

## HARMONIZATION BETWEEN CUSTOMS AND ISLAM IN THE JALAWASTU COMMUNITY

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**Abstract:** There is a growing study concerning various processes of localisation of widely recognised world religions and universalization of local traditions currently, notably associated with the field of religious moderation. One of the issues being stressed is how Islam is able to establish and coexist in harmony with local cultures. This study examines the interaction of Islam with Indonesian indigenous traditions in West Java called *Jalawastu*, the existence of which continues to present. In other words, this study aims to analyze the religious-cultural lifestyle of the *Jalawastu* customary community, which have long been practised. A qualitative approach with an ethnographic method was applied. The results of this study illustrate that the relationship between Islam and Jalawastu traditions is in harmony and balance. Those are markedly indicated in the community's daily life. They are both practising Islamic teachings and performing ancestral traditions. The community's compliance with their customs brings about the long existence of the traditions even until this modernized era. To sum up, Jalawastu traditions and Islam are the ways through which humanitarian relationships and local wisdom could be reinforced in the era of globalization.

**Keywords:** Jalawastu, Islam, local tradition, acculturation, customary community.

### Introduction

The Jalawastu customary community is a Sundanese community inhabiting in the western area of north coast West Java, i.e., Brebes. It is believed that the community has a relationship with Sunda *Wiwitan*. The belief had been propagated to different regions, especially in West Java, hundreds of years ago. It constitutes one of the Indonesian indigenous beliefs that appeared before the presence of widely

recognized world religions, e.g., Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, and Buddhism.<sup>1</sup>

It is considered unique, that each region, whose inhabitants adhere to Sunda *Wiwitan*, manifests different characteristics. For instance, Sunda *Wiwitan* within Cireundeu and Baduy indigenous community is different. Baduy people exalt and worship rice exuberantly as Goddess *Sri*, whereas in Cireundeu, rice is the subject one should avoid.<sup>2</sup> In addition, the different characteristics are also apparent between the Jalawastu community and other Sundanese communities, such as Cipta Gelar, Kanekes, Karuhun Urung, Kampung Naga, Cisolok, and Baduy. Other Sundanese communities are devout Sunda *Wiwitan* adherents, while the Jalawastu Community is made up of obedient Moslems. Yet, the latter community is still nurturing several local traditions as local wisdom which still have an association with Sunda *Wiwitan*.<sup>3</sup>

By myth, Jalawastu traditions are attributed to the story of *Dayeuh Lemah Kaputihan*. The myth narrates that Jalawastu is the abode of gods and guardians. The place is perceived as a sanctum, accordingly. The community believes in some taboos. The taboos bear on behavioral teachings that foreground ecosystem issues and forbid the believers to keep certain livestock.<sup>4</sup> The prohibition is an embodiment of Jalawastu ethics, as stated in theology and deontology.

The taboos, brought on by the name of traditions, contain unwritten rules regarded as local wisdom by the Jalawastu community. Theologically speaking, they are associated with the community's allegiance to Ragawijaya, a prophecy caller and a saint. He was the one mandated by Batara Windu Buana to guard the sacred land of Kaputihan, to which people refer as Jalawastu.<sup>5</sup> Ragawijaya had never had living things as food.

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<sup>1</sup> Ira Indrawan, "Berketuhanan dalam Perspektif Kepercayaan Sunda Wiwitan," *Melintas* 30, 1 (2014), pp. 105-118.

<sup>2</sup> "Kepercayaan Baduy Versi Lain" [www.regional.kompas.com/](http://www.regional.kompas.com/) accessed on March 31, 2022.

<sup>3</sup> Wijanarko, "Harmoni di kaki Gunung Kumbang," *Aceh Anthropological* 2, 2 (2018): pp. 37-54.

<sup>4</sup> Asep Sunanang and A. Luthfi, "Mitos Dayeuh Lemah Kaputihan pada masyarakat Dusun Jalawastu Kabupaten Brebes (Tinjauan Strukturalisme Levi-Strauss)," *Solidarity* 4, 1 (2015): pp. 1-14.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

As narrated by the legend, the name Jalawastu has a story. It derived from a Javanese who was fishing using a net but caught stones instead. He then named the area *Jala* (to catch fish using a net) and *Wastu* (stones).<sup>6</sup> From the story, we can imply that Jalawastu is inhabited by two large tribes, namely the Sundanese as the indigenous tribe and the Javanese as the migrants. Besides the Javanese, the migrants were also Syarif Hidayatullah, a carrier of Islamic teachings, and his followers. They came from the Middle East and travelled for the sake of spreading Islam in Indonesia.<sup>7</sup> Islam then blossomed and became the religion to which the majority of the Jalawastu community adhere.

As time went by, local teachings interplayed with Islam, causing the process of acculturation to occur.<sup>8</sup> The social process came into existence as a result of the interaction between Jalawastu cultures and Islamic teachings diffused by Syarif Hidayatullah. Through the process, Islamic teachings were gradually integrated with Jalawastu cultures.<sup>9</sup> However, the integration of Islam with the belief espoused by Jalawastu people did not take over local traditions, whose values had been abided by for centuries.<sup>10</sup>

Islamic teachings, which were integrated into local traditions, were now easily adjusted to the local context. This made the teachings more applicable and utilitarian. Some oppositions to cultural unification were only germane to the creed system, ideology, and philosophy of life. The acculturation of Islamic teachings and Jalawastu traditions was inevitable. Both Islamic clerics and local figures had interests, in which the first party stressed the spreading process of Islam, while the second one highlighted the extant social system to which the local community should cling.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> An interview with one of the Jalawastu people. While the other version, explains that the origin of the word Jalawastu tells about the princess of Karawang.

<sup>7</sup> Luthfi, "Mitos Dayeuh Lemah Kaputihan," p. 5.

<sup>8</sup> Siti Zulaeka, "Akulturasi Islam Kejawen di Tanah Jalawastu," <https://timesindonesia.co.id/kopi-times/295576/akulturasi-islam-kejawen-di-tanah-jalawastu> accessed on March 31, 2020.

<sup>9</sup> Luthfi, "Mitos Dayeuh Lemah Kaputihan," pp. 9-10.

<sup>10</sup> Wijanarko, "Harmoni di kaki Gunung Kumbang," p. 52.

<sup>11</sup> Sholih Muaidi and A. Sofyani, "Acculturation of Islam and Javanese Culture in Public Servant Ethics," *el Harakah* 20, 2 (2018): pp. 233-252.

Islam in the *Jalawastu* community expresses acculturative Islam. Because there has been a modification between the existing culture in society and Islam as a new culture that comes from outside the *Jalawastu* community. In the end, these two cultures experienced social contact, which resulted in cultural acculturation.

This study brings into focus the *Jalawastu* traditions the community is retaining and Islamic values adapted to local cultures. Additionally, it confers the examination of the *Jalawastu* community's spirit in maintaining acculturation within the community.

The common trend of previous research on *Jalawastu* underscores local traditions as delineated in the *ngasa* ceremony. Among the traditions are *perang centong*, *selamatan*, *bersih desa*, and *arak-arakan*.<sup>12</sup> Sa'diyah, in her research, argues that the *data* ceremony functions as moral education. It is the manifestation of the behaviors of gratitude and surrenders to God; the behaviors required in social life, e.g., politeness, mutual help, and friendship; and morals towards the universe by preserving nature.<sup>13</sup> Wijanarto elucidates that in performing the *ngasa* tradition, the *Jalawastu* community refers to their history, the embodiment of which is preserved as memories or folklore told from generation to generation. The folklores thus indicate the ecological relationship between cultures and the physical environment which engenders a cultural system and social symbols.<sup>14</sup>

Other studies of *Jalawastu* emphasize the community's behaviors in daily life within the *Jalawastu* cultural framework. For example, Dzakkii and Ardi convey that the practice of inheritance among the *Jalawastu* community is still deploying the custom system. According to the system, heirs are the children, and any child who willingly manages inheritance before the death of his/her parents deserves a larger portion.<sup>15</sup> Wahyudi discusses early marriage in the *Jalawastu* community because of economic, educational, and social factors, as

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<sup>12</sup> Mia Nur Fadhilah and T. Supriyanto, "Upacara Tradisi Ngasa di Dukuh *Jalawastu* Desa Ciseureuh Kabupaten Brebes," *Sutasoma: Jurnal Sastra Jawa* 8, 1 (2020): pp. 16-25.

<sup>13</sup> Siti Halawatus Sa'diyah, "Pendidikan Akhlak dalam Budaya Lokal "Ngasa" pada Masyarakat Kampung Budaya *Jalawastu* Desa Ciseureuh Brebes," (Unpublished Thesis, UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta, 2019).

<sup>14</sup> Wijanarko, "Harmoni di kaki Gunung Kumbang," pp. 37-54.

<sup>15</sup> Muhamad Dzakkii and M.N. Ardi, "Praktik Pembagian Harta Waris di Kampung Adat Pedukuhan *Jalawastu* Kabupaten Brebes", *ADHKI: Journal of Islamic Family Law* 2, 1 (2020); pp.39-46.

well as a lack of socialization by the government.<sup>16</sup> Pramudya et al. explicate that adaptive skills in responding to social changes are manifested through attempts of nurturing custom values and embracing social changes which generate positivism for the community.<sup>17</sup>

Among other studies of Jalawastu is the one carried out by Sunanang and Luthfi. In the study, mythical elements of Jalawastu beliefs are addressed and investigated using Levi-Strauss' structuralism theory. By the theory, myths are mainly affected by ethnic and religious syncretism.<sup>18</sup> Sakti illuminates the spatial territorial characteristics of Jalawastu community settlements. He categorizes the space into shelters, fields, forests, and customary land. Determining the territorial spaces should adhere to cultural and customary values and be conducted using the space and natural resources available.<sup>19</sup> In Huzaena and Munawarah, the Sundanese language, used as a means of communication by the Jalawastu community, is discussed from a geolinguistic perspective. As pointed out by the results, although most of the Brebes community speaks in Javanese, the Jalawastu community endeavors to preserve the language of their ancestors who spoke in the Sundanese language. And yet, the Sundanese language spoken in Jalawastu does not have any language variety. Additionally, it has several vocabularies which only apprehended by those living in Jalawastu.<sup>20</sup>

Academics' study of the Jalawastu community focusing on the relationship between Islam and local traditions is very rare. As yet, I could only find a specific study of the Jalawastu community with regard to Islam was the research conducted by Rachmawati that addresses three *da'wah* approaches applied by Islamic missionaries. They are regularly reciting *Surah Yaseen* together, have annual religious

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<sup>16</sup> Slamet Wahyudi, "Praktik Perkawinan Dini di Kampung Budaya Jalawastu Ditinjau dari Perspektif Hukum Islam," Unpublished Thesis, UNISULA Semarang, 2021.

<sup>17</sup> Hendra Pramudya, TM. Marwanti, and Y. Sundayani, "Ketahanan Sosial Komunitas Adat Jalawastu terhadap Perubahan Sosial di Desa Ciscureuh Kabupaten Brebes", *Lindayasos: Jurnal Ilmiah Perlindungan dan Pemberdayaan Sosial* 3, 2 (2021): pp. 125-146.

<sup>18</sup> Luthfi, "Mitos Dayeuh Lemah Kaputihan," pp. 1-14.

<sup>19</sup> Bimo Perbowo Sakti, "Sistem Ruang Permukiman Tradisional pada Kampung Adat Jalawastu," Thesis UNISULA Semarang, 2020.

<sup>20</sup> Mifta Huzaena and S. Munawarah, "Bahasa Sunda di Jalawastu: Perspektif Sosio-Geolinguistik," *Proceeding Inusbarts* (2018): pp. 195-213.

activities, especially reciting the Holy Qur'an and listening to religious speeches, and arrange an informal school for studying how to recite the Holy Qur'an (TPA). This study sets forth Islamic values customized to local cultures so they can be applied in harmony and the Jalawastu community's spirit to retain the strongly established acculturation. The focus is selected considering the unique religious-cultural life of the Jalawastu community. They have been practising cultural acculturation, whereby cultural changes are prevalent without any personality or self-identity of the community being lessened.

This study employed an ethnographic method to visualize the meaning and activities that occurred within Jalawastu community's daily life.<sup>21</sup> Data were collected through interviews and the observation of the Jalawastu community's activities regarding the traditions, physical characteristics, social situations, and other objects relevant to the focus of the study. The discussion was presented using a descriptive approach. Accordingly, in this research, ethnography plays an important role in understanding the harmonization lies between traditions and Islamic teachings.

### **Islam and Local Wisdom**

There is a growing study of the relationship between Islam and local traditions currently, notably in the field of religious moderation. One of the issues being stressed is how Islam can establish harmonization with local cultures. In this study, the theoretical construction refers to two aspects, which are Islam and local traditions. Dialectics of Islam and local traditions are best examined using a cultural perspective-based approach.<sup>22</sup>

It is mentioned in the book *The Religion of Java* by Clifford Geertz, that Muslims who are still carrying out local traditions are called *Islam Abangan*. Geertz classified the Javanese community into three groups, i.e., *Abangan*, *Santri*, and *Priyayi*. He associated *Islam Abangan* to Islamic teachings which integrate elements of Hinduism,

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<sup>21</sup> Ann Swidler, "Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies," *American Sociological Review* 51, 2 (1986): pp. 273-286.

<sup>22</sup> Abdurrohman Kasdi, "Islamic Dialectics, and Culture in Establishing Islam Nusantara Paradigm: Variety Model of Islam Nusantara for Indonesia", *Addin* 12, 2 (2018), 299), pp.-324.

Buddhism, Animism, and Dynamism.<sup>23</sup> Others, define the *Abangan* community as adherents to the system of Javanese spiritual beliefs.<sup>24</sup>

Geertz's perspective on *Islam Abangan* is one of the suitable references for investigating Islam as the religion adhered to by the Jalawastu community. As such, this study will underscore the blend of Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and local wisdom as how Geertz addresses its bearing on religions in Java. Notwithstanding this, this study discusses the blend by relating it to Pasundan traditions.

Beatty, in looking at the division of Islamic groups as what has been executed by Geertz, ascribes the groups share similarities as a community. The three groups will coalesce during certain rites, e.g., *Selamatan*. Beatty's argument is aligned with this study of the Jalawatu community, that in performing certain rites, all groups will gather and make harmony.<sup>25</sup>

Islamic teachings blossoming in Indonesia cannot be segregated from elements of local wisdom. Local wisdom greatly impacts the diverse patterns of the development of Islam in Indonesia. They have existed and burgeoned long before the arrival of Islam in Indonesia. Hence, local values remain although there are dominating religious values. Historically speaking, local cultures emanate from the process of creation, taste, and intention of human beings who act by their deepest conscience and ideologies, in which honesty, modesty, togetherness, justice, humanity, and concern for nature are emphasized.

Cultural values cannot persist and be accepted by the community unless they endorse human values. That being so, cultural values are also universal. This universality manifests a synergic connection of Islam to local traditions. Regrettably, some distortion still comes about. Measuring how Islamic teachings and local wisdom walk side by side can be exerted through the identification of universal values in local teachings. In addition, an identification of the internalized forms of Islamic laws in local wisdom, particularly in norms applicable among the community, should be performed as well.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Clifford Geertz, *The Religion of Java* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967).

<sup>24</sup> Ferry Y. Mamahit, *Abangan Muslims, "Javanese Worldview, and Muslim-Christian Relations in Indonesia," Transformation 38, 1 (2020): pp. 31-45.*

<sup>25</sup> Andrew Beatty, *Varieties of Javanese Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge Studies in Social and Cultural Anthropology, 1999), p. 111.

<sup>26</sup> Suparji, "Eksistensi Hukum Islam dan Kearifan Lokal," *Jurnal Al-Azhar Indonesia Seri Humaniora 5, 1 (2019): pp. 21-28.*

A process and interaction within a harmony between Islamic teachings and local wisdom have been clear since the arrival of Islam in Indonesia. Islam and customs were internalized through their binding and forging with the community life at that time, resulting in local wisdom. That being so, Islamic values have inflected local wisdom developing among the community. Their influences are clear-cut in the community's marriage tradition, garments, inheritance, and economy. In brief, there is the tailoring of Islamic teachings to local wisdom and vice versa.

### **History of the Jalawastu Community**

The Jalawastu community lives in Ciseruh Ketanggungan Brebes. According to history, the Jalawastu community came into existence thanks to a figure named Ragawijaya. He was learning the *Kanuragan* practice to augment his power. He then meditated at Gedong Sirap at the foot of the Kumbang Mountain. After he had successfully achieved *moksa* (the culmination), Batara Windu Buana (a god) instructed Guriang Panutus (the messenger of the gods) to give an heirloom in the form of three urns. The heirloom conferring meant that Ragawijaya needed to reside as he still had some sort of affairs with Batara Windu Buana.<sup>27</sup>

Ragawijaya was imparted a command to descend from Gedong Sirap wherein gods' dwelling. After descending, he built a residence in Pasarean Gedong Petilasan. It immediately turned out that the area was also *Kaputihan* or a precinct functioning gods' residence as in Gedong Sirap. Whilst, he was allowed to inhabit the area under a certain agreement, in which he had to guard it as a sanctum where gods lived.<sup>28</sup>

To meet the agreement, some endeavors should be acted upon until today. The community should be mindful of their behaviors, words, and actions. They have to avoid prohibited acts, e.g., killing, stealing, gambling, committing adultery, uttering inappropriate words, cutting trees without consent, revoking the grass, killing animals, being greedy, telling lies, robbing, being jealous, quarrelling, and so on. Other prescriptions include constructing a house using cement, ceramics, and roof tiles; ecosystem-related ones, such as cutting a tree, revoking the

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<sup>27</sup> Luthfi, "Mitos Dayeuh Lemah Kaputihan," pp. 5-10.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.



grass, killing certain animals, planting red onions, peanuts, black beans, and soybeans; playing two musical instruments, namely *kenong*, and *gong*; and keeping buffalos, lambs, goldfish, and goose as cattle.<sup>29</sup>

The agreement spawns different traditions in the form of ceremonies thereafter, such as *ngasa*, *tong-tong breng*, *ngaguyung kuuu*, *bersib desa*, *ciprat suci*, *perang centong*, *arak-arakan gunung*, praying rites, *selamatan*, *tundan*, *selamatan* for newborns, healing ceremonies to relegate dark arts, the counting tradition to determine the date best for holding certain ceremonies or activities, *babarit*, *sedekah bumi*, *tutulak*, *heo gelo*, and *cako*.<sup>30</sup> And yet, the principal tradition is the *ngasa* ceremony.<sup>31</sup>

*Ngasa* constitutes another attribute aside from the Sundanese language preserved by the Jalawastu community as the heritage in Brebes. They perceive tradition as their self-identity as part of the Jalawastu community. As claimed by them, it is still germane to Sunda Wiwitan. Nine regions that perform *ngasa* are Marenggeng (Bantarkawung), Gandoang, Kadumanis, Kurungciung (Salem), Selagading, Garogol, Jalawastu, Permana (Ketanggungan), and Blandongan (Banjarharja). However, today, the tradition is only performed in Jalawastu.<sup>32</sup>

Hinduism and Buddhism entered the island of Java in early 400 BC and bred significant transformation in various sectors of life since then. Myriad groups of people who previously espoused Sunda Wiwitan converted to Hinduism and Buddhism. This brought about a decline in the *ngasa* ceremony in Jalawastu. During the rule of Dharma Sakti Wira Jayeswara, the re-actualization of the tradition still endeavored because he was an obedient adherent of Sunda Wiwitan. Through that endeavor, the *ngasa* tradition was revitalized yet in a concise time as a result of the abdication of Dharma Sakti and the arrival of Islam. The resurgence of the *ngasa* tradition broke out when the regent of Brebes, Arya Candra, revitalized it in 1882. Luckily, it is preserved until today.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Sundayani, "Ketahanan Sosial Komunitas Adat Jalawastu," p. 131.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 126.

<sup>31</sup> Interviews with Dastam and Widodo (traditional figures of the Jalawastu Community)

<sup>32</sup> Wijanarko, "Harmoni di kaki Gunung Kumbang," p. 47.

<sup>33</sup> Supriyanto, "Upacara Tradisi Ngasa di Dukuh Jalawastu," p. 20.

Syarif Hidayatullah was the ulama who firstly taught Islam in Jalawastu.<sup>34</sup> The event happened in the 15<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>35</sup> When teaching Islam in either Jalawastu or other regions, Syarif Hidayatullah believed that it was necessary to neither alleviate nor eradicate all local cultures or wisdom which have been at hand long before his arrival. He wisely coped with them given the community had different customs, habits, cultures, and local wisdom. Any form of culture which was good was preserved and fleshed out. Meanwhile, those which were contextually inappropriate for the current era were stylized with Islamic values and knowledge which might engender moral values and attitudes.<sup>36</sup>

Albeit espousing Islam,<sup>37</sup> the Jalawastu community respects animism and dynamism too. They are still practising ancestral traditions as regards mysticism hitherto. In other words, there is a syncretism that is uniting Islam and the ethnicity of the Jalawastu community's locality.

### **Interaction of Islam with Jalawastu Culture**

The flourishing of Islam among the Jalawastu community is due to Islam offering safety and peace. Islamic teachings are considered simpler associated with their religious duties than other previous religions which emphasize mysticism. According to the council of Kokolot, before the arrival of Islam in the Jalawastu communities, they had adhered to the local belief, which was Sunda *Wiwitan* as well as Hinduism and Buddhism. In addition, there were also animism and dynamism, the elements of which mingled with the newer religions. Religions share common characteristics. For example, Sunda *Wiwitan*, Hinduism, and Buddhism believe in evil spirits and ghosts, as well as gods with different roles.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Dastam (a Jalawastu figure) explains that there is another version, specifically mentioning the uncle of Syarif Hidayatullah who entered the land of Jalawastu.

<sup>35</sup> As spelled out by Tome Pires in his book "Sama Oriental". Islam embedded its predisposing to areas in and around Brebes in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Tome Pires, *Perjalanan dari Laut Merah ke Cina* (Yogyakarta: Ombak, 2015), 113.

<sup>36</sup> Luthfi, "Mitos Dayeuh Lemah Kaputihan," pp. 8-9.

<sup>37</sup> Information comes from Kuswanto, the chairman of RT 01 / RW 03, and Darto, the chairman of RT 01 / RW 03, Jalawastu Hamlet.

<sup>38</sup> Interview with Turaes and Tarki (Kokolot Council of Jalawastu community). The Kokolot Council is a representative council of citizens

Islam thus differs from older religions in Jalawastu. It has successfully gained a multitude of followers and is well-adapted to the Jalawastu community's life. The cultural acculturation between Islam and Jalawastu traditions is accepted by the community, in which the results of the acculturation are firmly entrenched in their daily life.<sup>39</sup> The encounter between Islam and Jalawastu traditions amplifies the concept of harmony between Islam and local traditions. Both teachings can walk side by side aligned with their values. Accordingly, this attests to the harmony which engenders local wisdom.

Islam, which started thriving in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, followed and adjusted to various extant traditions. It had never been the intention of Islam to delete all cultures and traditions which had long been existing.<sup>40</sup> As such, Islam in Jalawastu is a reflection of the community's tradition. To put it more simply, the form of Islam in the village is ancestral acculturation heritage as local wisdom which is still preserved today.

The cultivation of Islam in the Jalawastu community is considered significant, generating a uniquely Islamic phenomenon. Islam is faced with local traditions and cultures which, fortunately, can walk with Islam correspondingly. Hence, the community can adhere to Islam without needing to lose their self-identity. In the past, mysticism in the Jalawastu community developed in habituation. Religious cosmology like animism, dynamism, Sunda Wiwitan, Hinduism, Buddhism, local traditions, and Islam converge in Islamic mystic traditions. The latter traditions make up the results of the acculturation process between Jalawastu cultures and Islam as a dialogic and integrative form. The acculturation, which has a dialogic pattern, demonstrates that Islam and Jalawastu cultures converse in a form of social-religious structure. Meanwhile, attributed to its integrative form, Islam is nurtured and becomes a critical part of the Jalawastu cultural structure.

Akin to any other customary community, the Jalawastu community maintains its local traditions, which retain through generations. To be integrated with the Jalawastu community's culture, Islam must not be too stiff. It opens up to and adapts to local traditions. As a result, Islamic teachings influence the community's paradigm because they

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<sup>39</sup> Interview with Dastam, a traditional and religious leader.

<sup>40</sup> Noor Cholis Idham, "Javanese Islamic architecture: Adoption and adaptation of Javanese and Hindu-Buddhist cultures in Indonesia", *Journal of Architecture and Urbanism* 45, 1(2021), 9-18.

can be customized to local traditions. With such integration, Islam as a religion nurtures an integral relationship with traditions as local wisdom.

The openness of Islam to local cultures induces Islamic teachings to rapidly blossom in the community. At the beginning of its era in Indonesia, Islam interplayed with Jalawastu cultures and transected through the boundary of fundamental dissimilarities. The dissimilarities refer to the rudimentary principles of the two different teachings. However, Islam did not merely accept all traditions and cultures of the Jalawastu community. In its development, Islam filtered Jalawastu cultures. As Dastam explained that local traditions espousing Islamic teachings were accepted, whereas those which were at odds were tailored.<sup>41</sup>

The condition was discrete from that in other customary communities, the members of which would be dismissed from the customary groups they had belonged to since they adhered to another belief. This is explained by Halim et al. as follows:

“The infiltration of foreign religions, particularly Islam and Christianity, has defaced the practice of Dayak cultures. After embracing Islam, Dayak people will usually abandon their traditional practices and beliefs. Furthermore, they alter their identity to be Malay people. Serious Islamic converters will leave their community for dwelling with the Malay community in the absence of consensus between Islam and Dayak cultures, e.g., drinking liquor and consuming pork. For several generations, Islam has changed cultures.”<sup>42</sup>

When it comes to Islam, its infiltration into the Jalawastu community does not destruct cultural practices there despite some reduction of them (eliminating cultures that are not analogous to Islamic teachings). Islam corroborates the traditions by stylizing them to its teachings. Indeed, there are many changes in their sociocultural life. Syncretism is still apparent in their religious belief although most Jalawastu people perceive Islam as more than just a religion. Rather, they claim Islam as a cultural identity as in practice, they combine Islam with local beliefs, most of which are expressed in traditional

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<sup>41</sup> Interview with Dastam, a traditional and religious leader.

<sup>42</sup> Abdul Halim, Basyid, A., and Prihananto, “Religious Identity Transformation. Cultural Interbreeding between Dayak Indigenous Culture and Islam”, *Journal of Indonesian Islam* 15, 1(2021), 173.

rites. Additionally, rite activities pose cultural practices which had been carried out by their ancestors after the arrival of Islam in Jalawastu. The rites reflect a form of syncretism between their religious beliefs and commitments to practising Islam doctrines correctly, as well as conducting rites in such a way that they do not break Islamic teachings. In that manner, they can be categorized as obedient Moslems.

Such an Islamic condition is inevitable. Islamic infiltration into local traditions is very possible in light of intensive interaction between the Jalawastu community and newcomers, producing acculturation. This acculturation aims to retain the existence of old cultures but embrace the community's religious beliefs. Ultimately, Islam is integrated with the extant traditions, resulting in the community's manner in the burgeoning cultural changes and life practices.<sup>43</sup>

When Islam came to Jalawastu, the community learned what was allowed and disallowed by Islamic *sharia*. Conscious of the fact that Jalawastu traditions were conflicting with Islamic teachings, they adjusted the traditions to Islamic teachings. For example, they altered the intention and purpose of the *ngasa* ceremony. The ceremony had been done to worship ancestors. Its activity then was modified into reciting prayers (*tasyakuran*) and intended to commemorate the life journey of the Jalawastu community and ancestors. In connection with the old habit of providing offerings for the ancestors' spirits and gods, the offerings, which were left to keep it intact and presentable, are now intended to be consumed.

In addition, the *tundan* tradition or ceremony was adapted to Islam. This tradition, which is a ceremony in form, is intended to eradicate rats as pests that harm agriculture. It is commonly executed during an urgent condition. During the ceremony, it is believed that Goddess Sri the goddess of rice is present as well. She acts as a guardian who wards off threats, such as rats, which potentially imperil the community's plants. Nonetheless, the prayers recited are Islam-referring. Therefore, the presence of the rice god is only a symbol of custom. whereas in fact, they pray to God according to Islamic teachings, and the recitation of the prayer is preceded by Islamic elements, such as reciting the word "*Nawaitu...*".<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Benny Baskara, "The Expansion of the Jama'ah Tabligh Movement and its Influence on the Religious Belief of the Bajo People in Southeast Sulawesi", *Journal of Indonesian Islam* 14, 2 (2020), 519–540.

<sup>44</sup> Interview with "Juru Bikang" the reader of prayers at a traditional event.

The *tutulak* ceremony constitutes a ceremony to ward off bad omens and diseases. The Jalawastu community also exerted the ceremony to avert them from the COVID-19 pandemic. The *tutulak* ceremony aims to ward off infections and prevent them from affecting the village. The participants of this ceremony are some people who act as the representatives of their families. The ceremony activities cover reciting prays in an Islamic manner and continued readings of mantras that read “the plague returns to its origin, if its origin is from the west back to the west, from the east back to the east, from the south back to the south, from the north back to the north, from the top back to the top, and from the bottom to back down”.<sup>45</sup>

The *ngaguyang kumo* ceremony functions as the medium to request rain. Hence, it is commonly performed during a long dry season. The underlying activity of the ceremony is bathing the village head in a sacred river, i.e., Curug Rambukasang. To customize the *ngaguyang kumo* tradition to Islam, participants also take place a prayer for a rain-seeking purpose (*istisqa* prayer), as well as reciting prays commensurate with sharia. The *istisqa* prayer is performed outside the ceremonial agenda. Based on an interview with a traditional leader, Dastam, he explained:

“*Istisqa* prayers are performed outside the ceremonial agenda. This is intentional to maintain the authenticity of local traditions”.<sup>46</sup>

This is considered unique, that after the ceremony, there was a flush among the residents present. The ceremony makes up one of the spiritual measures draped with traditions to seek rain.

Similar to some other communities, the Jalawastu community undertakes a routine activity of *selamatan*. *Selamatan* poses a medium for *silaturrahim* (reinforcing the ties) and is a religious symbol. This activity demonstrates various elements of beliefs, namely praying in an Islamic method, reciting the Holy Koran, reciting Surah Yaseen, and reciting Tahleel, as well as animistic elements, e.g., providing an offering. Notwithstanding this, participants can eat it after the chief ritual is complete. This embodies a cultural expression by exhibiting religious representation with mystical affiliation.

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Interview with Dastam, a traditional and religious leader.

The *selamatan* tradition of the Jalawastu community is a religious tradition extant long before the arrival of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam. The Jalawastu community's need for security, tranquillity, safety, peace and happiness in life yields a belief in animistic and dynamistic power. The belief system deems the existence of spirit guardians or inhabitants, which may have either good or bad characters, in the universe. After the infiltration of Islam, the paradigm changed. The spiritual concept does not merely connect to the spirit of the ancestors or sacred objects. Instead, it perceives spirits as God's creation, which people should also believe. Spirits do exist because Islam acknowledges their existence, such as that of *jinns* or devils.

Until today, the *selamatan* ritual is still a preserved tradition in Jalawastu. It is carried out on certain months or special occasions, e.g., big events, births, and marriage ceremonies. Several *selamatan* traditions which were usually conducted by the Jalawastu community are *selamatan syura*, *maulud*, and *Kamis Kliwonan*. According to Widodo:

“The community believes in the efficacy of reciting prayers in the month of Shuro. The month is considered sacred. It is believed that during the month, spirits are in the culmination of their winning. In so doing, the month is considered the best time to recite prayers for the Jalawastu ancestors”.<sup>47</sup>

In Islam, the month of Shuro is called Muharram. Islam teaches that this month is dotted with goodness. That being so, people are suggested to do good as much as possible. During the month, therefore, people afford charities in the form of food, drinks, and snacks during *selamatan*.

Another *selamatan* is on the commemoration purpose, which is to commemorate the birth of Prophet Muhammad, PBUH. On the occasion, people make a *tumpeng*. *Tumpeng* symbolizes the geographical condition of Jalawastu, which is a mountainous region. The dish is the medium exploited by people to venerate mountains as the abode of *hyang* or the spirits of the ancestors. The conical shape of *the tumpeng* symbolizes the gods' dwelling. In a more profound meaning, *tumpeng* manifests our gratitude to the Creator. *Tumpeng* is a dish with different side dishes and vegetables, symbolizing tolerance and the stateliness of God. In *selamatan*, *tumpeng* is usually eaten together after reciting the Holy Qur'an. During the *mauludan* event, other activities are also done,

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<sup>47</sup> Interview with Widodo, a youth, and figure of Jalawastu.

e.g., cleaning or wiping ancestors' artefacts, such as kris, sticks, spears, swords, and so forth.

From the aforementioned traditions, thus, local traditions practised by the Jalawastu community have been tailored to Islam teachings. These traditions embody the consequence of the values of the local community's beliefs. The culture is environmental condition and situation-based, thereby accompanying the community's life journey. Within this context, in the customs of the Jalawastu community, there is an intersection in the social process (assimilation) between new religions and local cultures.

The acculturation of the Jalawastu traditions to Islam is smooth, causing Islam to be gradually accepted by and stylized to local traditions. In this way, the Jalawastu community's self-identity persists. Persistence is possible as Islam is an absolute religion. It comes from God's teachings and, accordingly, can be adapted to traditions and customs, which are relative by nature.

The contact of Islam with the Jalawastu community has been for centuries. As such, Islam in Indonesia and Arabia share discrete characteristics. The first Islam has been adjusted to Indonesian customs and cultures. Correspondingly, Islam in Jalawastu is predisposed by the Jalawastu climate and environment.

The arrival of Islam in Jalawastu brings a crucial effect on the religious life of the community living there. Long before the arrival, the Jalawastu community had adhered to animism, dynamism, Sunda Wiwitan, Hinduism, and Buddhism. The role of religious figures, e.g., Syarif Hidayatullah, is elemental in the propagation of Islamic teachings. He had successfully embedded the teachings in the community. His success is impacted by several factors, e.g., his ability to adapt local beliefs and traditions to Islam or to pack Islam in such a way that it can be connected to local beliefs. By that means, as such, the deployment of Islam was conducted in peace and could achieve the spiritual aspect.

Islam in Jalawastu is unique. Prevalently, the Jalawastu community, similar to other Moslems, believes in *shahada*, executes prayers, donates *zakah*, exerts fasting, and performs *hajj* for those who can afford it. Whilst, in Jalawastu, Islam teachings are perceived to be descended from ancestors as well. Thus, other religion-related systems, i.e., traditions, customs, and even Sunda Wiwitan are still preserved.



The Jalawastu community regards Islam as both way of life and religion. They hold faith that Islam leads to goodness both in the world and in the afterlife. Implicitly, Islam teachings in Jalawastu are so well-preserved and strongly embedded because the Jalawastu community ascribes them as flexible ones. Besides, the community perceives traditions as a manifestation of homage to older people and ancestors and as a carrier of moral values.

The compromise between local cultures and Islam, about traditions, can be manifested. Additionally, dialectics between traditions and Islamic laws can walk side by side in harmony. The traditions are accepted by Islamic laws as long as they are not in contradistinction from *tawhid*. Currently, practiced rites constitute the outcome of the dialectics and are a form of a model for reality that has reached a common agreement. Sacredness remains in the traditions although they have been stylized to Islam as the embodiment of Jalawastu cultures and characteristics.

The Jalawastu community does not deny modernization in this era. They embrace the need for a dynamic process without disregarding good ancestral teachings. Accordingly, the processes of dialectics and literacy should go on aligned with the era development. The Jalawastu community believes that cultures and traditions are not solely past events. Rather, they contain inspirations for life. As such, the local community needs to maintain an affinity with them.

Both cultures and traditions are precedents. For instance, they teach the community not to impair or cut trees and to preserve plants as they serve favor of life by providing fruits, nurturing springs, and constituting food sources for cattle. These functions raise our empathy. This empathy is a feeling of respecting ancestors' struggle to preserve nature for the sake of the future generation<sup>48</sup>. Hence, ancestral teachings commonly address simplicity in life in three principles, i.e., venerating nature, taking care of nature, and not being greedy or using natural resources sparingly.<sup>49</sup>

Traditions are implemented to reward the ancestors' material or non-material services which contribute to the life of the Jalawastu

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<sup>48</sup> Kalfein M Wuisaan, "Gerakan Kebudayaan Generasi Muda Minahasa Menjaga Adat Tradisi", <https://kebudayaan.kemdikbud.go.id/ditkma/wp-content/uploads/sites/6/-2020/07/Materi-Kalfein-Wuisaan.pdf> accessed on March 31, 2022.

<sup>49</sup> Enkin Asriwijaya, "Gerakan ekopopulisme komunitas Samin melawan perusahaan semen di Pegunungan Kendeng", *Jurnal Sosiologi Pendidikan Humanis* 5, 1(2020), 35-47.

community. Preserving customs and traditions means manifesting ancestral cultures. There are several benefits of the traditional procession which are analogous to current issues. For example, the implementation of traditions functions as *silaturrahim* media among the Jalawastu people.

Through the Jalawastu traditions and customs, there is implied obeisance for older people and ancestors. The Jalawastu community respects their ancestors, considering their services which hinder the current generation from destruction. Additionally, ancestral teachings confer an apprehension of the imperativeness of preserving the next generation. Hence, they retain ecosystems for not only the current generation but also the future ones. The principal has supported the Jalawastu community, allowing them to survive until today.

As a community upholding moral values, its customary traditions connect to all aspects of human life, including how to conduct ethically towards nature and the living environment. Nature and the living environment are integral parts of human life. It is because human needs are derived from and catered to by nature, either plants or animals. The philosophy of the tradition is commensurate with Islamic teachings. As written in the Holy Koran, it is obligatory for human beings to preserve nature, in so doing, the sustainability of which will not be compromised by irresponsible groups of people.

This study shows that the interplay between Islam and local traditions is in harmony. The acculturation process in religious practices carried out in daily life indicates synergy between consistency in conducting traditions and adherence to religious teachings. Both traditions and Islamic teachings are applied to manage life as structures within social rules. In many layers, the implementation of customary traditions has been adapted to the pillars of Islam. Islam is integrated with local life but by maintaining the extant customary patterns. That being so, the community has an Islamic teaching-based spiritual world.

Through these local traditions, Islamic spirituality with no Arabian-like characters is established. Islam in Jalawastu is interpreted into values and traditions, constituting a new identity of the Jalawastu community. The encounter of traditions with Islam in the Jalawastu cultures points out a dialogue that causes a new culture within a local nuance to reconstruct.

## Conclusions

Rites practiced by the Jalawastu community resulted from the dialectics between older traditions and Islamic teachings that arrived in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. The acculturation of these two entities affects the value systems and beliefs the Jalawastu community adheres to. Traditions and practices cannot be segregated from Islamic elements which have become the system of beliefs the community espouses. Tradition is media by which the community acquires legitimation which enables values as the system of life can be well accepted. The system of life constitutes a culmination point of traditions that have been practiced commensurate with beliefs the Jalawastu community clings to.

The two entities complement each other. Islam accepts customs and traditions in order to get place and legitimation from the community. Moreover, Jalawastu customs and traditions accept Islam as the peak of the acculturation of values and symbol of truth. Therefore, Jalawastu customs play an important role as a mediator which links Islam teachings to social realities. Practising customs and traditions, thus, should be comprehended as not only cultural preservation acts but also spiritual expressions.

Rites which have been long practiced by the Jalawastu community were inevitable elements during the spread of Islam in Jalawastu. Tradition is understood as human's expression of lifestyle highlighting wisdom wrapped and descended to the future generation as social values and orders of life. The Jalawastu community senses traditional benefits, i.e., tranquility, prosperity, and stronger bonds. Traditions and Islam blend creating the current model of Jalawastu culture.[]

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