings on the role of Qur'anic recitation in reinforcing spiritual sensibility and communal solidarity in Indonesia. (Gade, 2004). Crucially, the perceived efficacy of the ritual was not contingent on semantic comprehension of the text, but on the collective recognition of its sacredness—a perception that positioned Qur'anic recitation as more spiritually authentic than puppet-based media rooted in pre-Islamic traditions.

The inclusive socio-political climate of Kedungasri provided further reinforcement. The village has a long-standing tradition of interfaith participation, with Muslims, Hindus, and Christians jointly engaging in communal activities such as *Takir Sewu* and *sedekah bumi*. This history of cooperation created a social environment conducive to ritual adaptation, where religious innovation could occur without polarisation. As Asad argues, Islamic practices in plural settings are always the product of negotiation between normative prescriptions and lived social realities. (Asad 1993). In Kedungasri, this negotiation enabled *ruwat santri* to flourish as a form of symbolic Islamization that upheld both theological integrity and local solidarity, illustrating how political-cultural factors can act as catalysts for successful grassroots religious transformation.

Even though the media has changed, the perpetrators of *ruwat santri* continue to consciously maintain the sustainability of traditions. The structure of the stages of the procession, from the opening to the closing prayer, is maintained in the implementation of the ritual. The change occurred only in the instruments used, by replacing puppet performances with a recitation of the Qur'an that was more in accordance with Islamic values. Meuleman (2002) refers to this strategy as *creative localization*, namely an effort to integrate the universal values of Islam with local cultural forms in harmony (Meuleman, 2002). This approach allows for the preservation of cultural identity as well as the affirmation of religious values internalized by society. This proves that cultural innovation does not always negate traditions, but can enrich existing meanings.

In practice, *ruwat santri* is generally carried out before marriage or when a person enters an important phase of their life. This procession was guided by KH. Ishad instructs the participants to recite certain verses and conclude them with dhikr *lā ilāha illā Allāh* and *Muḥammadur Rasūlullāh* in a circular position around the tumpeng as seen in the gambra below. According to Ahyat, although he does not know in detail the reason for choosing this practice surah or sanad, the lack of formal explanation does not reduce people's confidence in the effectiveness of the ritual. This belief rests on the authority of religious leaders and the symbolic power of the Qur'an, which is believed to have protective and purifying powers. This condition confirms that the acceptance of rituals is influenced more by socio-religious legitimacy than by detailed theological arguments. Thus, *ruwat santri* becomes a concrete example of the interaction between collective beliefs, religious authority, and cultural adaptation in a pluralistic society (Ahyat, 2025).

Fig.1 . Process of the ritual of the ruwat Santri

The adaptation of theological symbols while preserving social functions positions *ruwat santri* in Kedungasri as a *contact zone* (Pratt, 1991)—a shared space where religious differences are negotiated through ongoing participation. The

tolerance that emerges is not the product of abstract discourse but of repeated collective interaction that fosters mutual trust and solidarity, consistent with Hefner's (2011) concept of *civic pluralism*. Anchored in strong theological legitimacy and dense social cohesion, the Kedungasri model demonstrates that socially adaptive Islamization can strengthen unity in multicultural settings without erasing distinct group identities.

Similar patterns appear elsewhere in Southeast Asia. In Kelantan and Terengganu, Malaysia, the *berdoa selamat* ritual replaces pre-Islamic mantras with the recitation of Yasin and *tahlil*, while retaining communal feasts and cooperative labor as social glue (Peletz, 2002). In Patani, Southern Thailand, *kenduri kampung* substitutes ancestral invocations with al-Fatiha and Yasin, yet maintains food redistribution and interfaith involvement (Liow, 2009). In Mindanao, the Philippines, Moro Muslims modify *pagpakan* from offerings to ancestral spirits into Qur'anic supplications, preserving communal feasts and traditional dances as markers of cultural identity (Frake, 1998).

The consistency of these cases indicates that *symbolic substitution*—the replacement of pre-Islamic theological elements with Islamic forms—combined with the preservation of social functions, is a recurring regional strategy shaped by religious diversity, local authority, and attachment to communal traditions. In Feener's (2013) terms, this is a *vernacularization of Islamic piety*, translating Islamic values into local cultural idioms without erasing their social base. From Bhabha's (1994) *cultural hybridity* perspective, it creates an "in-between" space where religious norms and local identity negotiate to produce rituals that are both theologically valid and culturally legitimate. (Arif & Panakkal, 2024). This challenges the assumption that Islamization implies cultural homogenization, showing instead that it can reinforce pluralism when rooted in local wisdom and credible leadership.

The Role of Quran Verses: Dimensions of Experience and Affectivity in Kedungasri

The spiritual experience of the community in undergoing the *ruwat santri* shows a strong affective dimension to the verses of the Qur'an. One of the residents, Ahmad Alex, stated that he felt a significant change in his life after participating in the ruwat, especially related to inner peace as an only child. The status of an only child in the local belief is considered to carry the burden *of sukerta*, which is the birth status that brings bad luck. Alex's belief that the ruwat with the recitation of

the holy verse can "purify" him from this status shows how the Qur'an is lived symbolically and therapeutically. Although he did not understand the entire contents of the letter he had read, he believed that his spiritual power had a real influence. This shows that reception does not have to be through grammatical understanding, but can be through existential experience. This interaction marks an affective and non-discursive relationship with sacred texts, as described in phenomenological approaches in religious studies (Ahmad, 2025).

A series of testimonies from other residents also reinforces this narrative. Suraji, for example, felt the need to take care of his adopted child because he believed that the child, as an only child, bore a certain spiritual burden. He believes that the recitation of the Qur'an verse is able to remove the potential for misfortune, even though the child is not his biological child. Here, we see the public's belief in the power of the Qur'an that is not exclusive to lineage or fiqh status. The power of scripture is placed as a universal protection capable of reaching anyone who undergoes its rites with the right intentions. This form of faith is not based on normative theological logic, but on collective beliefs and inherited experiences (Suraji, 2025). Thus, this kind of reception becomes part of what Abdullah Saeed calls the "social reception of the Qur'an", that is, a reception based on community and context, rather than purely individual and textual (Saeed, 2006:153).

Titis, another resident, also underwent a psychological transformation after participating in the ruwat ritual. He admitted that he often experienced failures in his daily life, which he then linked to his status, *Sugar* that has not been treated. After undergoing *ruwat* with the recitation of Qur'anic letters, he felt calmer and his life went more smoothly. In fact, he said that the Qur'an is "*The Living Book*", not only because it is read, but because the impact is felt directly (Titis, 2025). This expression shows that the Qur'an, in the eyes of the Kedungasri people, is not just a religious symbol, but an active and saving spiritual agent. In this context, the Qur'an is not only epistemic, but also existential. As Gade (2004) points out, the reading of the Qur'an in the local context of Indonesia functions not only as a form of teaching or doctrine, but as a medium for the formation of spiritual taste, meaning, and relationships. (Gade, 2004). Thus, the *ruwat santri* shows how the reading of the Qur'an forms a space of collective affection and healing that cannot be reduced to a purely linguistic meaning.

Abdur Rohman experienced a similar thing, especially in marriage matters. After failing four times in an engagement, he decided to undergo ruwat santri as a spiritual endeavor. He felt that in the next procession, he was "accompanied" by

the power of the Qur'an and finally succeeded in holding a marriage (Abdurrahman, 2025). This testimony reaffirms the community's belief that the reading of holy verses can intervene in social reality and open a way out of life's difficulties. In Clifford Geertz's perspective, this is an example of a "symbolic system" in religion, where religious texts serve to provide a framework of meaning for complex experiences (Geertz, 1973:90). Therefore, ruwat santri is not just a ritual, but also a system of meaning that allows humans to understand and manage existential suffering.

Through all the narratives above, it can be concluded that the tradition of ruwat santri is a form of Qur'anic interpretation based on practice and experience (tafsir praksis). He does not produce a book of tafsir, but presents a tafsir in life. In this case, *ruwat santri* is proof that the community is able to create a contextual, functional, and spiritual form of Qur'an reception without losing its Islamic essence. A model like this can be an important contribution to the discourse of living Qur'an and Islam in the archipelago. Thus, the Qur'an is not only read and memorized, but also lived and lived in meaningful social practices.

Analysis of Social Action in the *Ruwat Santri* Tradition: Max Weber's Perspective

The theory of social action developed by Max Weber provides a conceptual framework for understanding the motives and meanings behind people's behavior towards their cultural and religious practices. (Jones, 2003:114). Weber divides social action into four categories: traditional action, instrumental rationality, value rationality, and affective. (Turner, 2012:115). This approach becomes relevant in seeing the dynamics of the people of Kedungasri Village in the implementation of the traditions *Ruwat santri*, a form of local ritual that has undergone a process of Islamization through the replacement of puppet cultural elements with the recitation of the holy verses of the Qur'an. This analysis shows that people's religious actions are not singular, but are influenced by various historical, economic, spiritual, and affective backgrounds.

a. Traditional Actions: Ancestral Heritage as Ritual Legitimacy

Traditional actions, according to Weber, refer to patterns of actions that are carried out due to habits, routines, or inheritances that have taken place across generations. In the Kedungasri community, the tradition *of ruwat santri* is not only carried out as a form of piety, but also as part of "what should be done." This practice has been inherited since the KH era. Ishad and passed on by local

figures such as Mr. Ahyat without much question or deep rationalization (Ahyat, 2025). This shows that their actions are an expression of adherence to a tradition that lives and continues to be preserved in the collective memory of the community. The presence of *ruwat santri* as a form of substitute *for ruwat wayang* has been inherent in the minds of the community as a mandatory spiritual effort, especially for those who are considered "sukerta." Those who perform this ritual often do not question the essence or theological interpretation of the Qur'an readings used. Instead, what they do is repeat what was taught before, in hopes of avoiding supernatural danger or bad luck. This is what makes this tradition a traditional social action in Weber's sense: an action that is done because it has been "always that way."

b. Instrumental Rationality Actions: Strategic Adaptation in Limitations

The action of instrumental rationality is a form of action that is oriented towards the goal and is carried out with consideration of efficiency in the means of achieving it. The people of Kedungasri consciously choose *ruwat santri* as a more economical ritual solution than *ruwat wawang*. This choice was born out of realistic considerations: that puppet performances cost a lot of money, while reading verses of the Qur'an can be done at a lower cost and still feel sacred. In this case, religious actions are not entirely based on inheritance, but also the result of social and economic calculations.

The initiative of KH. Ishad had to formulate *ruwat santri* as the starting point for community rationality. He sees the needs of people who want to continue to carry out spiritual rituals without being burdened with the cost of traditional culture. Thus, by involving the panjak who read certain letters from the Qur'an, he created a new model of ruwat that was efficient but still contained religious meaning. In the narrative of the community, as conveyed by Mr. Ahyat, this *ruwat* can be carried out in a sustainable manner without economic pressure. Thus, it can be said that this action is the result of instrumental rationality born from the social conditions of the village community (Ahyat, 2025).

c. The Rational Actions of Values: Spirituality and the Meaning of Blessings

In contrast to instrumental actions that are oriented towards practical results, the action of value rationality is based on a deep belief in the intrinsic value of an action. In the context of *ruwat santri*, many Kedungasri residents believe that this ritual is not just a form of cultural preservation or economic solution, but also a medium to achieve blessings, inner peace, and harmony in life. This action is driven by noble values such as *barokah*, *wisdom*, and liberation

from *sukerta*, as believed by figures such as Mr. Suraji, who held ruwat for his adopted son (Suraji, 2025).

People do not only carry out this ritual for customary reasons or efficiency, but because they believe in a transcendent power in the recitation of the verses of the Qur'an. They believed that the scriptures recited in the procession contained divine power to purify the soul and resist calamity. In this case, *ruwat santri* is an action that is carried out on the basis of religious and spiritual commitment, not solely to achieve worldly goals. This corresponds to the character of the act of value rationality formulated by Weber: an action born of a belief in the value of truth or the sacredness of the action itself.

d. Affective Action: Spiritual and Psychological Emotions of the Community

Affective actions in Weber's theory are actions triggered by the emotional state of the perpetrator. Although Weber states that affective action is difficult to categorize as a form of pure rationality, it remains an important part of socio-religious practice. In the context of *ruwat santri*, this action can be seen in the emotional testimonies of residents such as Ahmad Alex, Titis, and Abdur Rohman, who felt a post-ruwat psychological transformation. They state that the ritual provides inner peace, improves one's fate, and even heals spiritual trauma experienced previously.

For example, Titis admitted that she was always bullied by bad luck until she finally did ruwat and felt a significant change in her life. Abdur Rohman even attributed his success in building a family to the spiritual energy of *the students*. Although it cannot be objectively verified, these subjective experiences have great power in shaping affectation-based social actions. This shows that rituals are not just symbolic ceremonies, but rather sublime spaces where individuals let go of inner anxiety and gain new hope.

Through the lens of Max Weber's theory of social action, the practice of *ruwat santri* in Kedungasri Village is revealed not merely as an expression of traditional or religious culture, but as a synthesis of multiple forms of social rationality. It embodies traditional action, transmitted across generations; instrumental action, arising as an adaptive response to economic constraints; value-rational action, grounded in deep religious convictions; and affective action, infused with strong emotional engagement. This multidimensionality demonstrates that local religious practices cannot be adequately understood from a single perspective. Instead, they must be viewed as interactive spaces where culture, religion, economics, and psychology converge and evolve dynamically.

Within this framework, the transformation of *ruwat* into *ruwat santri* is not simply an adaptation of ritual form to conform to Islamic norms; it also represents the deliberate construction of an inclusive social arena. By preserving the communal structure and symbolic elements deeply embedded in collective memory, the tradition remains a shared cultural asset, even for non-Muslim residents with longstanding cultural ties. Replacing the *wayang* performance with Qur'anic recitation has not diminished the ritual's unifying character; rather, it has endowed the practice with new, universally accessible values. As a result, the Islamization process moves beyond doctrinal internalization toward the creation of a participatory space open to all members of the community.

In this context, *ruwat santri* functions as a platform for interfaith encounters that emphasize cooperation, mutual respect, and the recognition of diversity. The values it promotes—blessing, safety, and harmony—are articulated as collective priorities that transcend religious boundaries. This inclusive approach not only strengthens the Islamic identity of the community but also establishes an organic mechanism for sustaining social cohesion. Given its adaptability and relevance to diverse community contexts, *ruwat santri* offers a replicable model for reinforcing religious tolerance, rooted in local culture yet firmly grounded in universal human values.

Qur'anic Spirituality and the Empirical Configuration of Local Religion

In the discourse of contemporary Islamic studies, spirituality is no longer limited in a mere normative or theological sense, but is also read as a social configuration formed from the dialectic between the text of revelation and the cultural experience of the ummah (Asad, 1993:34). The Qur'an is not only present as a holy book that is read in the worship room, but also as a living entity that actively interacts in the daily life of the community (Yahya, 2021:103). This concept is reinforced by the *Living Qur'an*, which is a model of understanding the Qur'an as a text that has been actualized in the life practice and social rites of Muslims (Rafiq, 2021). In this context, Qur'anic spirituality is not only born from the process of cognition, but from the process of reception and internalization of the values of revelation in a concrete social space.

The public's reception of the Qur'an is layered and complex. In many cases, especially in rural Islamic societies, Qur'anic verses are not presented in the form of academic commentary or normative discourse, but rather through ritual practices, collective prayers, or forms of spiritual interaction that contain symbolic

meaning (Kirom, 2025). The Qur'an is lived, not just read; interpreted through events, not just through text exposition. This indicates that Qur'anic spirituality in local practice is more performative and existential than discursive and normative (Suparno, Amsariah & Zakaria, 2025). Therefore, actions such as the recitation of certain verses in social situations including on the eve of marriage, birth, death, and purification, are a form of praxis interpretation of revelation.

In Max Weber's perspective, social action is the expression of subjective meaning that individuals carry out by taking into account the orientation of certain values, traditions, affections, or rational goals (Kalberg, 2017). When one reads the Qur'an in a local rite such as ruwat santri, the act cannot be reduced to a purely normative form of worship, but rather as the result of complex motivations that reflect spiritual values, collective beliefs, and forms of cultural adaptation. In this case, as Eickelman (1985) points out, the distribution and appreciation of religious meaning in non-Arab Muslim societies often depends on the social structure and authority relations that manage the symbolic and contextual transmission of religious knowledge, rather than solely on textual discourse (Eickelman, 1985). In other words, the action contains a layered motivational structure as classified by Weber: traditional (inheritance-based), affective (emotional), value (spiritual belief), and instrumental (social calculation).

The spirituality of the Qur'an manifested in the form of local rites shows how the people interpret the Qur'an not only as a religious text, but as a medium of healing, protection, and inner peace (Abu-Rabi', 2006). This phenomenon shows that local religion is not in the dichotomy between sharia and customs, but becomes a hybrid configuration that brings the two together in the form of a complete proxy. Therefore, Qur'anic spirituality in the local context is not a form of reduction of teachings, but a form of living interpretation of revelation that merges with the collective consciousness of society.

Furthermore, this configuration of local religiosity cannot be separated from the long history of the process of internalization of Islam in the archipelago (Susiati, Sumiaty & Buton, 2022). Studies of local Islam show that the acceptance of Islam in Indonesia is more cultural than revolutionary (Busyairy, 2018). Islam entered through a sufistic, symbolic and adaptive approach, hence Quranic values were absorbed through the socio-cultural medium of society (Azra 2004; Van Bruinessen, 1994). In this context, Qur'nic spirituality becomes a kind of transcendent spirit that maintains the continuity of social order through the mechanism of rites. This is what distinguishes between normative spirituality (which departs from texts and

laws) and local spirituality (which departs from the experiences and beliefs of the community).

From an epistemological perspective, Weber's approach to social action helps to uncover the rationality of the perpetrator in internalizing the values of revelation in social action. Meanwhile, the concept of local Islam provides a cultural foundation that explains the context and background of the practice. The two, when combined, produce a complete theoretical framework for reading local religiosity not as an anomaly, but as a legitimate form of contextual Islamic religiosity. This affirms that Islam is not only a text, but also a social praxis that lives in the pulse of society. Thus, Quranic spirituality and the empirical configuration of local religiosity are not two separate entities, but two faces of a single process that live on each other. In Quranic spirituality, revelation is central to meaning; In the local configuration, culture is a medium for conveying this meaning. The process of integration between the two gave birth to an authentic, rooted, and contextual form of religiosity, which is an important treasure in understanding Indonesian Islam today.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the transformation of the Javanese *ruwat* tradition into *ruwat santri* in Kedungasri Village exemplifies how symbolic Islamization can unfold without disrupting cultural continuity. The central shift, namely replacing *pewayangan* and mystical incantations with Quranic recitation, represents not merely a formal modification, but a rearticulation of the concept of purification. This redefinition aligns the ritual with Islamic principles while remaining deeply embedded in local wisdom.

Analyzed through Max Weber's theory of social action, *ruwat santri* integrates four dimensions of actions: (1) traditional action, reflected in the intergenerational transmission of ritual practice; (2) affective action, expressed in profound spiritual experiences and emotional engagement; (3) value-rational action, grounded in the commitment to Quranic values; and (4) instrumental-rational action, demonstrating strategic adaptation to economic constraints. This multidimensionality reveals *ruwat santri* as a dynamic site where religious meaning, cultural preservation and socio-economic realities intersect.

With these characteristics, *ruwat santri* embodies the actualization of religious moderation by positioning cultural heritage as an integral component of Indonesia's pluralism, something to be accommodated rather than opposed. It serves as a praxis space where tolerance, adaptation, and a balance between

doctrinal purity and cultural continuity are cultivated and transmitted. This tradition affirms that Quranic values can harmoniously coexist with local cultural symbols, generating an inclusive and contextual religiosity. In practice, *ruwat santri* not only strengthens the Islamic identity of the community but also sustains intergroup social bonds, enhances cohesion within diversity, and provides a tangible model of religion as a unifying force. The practical implications of these findings extend to the development of cultural *da'wah* strategies that are sensitive to local contexts and the formulation of public policies that support religious practices aligned with the Sharia while preserving cultural heritage. By positioning the Quran as the central agent of transformation, *ruwat santri* enriches the discourse on the Living Qur'an in Indonesia and offers a model of religion–culture integration that reinforces religious moderation as a foundation for sustainable social harmony.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Local governments, religious leaders, and cultural practitioners could develop policies and programs that promote the integration of religious moderation values into the preservation of local cultural traditions. Practices such as *ruwat santri* can serve as a model for designing religious activities that align with Islamic teachings while respecting local customs. Such an approach is expected to strengthen interfaith harmony, safeguard cultural identity, and foster collective awareness that diversity is a social capital for building a harmonious, progressive, and prosperous society.

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