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Religion, Culture, and Modernity

Negotiating the *Suroan* Ritual in Wonokerto, Lumajang

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Abstract

The *Suroan* tradition is an annual ritual observed by the Javanese community to commemorate the Islamic New Year. It originated during the Islamic Mataram era under Sultan Agung, who integrated the Saka and Hijri calendars. Over time, *Suroan* spread to Wonokerto, Lumajang, where it became an annual cultural event. The celebration includes traditional performances such as Tayub Jaran Kencak, Karapan Sapi, Ojung, and Wayang, held over three days. Despite its cultural significance, the *Suroan* ritual faces challenges from modernity, which often views tradi-tional practices as outdated. This research explores how the Wonokerto community negotiates between reli-gion, culture, and modernity to sustain *Suroan*. Using an ethnographic approach, including participant obser-vation and interviews, the study examines how the ritual is adapted to contemporary contexts The findings reveal that Wonokerto's negotiation of modernity follows the ngeli tanpa keli principle (going with the flow without being swept away), a strategy rooted in the approaches of Sunan Kalijaga and Sultan Agung. Rather than resisting modern influences, *Suroan* incorporates them to remain relevant. The village government's festivalisation of the ritual ensures its preservation while promoting cultural tourism and eco-nomic benefits. This case illustrates that cultural heritage endures not through resistance but through strategic adaptation to modernity.

Keywords: *Suroan* tradition, modernity, cultural negotiation, indigenous community, traditional ritual

Introduction

The *Suroan* tradition is one of the traditional rituals of the Javanese community, with variations in its commemoration across different regions. In Wonokerto Village, Lumajang Regency, the *Suroan* tradition is observed as both a spiritual event and a unique local cultural celebration. In this village, *Suroan* is typically accompanied by sedekah bumi, a ritual expressing gratitude to God for the harvest and seeking blessings for welfare and safety. Distinctive customs such as Tayub Jaran Kencak and Ojung are integral to this celebration. Tayub Jaran Kencak involves beautifully decorated horses and dancers performing energetic movements, while Ojung is a display of agility using rattan, symbolising the courage and resilience of the community. These rituals not only serve as a means of preserving ancestral traditions but also act as a medium for cultural expression, enriching the identity of the Wonokerto community.

The negotiation between the *Suroan* tradition, religion, and modern culture presents a unique challenge for the people of Wonokerto Village. On the one hand, they strive to maintain the purity of customs passed down through generations. On the other hand, the influence of Islam as the majority religion and the demands of modernity necessitate adjustments in the implementation of this ritual. Some members of the community believe that certain elements of the *Suroan* tradition need to be aligned with Islamic values to ensure they do not contradict its teachings. Simultaneously, modernity brings changes in lifestyle and technological advancements that affect how people interact and celebrate the tradition. Therefore, this study aims to analyse how the people of Wonokerto Village negotiate the *Suroan* tradition within the context of religion and modern culture, focusing on adaptation patterns that allow Javanese culture to remain in harmony with Islamic teachings while enduring amid modernisation.

Suroan, also known as Suran or Suro, is a Javanese tradition commemorating the Hijri New Year, which falls on 1 Muharram. This tradition emerged from the cultural interaction between Islamic teachings and Hindu-Buddhist traditions (Rintaiswara, 2015). From an Islamic perspective, the *Suroan* commemoration marks the night of 1 Muharram in the Hijri calendar. At the same time, in practice, it incorporates elements of Hindu-Buddhist traditions that had long existed in Java prior to the arrival of Islam. This calendar system was introduced by Sultan Agung (1613–1645). During his reign, Javanese society generally followed the Saka calendar system, inherited from Hindu traditions, while the Islamic Mataram Sultanate used the Hijri calendar. Sultan Agung, seeking to expand Islam in Java, initiated the unification of the Saka and Hijri calendars into a single Javanese calendar. The primary purpose of this unification was to foster unity among his people and unify the island of Java, ensuring that they were not divided by differing religious beliefs. Additionally, this unity aimed to strengthen the kingdom's power to confront the Dutch in Batavia. The unification of the calendars began on Friday, Legi of Jumadil Akhir, in 1555 Saka, or 8 July 1633 AD. One Suro, the first day of the Javanese calendar in the month of Suro, coincides with 1 Muharram in the Hijri calendar (Rintaiswara, 2015).

In the Sultanate of Yogyakarta and the Sultanate of Surakarta, *Suroan* is celebrated with the tradition of *mubeng beteng*. This procession involves the community walking around the palace fortress as a symbol of protection and a prayer for safety in the new year. The activity is conducted solemnly and is often accompanied by prayers and the recitation of holy verses from the Qur'an. In Solo, the *Suroan* celebrations include the *kirab pusaka*, a parade in which various palace heirlooms, such as spears and krises, are displayed throughout the city. The *kirab* showcases the palace's cultural heritage and serves as a spiritual endeavour to cleanse the heirlooms (Ulung, 2013). Some communities on the coast of Java celebrate *Suroan* with the *larung sesaji* ritual, which involves throwing offerings into the sea. These offerings typically consist of various kinds of food, flowers, and incense, presented to the sea as an expression of gratitude and a request for protection from disasters.

Previous studies have partially analysed the harmonisation between culture, religion, and modernity. For instance, Fadlan et al. (2020) identified rational actions within the *Suroan* ritual in Bangunharjo, Yogyakarta. Similarly, Ahmad Choirul Rofiq (2024), Ricaksono and Muna (2022), and Damar Safera (2020) explored the harmonisation between religion and the *Suroan* tradition in Java. Rofiq (2024) argued that *Suroan* is the result of acculturation between Islam and Javanese culture, facilitated by the openness of Islamic teachings and the adaptability of Javanese culture to external influences. Specifically, the negotiation of these three elements—culture, religion, and modernity—was examined by Andri Ashadi (2019), who investigated the negotiation efforts of *Kaum Mudo* (the younger generation) in reconciling culture, Islam, and modernity. Therefore, this study addresses an academic gap by providing a more comprehensive analysis of the interaction between culture, religion, and modernity within the context of the *Suroan* tradition in Javanese society.

The significance of this research lies in its contribution to expanding the understanding of the negotiation patterns between culture, modernity, and religion, particularly within Javanese society. Specifically, the research addresses the following questions: How do the negotiation patterns between culture, religion, and modernity manifest in the *Suroan* tradition within Javanese society? How do Javanese communities balance the preservation of tradition with the acceptance of modern elements without losing their spiritual and traditional essence? Furthermore, what role does Islam play in guiding the community through this negotiation process?

This study posits that Javanese society negotiates the relationship between culture, religion, and modernity within the *Suroan* tradition by adapting modern elements while preserving spiritual and traditional values, with Islam serving as a guiding framework in navigating these changes. The study employs Max Weber's theory of modernity to analyse how rationalisation influences the role of religion in society. Weber explains that modernity drives a shift from traditional ways of thinking to a more secular and knowledge-based approach. As bureaucracy and technology advance, religion becomes increasingly marginalised by the logic of efficiency and rationality, a phenomenon Weber describes as the "disenchantment of the world." This theory helps to understand how communities negotiate religious values with the demands of rationality in modern life.

Moreover, this study also considers Homi K. Bhabha's concept of cultural hybridity to examine how Javanese society merges traditional, religious, and modern elements within the *Suroan* tradition. Bhabha argues that cultural hybridity emerges when different cultural influences interact, creating new, dynamic identities rather than rigid, fixed traditions. This perspective helps explain how Javanese communities do not merely abandon or resist modernity but instead integrate it in ways that allow their spiritual and cultural heritage to remain relevant. By combining Weber's rationalisation theory with Bhabha's hybridity framework, this study provides a deeper understanding of how tradition, religion, and modernity coexist and evolve within Javanese society.

This qualitative study employs ethnographic methods to analyse the *Suroan* ritual in Wonokerto, Lumajang. The ethnographic approach was selected because it enables researchers to understand and describe the culture and meaning embedded in the *Suroan* ritual in a profound and holistic manner. This research focuses on how the community in Wonokerto carries out and interprets the ritual within the context of their daily lives.

The object of this research is the *Suroan* traditional ritual in Wonokerto Village, Lumajang, which took place from 28-31 July 2022. The subjects of this study include cultural practitioners, such as traditional leaders and members of the general community. Data collection was conducted using three methods. First, field studies were carried out through observation. The observations were undertaken to gather direct information by participating in the *Suroan* procession. Second, interviews were conducted with several informants. The researcher interviewed one traditional leader and three residents who are cultural practitioners of *Suroan*. Third, a literature review was conducted by collecting and analysing written sources related to the research problem.

Identity Construction of the Wonokerto Community

Homi K. Bhabha (1949) defines *ambivalence* as a form of resistance by the colonised against the coloniser. Those who are dominated may appear to accept their subjugation but, simultaneously, resist it. In the context of cultural identity politics, ambivalence manifests as individual confusion over identity due to exposure to two competing cultures. In the case of the Wonokerto community, this ambivalence is evident in their daily and cultural practices. Many members of the community are unaware that their cultural identity is dual in nature. On the one hand, the people of Wonokerto, particularly in Winong Hamlet, identify themselves as Javanese. On the other hand, their cultural and daily practices are closely aligned with Madurese traditions.

One clear example of this duality is the linguistic accent used by the Wonokerto community. They speak Javanese with a distinct Madurese accent, reflecting the blending of these two cultural identities. When researchers conversed with residents, they found that the community members understood Javanese, even when spoken in its refined form (*kromo*). However, their responses were delivered in a Madurese-accented Javanese, a characteristic feature of the Horseshoe (*Tapal Kuda*) region, where residents are proficient in both

languages, often mixing them or using them separately.

This self-identification as Javanese, while using a Madurese accent in daily speech, exemplifies cultural hybridity, which ultimately gives rise to ambivalence. The convergence of Javanese and Madurese cultures has resulted in a unique linguistic style. The people of Wonokerto are not only fluent in Javanese, which they regard as their native language, but also adept in Madurese. Winong Hamlet, in particular, demonstrates this duality: while its residents identify as Javanese, their daily linguistic and cultural practices are heavily influenced by Madurese traditions. This blending of speech and language is referred to as *ideoiek* (Malmkjaer, 2009). Individuals from the Lumajang and Horseshoe regions can be easily identified through their distinctive speech patterns when engaged in conversation using Javanese. This linguistic style has endowed the Horseshoe region with a unique identity, characterised by its ability to seamlessly use both languages (Zoebarazy, 2018).

This linguistic identity also distinguishes the Horseshoe region from neighbouring areas. For instance, in the *Arek* or *Suroboyoan* region, the dialect differs significantly from that of the Horseshoe region. Although there are many similarities in vocabulary, the dialect serves as a marker of the speaker's identity. Similarly, the *Mataraman* area, stretching from Nganjuk to the west, features the *Solo Mataraman* dialect, which differs from the *Suroboyoan* dialect. Thus, the speaker's linguistic style can be used to identify their regional and cultural background.

The Javanese language, infused with a Madurese dialect, exemplifies a Javanese-Madurese hybrid culture. This hybridity is rooted in historical processes that brought Madurese migrants to Java, particularly in the Lumajang area and its surroundings. The interaction between these two cultures has resulted in a unique linguistic style that sets the region apart from other Javanese areas. This hybrid identity is deeply influenced by environmental factors. According to Stuart Hall (1990), identity can either remain static or evolve depending on the environment. Hall categorises identity into two types: the *identity of being* and the *identity of becoming*.

The *identity of being* is static and unchanging, rooted in a group's shared historical and cultural background. Such identities tend to endure over time and are preserved by the community as part of their artistic and historical heritage. In contrast, the *identity of becoming* is dynamic and adaptable, allowing individuals to adjust to new social environments and changing times. The process of *identity of becoming* is a long and challenging journey, but it also offers opportunities for growth and self-discovery. By remaining open to new experiences and opportunities, individuals can develop their identity in ways that enable them to connect with others, express themselves, and realise their full potential.

The identity of the Wonokerto community today is the result of historical constructions that continue to evolve, making it a dynamic or *identity of becoming*. The community's identity, inherited from generation to generation, is closely tied to its historical and cultural background, shaped by collective experiences, traditions, and values that are carefully preserved. One manifestation of this identity is the *Suroan* ritual, a series of ceremonies that symbolise the continuity and evolution of traditions and cultural values passed down

by their ancestors. In this context, the *Suroan* ritual serves as a means of reinforcing collective identity, strengthening the sense of unity and belonging among community members. Emile Durkheim (1972), a French sociologist, argued that cultural rituals enhance the solidarity of a community. Durkheim further noted that each tribal group has totemic symbols that reinforce its self-identity and solidarity.

The identity displayed by the Wonokerto community is no longer seen as a mere convergence of two cultures; it has transcended that. The Javanese-Madurese cultural identity has merged into a singular, cohesive identity. This fusion has been developing over a long period. While the community identifies as Javanese, the use of the Madurese dialect and other Madurese cultural practices demonstrates that their identity comprises two intertwined forms, exemplifying what Homi K. Bhabha terms *ambivalence*. The community accepts Madurese culture but resists being labelled solely as Madurese. This simultaneous acceptance and resistance are responses born out of the interaction between the two cultures (Ashcroft et al., 2007).

Suroan Ritual in Wonokerto, Lumajang

At the end of the month of Dhulhijjah, the residents of Wonokerto Village begin preparations for the *Suroan* ritual. The women prepare the *ubo rampe* (ritual offerings) in their kitchens, while the men prepare the venues where the ritual will take place. These venues include the village field, the village hall, Winong Play Ground, and Sedaeng. Each location is designated for specific events during the *Suroan* celebration. The field hosts the opening ceremony and the cattle race; Sedaeng is the site for the *Tayub Jaran Kencak* (a traditional horse dance); Winong Play Ground is reserved for the *Ojung* (whip-fighting ritual); and the village hall is used for the puppet show and the closing ceremony.

The sequence of events observed by researchers began with the preparations. The men of Wonokerto Village set up the venues in the field, Winong Play Ground, Sedaeng, and the village hall, while the women prepared the *ubo rampe* to be served at each event. Once the preparations were complete, the opening ceremony commenced after the *Isha* prayer, starting with *shalawatan* (recitations of prayers praising the Prophet Muhammad). All villagers were invited to attend the opening ceremony in the field. Following the *shalawatan*, the event continued with *barikan*, a tradition in which the community gathers food in a central location, usually a field, bringing dishes from their homes. This event typically includes *tahlil* (recitation of prayers) and communal prayers for the ancestors, expressing gratitude for the abundance of sustenance received throughout the year.

As one local woman explained in an interview (2022), "*Barikan* is a tradition where residents gather in one place, usually in a field, bringing food from their own homes. However, it is not just about sharing a meal; the event typically includes *tahlilan* (recitation of prayers) and communal prayers. People pray for their deceased ancestors and express gratitude for the blessings they have received over the past year. Essentially, beyond its religious aspect, this event strengthens community bonds and helps preserve cultural heritage."

The following day, the Wonokerto community organised the *Ojung* and *Tayub Jaran Kencak* events. The *Ojung* event took place at Winong Play Ground around 10 a.m. Residents from Winong brought food served on banana leaves and fronds, reflecting a traditional approach to minimise waste. The village head opened the event, which was followed by *tahlil* prayers for the ancestors. The *Ojung* ritual involves a whip-fighting tradition using rattan sticks. Two participants, typically men of varying ages, take turns striking each other with the rattan. The rules stipulate that the lashes must be alternated, the opponents must be evenly matched, and the number of strikes is limited to ten for adults and five for children. Before the contest begins, the *Ojung* shaman recites prayers for the participants, seeking safety and blessings (*barakah*) for the event.

A former *Ojung* shaman elaborated on the rules in an interview (2022): "There are several rules that must be followed. The whipping is done alternately, opponents must be evenly matched, and the number of whips is limited—10 times for adults and 5 times for children. Additionally, before the event begins, a prayer ritual is led by the *dukun Ojung* (traditional healer or spiritual leader)."

The *Ojung* ritual has undergone a transformation in its association with water. Historically, the ritual was linked to rain-making ceremonies, particularly in regions like Madura, where water scarcity is a significant concern. However, in Wonokerto, the ritual has shifted in meaning due to the community's changing perspective on water. Located on the slopes of Mount Semeru, Wonokerto enjoys abundant water resources, reducing the need for rain-making rituals. As a result, the *Ojung* tradition in Wonokerto no longer serves the function of invoking rain but has been integrated into the *Suroan* ritual as a cultural and spiritual practice. This shift reflects Foucault's (1994) concept of epistemic change, where the meaning and function of rituals evolve over time in response to societal and environmental factors.

The *Ojung* tradition in Wonokerto also demonstrates a philosophical alignment with the Madurese *Ojung* tradition, particularly in its symbolic representation of courage and resilience. In Sumenep, Madura, the *Ojung* ritual is traditionally performed to request rain from God (Afandi, 2018). This practice is rooted in the agricultural needs of the region, where rainfall is essential for crop cultivation. In contrast, Wonokerto's *Ojung* has lost its rain-making function due to the village's geographical advantage of abundant water. This epistemic shift highlights how environmental factors influence the evolution of cultural practices.

In the afternoon, the *Suroan* event continues at Sedaeng, a natural spring located on the village's main road. According to local residents, the road near Sedaeng has been the site of numerous accidents, particularly after the discontinuation of the *Tayub Jaran Kencak* ritual during the COVID-19 pandemic. The villagers believe that the absence of the ritual disturbed the *danyang* (spiritual guardians) of the spring, leading to accidents. As one resident explained in an interview (2022), "Oh, the ones who had accidents were not Wonokerto residents, Sir. Usually, they were outsiders who happened to pass through Sendang Road. That's why, in 2022, the *Tayub Jaran Kencak* was held again in the Sendang area. The locals

believe that by organising the *Tayub* again, accidents can be reduced. This tradition is seen as a way to ensure safety and prevent unfortunate events in that place."

The belief in the presence of *danyang* or spiritual guardians at Sedaeng has been passed down through generations. The *Tayub Jaran Kencak* tradition, which involves a procession of decorated horses and dancers, has long been held to honour these guardians. However, the tradition faced opposition from religious leaders who viewed it as incompatible with Islamic teachings. After a prolonged debate and the intervention of the village head, the *Tayub Jaran Kencak* was reinstated, reflecting the community's commitment to preserving their cultural heritage while addressing spiritual concerns.

Another significant tradition during *Suroan* is the cattle race, held in the village field. This event, which also serves as a venue for the opening ceremony and *barikan*, fosters a sense of community solidarity. The cattle race is unique in that it has become a collective tradition of Wonokerto residents, despite not all hamlets being inhabited by Madurese people. The presence of Madurese migrants, who introduced the tradition of bull racing, has enriched the cultural fabric of the village. Even in hamlets without Madurese residents, the community exhibits a blend of Javanese and Madurese cultural practices, particularly in their use of the Javanese language with a Madurese accent. This linguistic and cultural hybridity underscores the deep integration of Madurese traditions into the Wonokerto community.

Food plays a central role in the *Suroan* ritual, with *ubo rampe* (ritual offerings) being an essential component. Sticky rice (*ketan*) is a staple food that must be present at every *Suroan* event. As one local woman explained in an interview (2022), "*Ketan* is a must-have food at the *Suroan* event. It has always been that way, passed down through generations. Usually, *ketan* is prepared in various forms, such as *jatah* and *tape ketan*. During the opening ceremony, residents bring dishes made from *ketan* to be served. As for its meaning, the elders understand it better. But according to the local *dukun*, *ketan* symbolises unity because of its sticky nature. So, perhaps the idea is to keep the community harmonious and closely connected to one another."

Sticky rice is served in various forms, including *jatah* (portioned servings) and *tape ketan* (fermented sticky rice). The tradition of preparing sticky rice for *Suroan* has been upheld for generations, with younger community members often unaware of its deeper symbolic meaning. According to the former shaman, the sticky nature of the rice symbolises unity and cohesion within the community. During the *Suroan* celebrations, researchers visited villagers' homes and were offered various dishes made from sticky rice, highlighting its importance as a cultural and spiritual symbol.

Genealogy of the Sacredness of Sedaeng and Winong

In the view of the Wonokerto community, water is a sacred element. The springs at Sedaeng and Winong are emblematic of the deep respect the Wonokerto people hold for water. Each of these locations is considered sacred and is associated with distinct rituals.

The *Ojung* tradition is performed at Winong Play Ground, while the *Tayub Jaran Kencak* tradition takes place at Sedaeng. Both traditions are carried out annually and have been preserved through generations. The government supports the implementation of these rituals by providing facilities and the village hall as a venue for the closing ceremony.

The existence of *sendang* (natural springs) and Winong, collectively referred to as *petirtaan* in the Wonokerto area, is deeply intertwined with local mystical beliefs. The *petirtaan* at Sedaeng is considered sacred because it is one of the streams originating from a natural source. This water is essential for daily activities such as farming, washing clothes, bathing, and cleaning livestock. Over time, mystical stories have emerged around the spring, with many locals believing that it is inhabited by spiritual beings. As one local youth explained in an interview (2022):

"The people here believe that this *sendang* (natural spring) has spiritual inhabitants, which is why there are certain rules that must be followed. For example, you're not allowed to litter, use it for unnecessary activities, or behave inappropriately around the area. They say that if someone disobeys these rules, they might experience misfortune or strange occurrences. That's why locals only use the *sendang* when necessary, like for bathing, washing clothes, or cleaning their pets. That's also why a designated bathing area was built near the *sendang*, so people can use its water properly without breaking the rules."

In addition to establishing behavioural rules around the spring, the belief in supernatural beings is a key reason for holding the *Tayub Jaran Kencak* ritual near Sedaeng. According to the Wonokerto shaman, the *Tayub Jaran Kencak* ritual is performed at the request of the spiritual guardians of the spring. If the community fails to conduct the ritual, these guardians may cause disturbances. This belief was reinforced when the *Tayub Jaran Kencak* ritual was suspended for several years due to COVID-19 restrictions and village regulations. During this period, there were numerous accidents involving vehicles on the road near Sedaeng. Residents attributed these incidents to the absence of the ritual, which they believed had angered the spiritual guardians. As a result, the community decided to reinstate the *Tayub Jaran Kencak* as part of the *slametan* (ritual feast), hoping to prevent further accidents and restore harmony.

Meanwhile, the sacredness of water at Winong is rooted in local folklore. According to the *Ojung* shaman in Winong, the *petirtaan* at Winong was once a stopover for a Muslim traveller from the Majapahit Kingdom. The traveller paused at Winong before continuing his journey, and his presence was said to be accompanied by a white tiger, believed to be the guardian of Winong. This story has been passed down through generations and continues to shape the community's reverence for the site.

Visually, the area around Winong waterfall is characterised by dense bamboo trees. During the dry season, the water flow is reduced, but in the rainy season, the waterfall becomes more vigorous. During their visit, researchers observed several offerings left at the site, intended for its spiritual inhabitants. To maintain the sanctity of Winong, the community has built a playground near the waterfall, where the *Ojung* ritual is held. This blend of sacred and recreational spaces reflects the community's efforts to balance tradition

with modern needs.

The stories surrounding the sacredness of Winong and Sedaeng align with Mircea Eliade's (1961) concept of myths as narratives that convey supernatural truths. Eliade argues that myths are not mere imagination or superstition but are deeply meaningful stories that explain the origins of gods, ancestors, and other supernatural phenomena. These myths form the foundation of religious practices, giving rise to rituals and the veneration of sacred objects. In the case of Wonokerto, the myths surrounding *petirtaan* have led to the establishment of rituals such as *Ojung* and *Tayub Jaran Kencak*, which reinforce the community's beliefs and strengthen social cohesion.

Émile Durkheim (1972) further elaborates on the role of rituals in reinforcing communal beliefs. He states, "Beliefs are made manifest in the rituals and cults. Also, this community of beliefs is sometimes shown in the cult. The point of the ritual is to reinforce beliefs." Rituals, according to Durkheim, are practices rooted in the sacred and serve to strengthen group solidarity. The *Ojung* and *Tayub Jaran Kencak* rituals in Wonokerto exemplify this function, as they not only preserve the myths of *petirtaan* but also foster a sense of unity among community members.

The role of these rituals in enhancing group solidarity is evident from the outset of the events. Men, women, teenagers, and children all participate in the preparation and execution of the rituals. Women prepare the *ubo rampe* (ritual offerings), including food and sticky rice snacks, while men set up the ritual sites. On the day of the event, all other activities are suspended as the community focuses entirely on the rituals at Sedaeng and Winong. As one local resident explained in an interview (2022):

"From the very beginning of the event, this ritual clearly strengthens the community's unity and reinforces their belief in tradition. Everyone gets involved, from children to adults, both men and women. The women are usually busy preparing *ubo rampe* (ritual offerings), such as food and *ketan*-based snacks, while the men take care of setting up the ritual site. On the main day, all other activities are put on hold because the residents focus entirely on participating in the procession at Sedaeng and Winong."

The concept of *petirtaan* (sacred water) has deep roots in Javanese history, particularly during the Hindu-Buddhist era of ancient Java (5th–10th century AD). Water was considered sacred in Hindu and Buddhist beliefs, serving not only practical purposes but also as a means of purification for worship. Agus Aris Munandar (2014), an archaeologist from the University of Indonesia, categorises *petirtaan* into two types based on their cosmological significance: water for daily needs (e.g., drinking, washing) and water for ritual purification. However, Munandar acknowledges that this classification is not always clear-cut due to a lack of concrete evidence. He therefore proposes a more detailed classification based on archaeological findings:

1. Natural Petirtaan: These include springs, ponds, lakes, and rivers that are considered sacred by the community. Examples include the Brantas River in ancient Java, which had no additional structures.
2. Modified Natural Petirtaan: These are natural water sources that have been enhanced

with artificial structures, such as showers (jaladwara), stone walls, and statues of deities. Examples include Jalatunda in Mojokerto, Bhima Lukar in Dieng, and Umbul Temple in Magelang.

3. Artificial Petirtaan: These are entirely man-made structures designed to collect and store holy water. Examples include Tikus Temple in Trowulan and Gentong Temple in Penganggungan, where water was channelled for purification purposes.

In Hindu belief, water (*tirha*) is sacred, and its veneration played a central role in the construction of temples and *petirtaan* areas during the Hindu-Buddhist period in Java. The existence of *petirtaan* with elaborate architectural features, such as Jalatunda Bath (built in 977 AD during the reign of Udayana in Bali), underscores the importance of water in religious and cultural practices (Sartini, 2014).

The sacredness of *petirtaan* has undergone significant epistemic shifts over time. During the Old Mataram period, *petirtaan* was so revered that temples were built specifically for purification rituals. This perspective was deeply influenced by Hindu-Buddhist cosmology, which regarded water as a sacred element (Prasetya, 2021). However, in contemporary Wonokerto, the sacredness of *petirtaan* has been influenced by modern cultural practices. For example, the construction of a playground near Winong waterfall reflects the blending of sacred and profane elements. While the site remains a place of spiritual significance, it also serves as a recreational area for tourists and locals.

This integration of modern facilities has led to a new epistemic confusion regarding the sacredness of Winong. The construction of the playground, intended to attract tourists, has inadvertently diminished the spiritual significance of the site. The coexistence of sacred and profane elements highlights the challenges of preserving traditional beliefs in a rapidly modernising society.

Adaptation and Transformation of *Suroan* Ritual

The *Suroan* ritual in Wonokerto undergoes various transformations and adaptations in response to the influences of religion and modernity. This process is a deliberate reaction by the indigenous community to maintain the *Suroan* tradition. One striking adaptation is the integration of Islamic and modern elements in the ritual's implementation. Local people have come to recognise the importance of aligning their traditional practices with Islamic teachings, the predominant religion in the region. For instance, the recitation of prayers in the Islamic tradition has become an essential feature of the *Suroan* ceremony, typically performed by religious figures or shamans with knowledge of Islam.

Religion and culture are two sides of the same coin—intertwined and mutually reinforcing in shaping the meaning and identity of a society. Culture requires religion to imbue it with a sacred significance, utilising religious symbols and ritual practices to create a deeper sense of purpose (Hicks, 2010). In this context, religion provides a profound theological

and spiritual foundation, expressed through diverse cultural elements. Conversely, culture offers tangible forms through which religious experiences are manifested and lived by the community. In the *Suroan* ritual in Java, for example, the confluence of Islamic elements with local beliefs contributes to the creation of a sacred cosmos that upholds the ritual's sanctity and spiritual vitality. *Suroan* celebrates the turning of the year, serving as a moment when spiritual and symbolic meanings are exchanged, reinforced, and transmitted across generations. Thus, religion and culture together form a sacred cycle that fortifies the community's identity and spiritual values, symbolically represented through various emblems and practices.

Clifford Geertz argued that symbols are fundamental to understanding culture and religion. He viewed symbols not merely as signs or representations but as instruments that structure and impart meaning to human experience. According to Geertz, symbols assist individuals in interpreting the world around them, offering guidance in daily life. These symbols emerge in diverse forms, including rites, ceremonies, artefacts, language, and behaviour, through which people express their beliefs, values, and aspirations (Geertz, 1973).

However, Geertz's interpretation of symbols has been critiqued for its overgeneralisation and static portrayal. Critics, notably Talal Asad, contend that Geertz's framework neglects the dynamic nature of symbols and the conditions that shape them. Asad criticises the tendency to regard religious symbols as fixed, universal representations of meaning without accounting for the power dynamics that govern their interpretation and use in practice (Asad, 2009). He argues that symbolic meaning is inextricably linked to the power structures within society, which include religious institutions, spiritual leaders, and other authorities that dictate the interpretation of these symbols.

In many instances, such cultural and religious authorities control education, rituals, and sacred texts, thereby contributing to the formation and maintenance of symbolic meanings. The role of traditional leaders becomes a crucial filter for new cultural influences; cultures that diverge from established norms are often rejected, whereas those that conform are accepted. Asad developed the concept of discursive tradition to illustrate that tradition is not merely a legacy transmitted from generation to generation, but a set of practices and discourses actively shaped through social interaction (Asad, 1993). He emphasises that power is central to this process, with institutions such as the state, religion, and education playing key roles in defining and preserving what is considered a legitimate tradition. Moreover, Asad criticises the ethnocentric approach of classical anthropology, which frequently views tradition through a Western lens, and stresses the importance of understanding tradition within its own cultural and historical context. Thus, discursive tradition, as proposed by Asad, offers a dynamic framework for understanding tradition as a constantly evolving field influenced by power and historical context.

This concept has been applied in various studies, such as in the examination of the practice of Pattula' Bala among Bugis Muslim communities in Indonesia (Amir, 2022), which demonstrates how such traditions form part of a broader Islamic discursive tradition and evolve through processes of transmission and transformation. Similarly, research on

the Wawacan Seh ritual in Banten illustrates that its survival is due to cultural negotiation, assertions of authority, and underlying power dynamics. Over time, the ritual has been maintained and modified, with elements such as Maca Silsilah, Manakiban, and Istigosah Kubro emerging as new practices. Cultural negotiations have produced three outcomes: the continuation of the ritual, its continuation with modifications, and, in some instances, its discontinuation. These modifications reflect the adjustments made in response to social and cultural changes within Banten society. Three primary factors have influenced these changes: the subjects—represented by three Muslim groups (Localists, Moderates, and Universalists); events, including migration and educational developments; and conditions such as modernism, rationalism, globalism, and political-economic factors. Alterations in the Wawacan Seh rituals signify not only shifts in cultural tradition but also fundamental changes in ontological social structures, authority, religious worldviews, and community power relations (Kurniawan, 2019).

The researcher posits that the *Suroan* tradition in Lumajang has similarly undergone transformation and adaptation. Such change evidences the inherent instability of tradition when faced with evolving circumstances. While religion and tradition are often perceived as constants within society, they are in reality dynamic and susceptible to change. The continuous movement of modern times facilitates modifications across various domains, including traditional rituals and religious practices. As societies modernise, transformations occur in technology, economics, and social and cultural life. Modernisation introduces new paradigms, values, and external influences that compel communities to adjust. Consequently, traditional rituals and religious practices, once deemed sacrosanct, are modified to remain relevant and meaningful to contemporary generations (Inglehart & Baker, 2000).

For example, one interviewee, Dukun Ojung (2022), noted:

> "In the past, people might have wanted to preserve Sedaeng and Winong exactly as they were, but times have changed. What matters now is that the traditions at these two water sources continue so that local beliefs are not lost. That's why we still perform rituals there, but in a way that aligns with the present time. For example, we now hold communal prayers in the Islamic way. This way, the traditional values remain, while also staying in harmony with the current beliefs of the community."

Moreover, the logic and culture of modernity are evident in the planning and procession of traditional rituals. Dukun Ojung further stated:

> "In the past, traditional rituals were entirely managed by the elders who faithfully carried on the traditions passed down through generations. But now, with the changing times, the village government also plays a role in planning and organising the event. So, it's not just the traditional leaders anymore—the village authorities are also actively involved in the ritual process."

The involvement of the village government in Wonokerto's ritual procession is driven by a desire to festivalise customary rituals. The festivalisation of the *Suroan* ritual in Wonokerto, Lumajang, transforms what was once an exclusive, sacred ceremony into a public celebration. This transformation aims to promote local culture, bolster tourism, and

strengthen community identity. By converting traditional rituals into lively festivals that incorporate additional cultural activities, such as Wayang and Jaran Kencak performances, the rituals become more inclusive. This approach not only preserves cultural essence but also enhances accessibility, inviting participation from a broad spectrum of society.

Apart from enhancing cultural identity and promotion, the festivalisation of *Suroan* traditional rituals also yields significant economic benefits for Wonokerto village. With the increasing influx of tourists, numerous new business opportunities have emerged for the local community. These include the development of handicrafts, culinary ventures, and tourist accommodation industries. Such festivalisation not only bolsters the local economy but also facilitates the diversification of income through a range of businesses and services related to the tourism sector. For example, the heightened demand for local food and beverages has led vendors to expand their operations by opening food stalls, coffee shops, and outlets offering regional specialities that have become attractions in their own right.

Genealogically, the pattern of adaptation and negotiation within *Suroan* cultural practices in Wonokerto has deep historical roots. Javanese society has long embraced the 'ngeli tanpa keli' paradigm as a means of engaging with external cultural influences. This concept, introduced by Sunan Kalijaga, is encapsulated in the adage: "Anglaras ilining banyu angeli, ananging ora keli. Uninga sucining gandaning Nabi" (adjust to the flow of water but do not be carried away; always remember the sanctity of the Prophet's teachings). This maxim formed a cornerstone of the Walisongo da'wah strategy during the conversion of Javanese people from Hindu-Buddhist traditions (Sungaidi, 2016).

In an era defined by rapid change, the capacity to adapt is paramount. Societies that are unwilling or unable to adjust to new circumstances risk being left behind, even as adaptation itself must be approached with caution. The dangers of uncritical adaptation are evident in instances where entities previously deemed successful eventually succumb to the overwhelming dynamics of change. In the context of Wonokerto, the transformation of the *Suroan* tradition is reflective of this delicate balance between preservation and adaptation.

The successful Islamisation of Java, as exemplified by Sunan Kalijaga's integration of the local wayang tradition with Islamic teachings, underscores the importance of adapting religious practices to resonate with indigenous culture. By using wayang as a medium for conveying Islamic values, Sunan Kalijaga was able to reach a broader audience, including those initially resistant to new religious ideas. In this adapted form of wayang, familiar characters were imbued with new symbolic meanings. For instance, Semar, traditionally a punakawan, came to represent virtues such as justice, piety, and wisdom, thereby aligning with Islamic moral precepts. Similarly, the Pandawa Lima, reinterpreted within an Islamic framework, symbolise the five pillars of Islam, with each character embodying a specific aspect of these foundational principles.

Moreover, the adaptation of Islam to local culture is also reflected in mosque architecture. The Demak Mosque, one of Indonesia's oldest, exhibits a synthesis of Hindu-Buddhist architectural elements with Islamic design. Its distinctive three-tiered overlapping roof mirrors traditional temple structures, symbolising the layers of the sky in Islamic

cosmology. The mosque's decorative elements, which combine traditional Javanese motifs with Arabic calligraphy and geometric patterns, further illustrate this cultural amalgamation (Sumbulah, 2012). Through such adaptations in both ritual practice and material culture, local traditions are not only preserved but also revitalised, ensuring their continued relevance in a modern context.

The process of adaptation continued with the rise of Islamic Mataram in Java, founded by Panembahan Senopati, also known as Danang Sutawijaya, in the 16th century. Under the reign of Sultan Agung (1613–1645), the Islamic Mataram reached its zenith. One of Sultan Agung's most significant contributions was the unification of the Islamic calendar with the Hindu Saka calendar (Ricklefs, 2013). At that time, the Javanese people followed the Saka calendar, which was adopted from India and based on the solar cycle, whereas the Hijriyah calendar, or Islamic calendar, was based on the lunar cycle. This discrepancy led to inconsistencies between the traditional celebrations held by the royal court and Islamic religious observances. To resolve this issue, Sultan Agung introduced a new calendar system that merged elements of both the Saka and Hijriyah calendars. This system, known as the Javanese or Sultan Agungan calendar, retained the Saka year but altered its calculation method by adopting the lunar cycle instead of the solar one. Despite this shift, the reform neither disrupted historical records nor the societal order, thereby preventing social unrest (Rintaiswara, 2015).

The Sultan Agungan calendar officially commenced on Friday Legi, 1 Sura, year Alip 1555 J, corresponding to 1 Muharram 1043 H or 8 July 1633. This event was recorded in *Windu Kuntara Lambang Kulawu* and was marked by a *candra sengkala* (a chronogram) that read *Jemparingen Buta Galak Iku* ("Arrow the Savage Giant"). The introduction of this calendar enabled the Mataram Kingdom and its successors to align traditional ceremonies with Islamic holidays. Consequently, rituals such as *Garebeg*, which were once seen as impediments to the spread of Islam, became effective tools for propagating Islamic teachings.

From this historical development, it is evident that the *Suroan* celebration in Wonokerto follows the Javanese-Mataram Islamic calendar system. However, the geographical distance between Islamic Mataram and Lumajang—approximately 429 km—meant that the dissemination of knowledge regarding the Javanese calendar took considerable time. There are two primary theories regarding how this knowledge spread from Islamic Mataram to Lumajang. The first is through the military expansion of the Islamic Mataram kingdom into East Java. Under Sultan Agung Hanyokrokusumo's leadership, Mataram sought to extend its territorial and ideological influence. The kingdom launched military campaigns in East Java, beginning with attacks on Pasuruan, Lumajang, and Blambangan in 1614. This expansion had a profound impact, leading to Mataram's dominance over most of East Java, except Blambangan. Consequently, Islamic influence in the region intensified, consolidating Mataram's position as the preeminent kingdom in Java.

The second theory attributes the transmission of Javanese-Islamic knowledge to the flight of Prince Diponegoro's followers to Java's southern coast following his defeat in the Diponegoro War (1825–1830). The war marked the Javanese people's final major re-

sistance against Dutch colonial rule. In its aftermath, Diponegoro's followers, known as *Laskar Diponegoro*, dispersed across various regions, concealing their identities and assimilating into local communities. Despite their dispersion, they maintained a covert system of communication, using trees as symbolic markers of their shared identity (Mardiyono, 2020).

The *Laskar Diponegoro* planted various trees in their surroundings, each carrying a specific meaning. The *Sawo Kecik* tree, planted at the front of houses, symbolised *kabecikan* (goodness and virtue). The *kepel* tree at the back of the house represented *manunggaling sedya lan gegayuhan* (the unity of will and aspirations). The *kemuning* tree on the left side signified *weninging piker* (peace of mind), while the *jambu darsono* tree symbolised *patuladhan* (exemplary conduct). This tradition reflected their effort to preserve their identity while integrating into new communities.

It was through the migration of *Laskar Diponegoro* that Islamic-Javanese knowledge began to take root in East Java. Many of Diponegoro's followers established *pesantren* (Islamic boarding schools) and mosques, where they imparted Islamic teachings alongside Javanese cultural traditions. Over time, this knowledge was gradually absorbed by the local population, shaping East Java's intellectual and cultural landscape (Husna & Afiyanto, 2022). A tangible manifestation of this knowledge transfer is the enduring use of the Javanese calendar, which exemplifies the integration of cultural and religious traditions. The *Kalender Sultan Agungan*, which blends the Hindu Saka and Islamic Hijriyah calendars, epitomises a strategic adaptation that fostered a cohesive and inclusive cultural identity.

This tradition of adaptation has continued over time. The people of Wonokerto exemplify this adaptability in negotiating their cultural identity in response to modernity. As Stuart Hall posits, societies are inherently dynamic, continuously reshaping their identities in interaction with new cultural influences. Since its inception, the community of Wonokerto has navigated a dual heritage, balancing Javanese and Madurese influences. This cultural hybridity has given rise to a distinctive identity that remains fluid, evolving in response to contemporary social transformations.

Modernity Does Not Marginalise Culture but Strengthens It

The persistence of *Suroan* traditional rituals in contemporary society through festivalisation challenges the thesis that modernity inevitably eliminates sacred elements. Max Weber's theory on the marginalisation of religion in modernity centres on the concept of rationalisation within modern societies. Weber argues that as modernity progresses, there is a shift from traditional and mystical thinking towards a more rational and secular worldview. In pre-modern societies, religion played a central role in explaining natural phenomena and providing meaning and guidance in life. However, with the advancement of science and technology, alongside the development of efficient bureaucracies, rational explanations increasingly replaced religious narratives. This rationalisation process created a world governed by logic, efficiency, and calculation, thereby diminishing the influence of

religion on both social and individual life. According to Weber, religion gradually became marginalised, losing its authority in shaping social values and norms, which were increasingly dictated by secular and scientific perspectives. He termed this process the "disenchantment of the world," representing a fundamental transformation in societal structures and orientations, leading towards modernity (Schroeder, 2002; Weber, 2006).

The findings of this research also critique Peter L. Berger's thesis on the marginalisation of religion and culture in modern society. In his seminal work, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion*, Berger (2011) argues that modernity, with its emphasis on rationalisation, secularisation, and individualism, inevitably leads to the marginalisation of religion. He contends that the dominant modern worldview—characterised by scientific explanations, bureaucratic structures, and a focus on individual autonomy—fundamentally clashes with the traditional religious worldview, which is rooted in sacred beliefs, communal values, and a sense of transcendence.

Berger further asserts that modernity permeates various aspects of society, including economics, politics, and culture. This pervasive influence gradually erodes the social and cultural foundations that sustain religious institutions and practices. According to Berger, religion becomes increasingly confined to the private sphere, losing its influence over public life and its ability to shape societal norms and values. Central to his thesis is the concept of "de-sacralisation," which refers to the process by which the sacred loses its significance in the face of modernity's rationalising and secularising forces. Religious beliefs and practices, once considered essential for understanding and navigating the world, are increasingly perceived as obsolete or irrelevant in light of scientific progress and secular explanations (Berger, 2011).

However, festivalisation does not merely preserve traditional rituals; it reinforces their presence by integrating traditional elements with the demands of an increasingly modern era. By transforming rituals into vibrant and diverse festivals, traditions are not only maintained but also adapted to appeal to younger generations and a broader audience, including tourists from various backgrounds. The continued existence of *Suroan* traditional rituals through festivalisation, therefore, demonstrates that modernity does not necessarily eradicate sacred traditions. On the contrary, traditional rituals can persist and remain relevant in contemporary society through creative and adaptive strategies that address the challenges of modernity.

Furthermore, the involvement of village governments in festivalisation underscores the role of the state in preserving local traditions. The 1945 Constitution of Indonesia explicitly mandates the protection of community cultures and traditions. Through active participation in the festivalisation of *Suroan* rituals, local governments demonstrate their commitment to safeguarding cultural heritage. They do not merely serve as facilitators of these events but also act as key organisers, coordinating various activities associated with traditional rituals. In this sense, village governments function as the primary custodians of *Suroan* traditions, ensuring their continuity in the face of modernisation and globalisation. Additionally, their involvement reflects the implementation of democratic values and re-

gional autonomy as stipulated in the 1945 Constitution.

The active role of state agents in preserving religion and culture challenges Weber and Berger's secularisation thesis. Weber posits that bureaucracy epitomises modern institutions, emphasising rationality, efficiency, and discipline. In his view, the expansion of bureaucracy aligns with secularisation, whereby religion and traditional values are increasingly displaced by rational and scientific thought. Berger similarly argues that modernity leads to secularisation, whereby religion loses its public and social significance. However, the continued involvement of bureaucratic institutions in the maintenance of religious and cultural traditions contradicts this assumption.

Thus, the secularisation thesis put forward by Max Weber and Peter L. Berger requires revision to account for the complexities of modernity, in which religion and tradition are not necessarily in opposition to progress. Instead, they can coexist and even reinforce each other, demonstrating that modernity does not inevitably lead to the decline of sacred traditions but, in some cases, facilitates their transformation and sustainability.

Conclusion

This research highlights the adaptive strategies employed by the Indigenous people of Wonokerto in negotiating religion and modernity. Rather than experiencing an absolute rupture, the *Suroan* tradition demonstrates how communities selectively integrate modern elements while preserving cultural heritage. This approach, rooted in the *Walisongo* era and sustained through the Islamic Mataram period, reflects a long-standing pattern of cultural negotiation, exemplified by Sunan Kalijaga's *ngeli ora keli* paradigm and the integration of the Saka calendar with Islam.

By blending ancestral traditions with contemporary innovations, the Wonokerto community ensures the resilience and relevance of its cultural practices. The festivalisation of *Suroan*, supported by the village government, illustrates how tradition can be actively maintained while simultaneously contributing to economic growth through cultural tourism. This challenges dominant narratives that frame modernity as inherently opposed to tradition, demonstrating instead that cultural heritage can be sustained and even strengthened through adaptive engagement with modernity.

More broadly, the case of Wonokerto offers valuable insights into the dynamics of cultural continuity and transformation in an era of globalisation. It underscores the potential for tradition and modernity to coexist, shaping a hybrid identity that remains deeply rooted in local values while open to change. In doing so, the Wonokerto community provides a compelling example of how cultural traditions can not only survive but thrive within the framework of contemporary society.

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