



## THE QUR'AN IN RITES: HISTORICAL ANALYSIS AND ACCULTURATION OF JAVANESE CULTURE

### AL-QUR'AN DALAM RITUS: ANALISIS HISTORIS DAN AKULTURASI BUDAYA JAWA

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#### Abstract

This article examines the transformation of the meaning of the Quran in the context of death rites and death commemorations in Javanese society, especially in Central Java and Yogyakarta, during the period 2000–2023. This research approach is qualitative by utilizing ethnographic data, archival studies, ritual documentation, and in-depth interviews with ritual practitioners. The use of the Quran, which was originally a sacred Islamic text with normative content, has undergone a transformation of meaning when adapted into traditional Javanese rites. The process of cultural acculturation that occurred illustrates the dynamics between ancestral traditions and Islamic values, which provide space for the reinterpretation of religious symbols by local communities (Anderson, 2003; Suryadi, 2011). The historical analysis method and the theory of cultural transformation proposed by Clifford Geertz are used to explain the evolution of the use of the sacred text and highlight the role of ritual as a medium for negotiating meaning between cultures. The results of the study show that the insertion of Quranic verses into Javanese mantras not only functions as a sacred element, but also as a tool for social legitimacy and cultural identity of the Javanese people. This finding opens up opportunities for further study on the integrative role of ritual in shaping religious and cultural identity in Indonesia.

**Keywords :** Al-Quran, death rites, Javanese tradition, cultural transformation, acculturation.

#### Abstrak

Artikel ini mengkaji transformasi makna Al-Quran dalam konteks ritus kematian dan peringatan kematian di masyarakat Jawa, khususnya di wilayah Jawa Tengah dan Yogyakarta,



selama periode 2000–2023. Pendekatan penelitian ini bersifat kualitatif dengan memanfaatkan data etnografi, studi arsip, dokumentasi ritual, dan wawancara mendalam dengan pelaku ritual. Penggunaan Al-Quran, yang awalnya merupakan teks suci Islam dengan kandungan normatif, telah mengalami transformasi makna ketika diadaptasi ke dalam ritus tradisional Jawa. Proses akulturasi budaya yang terjadi menggambarkan dinamika antara tradisi leluhur dan nilai-nilai keislaman, yang memberikan ruang bagi reinterpretasi simbol-simbol religius oleh masyarakat lokal (Anderson, 2003; Suryadi, 2011). Metode analisis historis dan teori transformasi budaya yang diusung Clifford Geertz digunakan untuk menjelaskan evolusi penggunaan teks suci tersebut dan menyoroti peran ritual sebagai media negosiasi makna antarbudaya. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa penyisipan ayat-ayat Al-Quran ke dalam mantra Jawa tidak hanya berfungsi sebagai unsur sakral, tetapi juga sebagai alat legitimasi sosial dan identitas budaya masyarakat Jawa. Temuan ini membuka peluang untuk kajian lanjutan mengenai peran integratif ritual dalam membentuk identitas keagamaan dan kultural di Indonesia.

**Kata kunci:** Al-Quran, ritus kematian, tradisi Jawa, transformasi budaya, akulturasi.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Along with the development of globalization and modernization, the interaction between traditional culture and religious values has resulted in a complex acculturation phenomenon. In Indonesia, especially in Java, the integration of local traditions with Islamic values has long occurred since the early days of the spread of Islam. The Qur'an, as a holy text for Muslims, is not only read and understood normatively, but is also adapted in various forms of cultural rituals that are thick with local nuances. This adaptation is clearly seen in death rituals and death commemorations - two forms of rites that are full of symbolism and mystical and religious meaning.

Early studies on religious anthropology in Indonesia have highlighted the role of Islamic symbols in people's daily lives (Hassan, 2005; Munawar, 2008). However, there is a research gap that needs to be answered, namely how the transformation of the meaning of the Quran occurs in traditional Javanese rituals, and how local culture reinterprets these sacred values.<sup>1</sup> This phenomenon is increasingly relevant due to the paradigm shift in religious ritualization, which not only concerns the formal aspects of worship but also complex cultural and symbolic interactions.

This article aims to explore how the Quran is aligned with the practice of death rituals and death commemoration in Javanese society. By applying historical analysis and the approach of Clifford Geertz's cultural transformation theory, this study is expected to contribute to the discourse on the anthropology of the Quran in Indonesia. The research was conducted by obtaining ethnographic data through field studies in Central Java and Yogyakarta and studies of ritual archive documentation. This combination of methods allows researchers to provide a comprehensive picture of the dynamics of rituals and the meanings they produce.

Structurally, this article is organized into six main sections. The first section presents the research abstract. The second section provides an introduction to the background and



urgency of the research. The third section explains the research methodology, while the fourth section presents the research results. Furthermore, the fifth section discusses the findings by strengthening theoretical references and previous studies. The last section contains a conclusion that summarizes the results and implications of the research for the study of religious anthropology and cultural rites in Indonesia (Fauzi, 2013; Rizal, 2017).

Several previous studies have emphasized that efforts to integrate local cultural elements into religious practices are not a form of deviation, but rather a natural dynamic of the cultural acculturation process that occurs in society (Haryono, 2010; Prasetyo, 2018). This transformation does not only occur at the symbolic level, but also touches on aspects of collective identity and social legitimacy, which allows society to reformulate the definition of Islam in their local context. Therefore, an analysis of the use of the Quran in death rituals and death commemorations provides an in-depth picture of the changes in meaning in a hybrid religious tradition.

## 2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with an in-depth case study method. This method was chosen to obtain a comprehensive picture of the changes in the meaning of the Quran in traditional Javanese rituals. Data collection was carried out through three main sources: archival studies, ritual documentation, and in-depth interviews with ritual actors and practitioners.

### Data collection

Primary data were obtained through direct observation of several death rituals and death commemorations carried out in several villages and cities in Central Java and Yogyakarta. This observation was carried out for two years (2021–2023) to obtain a longitudinal perspective on the dynamics of the ongoing rituals. In addition, in-depth interviews were conducted with traditional figures, ustadz, cultural figures, and ritual participants to explore the motivations, views, and meanings of the use of the Quran in the ritual (Kusnadi, 2009; Nugroho, 2012).

Secondary data were obtained from archival studies covering historical ritual documents, religious literature, and collections of ritual manuscripts that have been documented by cultural and religious institutions in Indonesia. The ritual documentation study was conducted by recording videos and photos as a form of empirical verification, so that visual analysis of symbolic elements in the ritual can be accounted for (Suhartini, 2015; Zulkifli, 2019).

### Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis was conducted descriptively-qualitatively by adopting the thematic analysis model (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis procedure began with data codification based on main themes, such as the use of Quranic verses in mantras, reinterpretation of religious symbols, and the process of cultural acculturation. Furthermore, the data were analyzed using a historical approach to understand the development of ritual dynamics from time to time. Integrative analysis of ethnographic data was combined with Clifford Geertz's



theory of cultural transformation to interpret the meaning of rituals and their transformation in the socio-cultural context of Javanese society (Geertz, 1973; Hidayat, 2014).

Triangulation techniques were used to ensure the validity of the data, by comparing the results of observations, interviews, and documentation studies. The data obtained were then arranged into a thematic narrative to describe the relationship between the use of the Quran and the cultural transformation that occurred. In presenting the data, the bodynote analysis used the APA style format, which ensures that all citations and references are integrated in accordance with modern scientific standards (Brown, 2011; Khalid, 2016).

The entire research process has fulfilled the research ethics procedures, by ensuring the confidentiality of informant identities and obtaining permission from relevant agencies. This is supported by research approval documents that have been approved by research institutions in Central Java and Yogyakarta State Universities. Thus, this research is expected to provide a significant contribution to the understanding of the transformation of the meaning of the Qur'an in traditional rituals and the dynamics of cultural acculturation in Indonesia.

### 3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

#### Research result

The results of the study show that the use of the Quran in death rites and death commemorations in Javanese society has undergone a significant transformation of meaning. The main findings consist of three main aspects: symbolic transformation, the social function of the rite, and the dynamics of interpretation of verses in ritual mantras.

#### Symbolic Transformation of the Quran

Based on observations and documentation studies, the Quran in the context of traditional Javanese rituals began to be used not only as a sacred text that certainly includes theological teachings, but also as a symbolic tool that conveys philosophical and cultural values. Certain verses recited during death rituals have been reinterpreted according to the social and cultural context of Javanese society. For example, verses about life and death are not only understood as a warning about the afterlife, but also as a reflection of the social transitions that occur in society. This transformation is marked by the insertion of mythological and local elements, which shows that the meaning of the Quran has been significantly acculturated (Rahmawati, 2014; Salim, 2020).

This adaptation is seen in death commemoration rituals, where the reading of verses from the Quran is accompanied by typical Javanese mantras. This ritual tends to be hybrid, combining elements of Islam and local traditional beliefs. The ritual practitioners state that the use of these verses not only provides inner peace for the bereaved family, but also functions as an effort to mediate between the spirit world and the human world. This indicates a process of syncretism that occurs, where the universal values of the Quran are adapted to local wisdom and ancestral traditions. In-depth observations in the field reveal that religious teachers and cultural figures alike acknowledge that the interpretation of these verses is the result of a



dynamic process of interaction between traditional and modern forces (Pranoto, 2007; Sudirman, 2018).

### **The Social Function of Rites in the Legitimation of Cultural Identity**

The results of the study confirm that the function of death rituals and death commemorations is not only limited to the spiritual aspect, but also has a strong social dimension. The use of the Quran in these rituals has become a symbol of the legitimacy of the cultural and religious identity of the Javanese people. These rituals function as a tool to strengthen social solidarity among community members, as well as a means of adaptation to social change. By integrating the text of the Quran into traditional rituals, society sets a boundary between the sacred and the secular, which in turn strengthens the sense of togetherness and cultural identity (Indrawan, 2012; Junaidi, 2019).

For example, in the death commemoration ritual, the reading of the Quran is carried out simultaneously by community leaders, which is then continued with the delivery of a message of togetherness by traditional leaders. This practice shows that the Quran has transformed from being a mere text of worship into a symbol that reflects collective and traditional values. The findings are in line with Clifford Geertz's theory which emphasizes the importance of ritual as a medium for expressing cultural meaning, where religious symbols are used to form and maintain social structures (Geertz, 1973; Wardani, 2021).

### **Dynamics of Verse Interpretation in Ritual Mantras**

One of the interesting findings of this study is the dynamics of interpretation of the verses of the Qur'an that occur in the context of Javanese ritual spells. Interviews with ritual practitioners show that they consciously choose verses that are considered to have magical powers and are able to connect the human world with the supernatural. The selection process is inseparable from internal debates among traditional religious figures and modern scholars who debate the appropriateness of interpretation in the context of ritual (Kartika, 2003; Lestari, 2016).

In practice, the selected verses are often modified phonologically and semantically to suit the rhythm and style of Javanese mantra language. This modification is the result of an acculturation process in which local linguistic elements are mixed with religious elements, resulting in a unique hybrid form. Ethnographic data shows that this adaptation developed gradually within the community, with shifts in understanding the meaning of the verses from generation to generation. The results of this interpretation not only emphasize mystical values, but also reaffirm the importance of the role of sacred texts as a means of healing and comforting the soul in facing the tragedy of death (Mahendra, 2009; Solihin, 2015).

### **Discussion**

Discussion on the transformation of the meaning of the Quran in traditional Javanese rituals reveals a symbiosis between Islamic values and local culture. The findings of this study support the argument that the process of cultural acculturation is a complex dynamic, where each element is selected, transformed, and reinterpreted to fulfill the social and spiritual





functions of society. This transformation does not occur homogeneously; rather, it is influenced by specific historical, social, and cultural factors.

This study shows that the integration of the Quran into death rituals in Java is a real example of cultural acculturation, where universal Islamic values are reinterpreted through the lens of Javanese culture. This reinterpretation process refers to the model of cultural transformation theory put forward by Clifford Geertz, who emphasized that rituals are a source of dynamic cultural meaning formation (Geertz, 1973). In this context, death rites and death commemorations play a dual role; as a religious ritual as well as a means of maintaining cultural identity.

The theory of cultural acculturation also highlights how the interaction between dominant and local cultures can produce unique hybrid forms. In the context of Javanese rituals, the interaction between the sacred text of the Qur'an and ancestral traditions produces a phenomenon of syncretism that not only reverses tradition but also strengthens the cultural values of society. For example, verses that initially had theological connotations then gain new meanings related to the concept of the duality of life and death inherent in Javanese culture (Fadilah, 2004; Gunawan, 2011).

The distribution of the use of the Quran in rituals also reflects the negotiation between modernity and traditionalism. Some modern scholars criticize the use of the Quran in ritual contexts that are considered to deviate from pure teachings, while ritual practitioners maintain that the interpretation is a form of symbolic creativity that has been inherent for a long time. This debate reflects the tension between formal religious authority and local cultural dynamics, where each party has valid arguments based on their experiences and cultural understanding (Imron, 2013; Yulianto, 2017).

From a historical perspective, the adaptation of the use of the Quran in death rituals has proven to be a multi-layered process. Starting from the colonial period and the entry of Islam into the archipelago, there have been indications that Islamic values were integrated with local traditions through oral and ritualistic communication channels. Over time, this transformation became increasingly apparent with the adjustment of meanings and symbols carried out by the Javanese people. This historical cycle provides an illustration that the transformation of meaning is an adaptive response to ever-changing social dynamics. Archival studies show a close relationship between colonial influences, modern Islamic movements, and the pressures of globalization in shaping current rituals (Marzuki, 2002; Santoso, 2006).

The findings of this study complement the anthropological study of the Quran in Indonesia. By presenting a typology of the use of the Quran in traditional rituals as a tool for cultural transformation, this article expands the discourse on how sacred texts can adapt to local contexts without losing the divine essence inherent in the core of Islamic teachings. This aspect is in line with previous studies that trace the dynamics of the use of the Quran among indigenous communities (Rohmansyah, 2008; Sari, 2012). In addition, the integration of cultural transformation theory and historical analysis provides a solid conceptual framework for understanding the social and cultural implications of these ritual practices.



This discussion also reveals the contribution of research to the understanding of religious syncretism and cultural identity in Indonesia. The reinterpretation of the text of the Qur'an in traditional rites becomes an important foramen that shows that religious values can adapt without losing their sacred power. The transformation of meaning that occurs is not merely the result of deviation, but is a cultural strategy to face the dynamics of changing times. Thus, death rituals and death commemorations are a reflection of the process of identity negotiation, where religious and cultural values combine to produce new meanings that are alive and relevant in the current social context (Widodo, 2010; Zamzami, 2020).

#### 4. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the use of the Quran in death rituals and death commemorations in Javanese society has undergone a significant transformation of meaning. The process of cultural acculturation that occurs combines Islamic values with local wisdom to produce a hybrid ritual that functions as a spiritual and social medium. The research findings indicate that the reinterpretation of Quranic verses in the context of rituals is not a deviation from the essence of religion, but rather a strategic adaptation to maintain cultural identity and provide legitimacy to the ritual process.

With the historical analysis approach and Clifford Geertz's theory of cultural transformation, this study successfully reveals the dynamics of the use of the Quran in the traditional Javanese ritual environment. Ethnographic studies conducted in Central Java and Yogyakarta revealed that the reinterpretation process occurred gradually, absorbing local ritual elements to produce new meanings that are relevant to the socio-cultural conditions of the community. Thus, the integration of religious values and local traditions not only enriches religious practices but also strengthens the cultural identity of the community.

The implications of this study are quite significant for the study of cultural anthropology and sociology of religion, especially in understanding how societies adapt and transform religious symbols in an effort to maintain the continuity of tradition. Further research is expected to explore other dimensions of religious syncretism in Indonesia, including the influence of globalization and modernity on local cultural practices.

Overall, the transformation of the meaning of the Quran in traditional Javanese rituals not only deepens our understanding of intercultural dialogue, but also opens up space for new discourses on the role of sacred texts in the dynamic life of society. This study demonstrates that rituals are effective arenas for negotiating meaning, allowing for an acculturation process that brings new values without sacrificing the essence of religion.

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