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Religious-Cultural Negotiation in the Nyadran Jembul Tradition: Islam and Javanese Culture in Tulakan, Jepara

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ABSTRACT:
Background: The Nyadran Jembul tradition in Tulakan Village, Jepara is a cultural heritage that shows the encounter between Islamic values and Javanese culture and is still maintained amidst changes in modern society.
Aims: This study aims to analyze the acculturation values of Islam and Javanese culture in the Nyadran Jembul tradition and its benefits for society and the younger generation.
Methods: The study used a descriptive qualitative approach through field research. Informants were selected using purposive sampling and consisted of seven individuals: village officials, community leaders, caretakers, community members, and youth. Data were collected through observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation, then analyzed through data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing.
Result: Research identified five core values: historical, social, cultural, religious, and eclectic. This tradition fosters harmony, friendship, communication, mutual cooperation, and tolerance. For the younger generation, Nyadran Jembul provides an understanding of history, solidarity, cultural experiences, and cultural knowledge.
Conclusion: Nyadran Jembul demonstrates that the acculturation of Islam and Javanese culture occurs through a process of adaptation and reinterpretation of local traditions without losing their social function and cultural identity. This tradition not only serves as a means of preserving cultural heritage but also serves to strengthen social integration, religious values, and the transmission of cultural knowledge between generations. Its sustainability therefore requires preservation that focuses not only on ritual procession but also on understanding the history, values, and meaning of the tradition by future generations.

Keywords: Islamic Acculturation; Javanese Culture; Jembul Nyadran.

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INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a multicultural society formed by the diversity of religions, beliefs, ethnicities, customs and local traditions (Alfindo, 2023; Khilmi et al., 2024; Nugraha et al., 2020). In the context of Javanese society, tradition not only functions as a legacy of the past, but also serves as a space where identity, social values, collective memory, and religious practices continue to be produced and passed down between generations (Ayun et al., 2025; Boanergis et al., 2019). However, the sustainability of local traditions faces challenges along with changing lifestyles, modernization, and the increasing diversity of cultural references. These conditions make the existence of traditions that are able to survive and adapt an important phenomenon to study. One such tradition is Nyadran Jembul, or locally known as Jembul Tulakan, in Tulakan Village, Donorojo District, Jepara Regency (Indrati, 2023; Rukiyah, 2019). This tradition continues to be practiced amidst changes in community life and maintains its unique character while adapting to changing times. Therefore, the urgency of research lies not only in documenting the tradition but also in understanding how local traditions maintain their social and religious relevance in a constantly changing society.

Ideally, the preservation of local traditions should go hand in hand with the community's understanding of the historical, cultural, social, and religious meanings underlying them. Nyadran in Javanese society serves a broader function than an annual ceremony, as it is associated with expressions of gratitude, respect for ancestors, the maintenance of mutual cooperation, and the strengthening of social harmony (Aminudin, 2024; Nai'mah, 2023). In the context of Tulakan, Nyadran Jembul is held in the month of Dzulqa'dah or Apit and is understood by the community as an expression of gratitude for sustenance, a means of strengthening ties, and part of local beliefs regarding protection from misfortune. However, the continuity of this practice is not always accompanied by an adequate understanding of its history and cultural significance. Research data even shows that some younger generations participate in a series of Jembul activities without fully understanding the history of its emergence. The gap between the continuity of the ritual and a substantive understanding of its meaning indicates that cultural preservation is not sufficient through mere repetition of ceremonies, but requires the transmission of knowledge and interpretation of values to the next generation.

This situation also opens up an important opportunity to examine Nyadran Jembul as a dynamic encounter between Islam and Javanese culture. This tradition has a cultural structure that has been passed down through generations, while its practices and interpretations demonstrate a growing emphasis on Islamic values. The research document explains that Javanese society still maintains a number of elements that bear traces of animism, dynamism, Hinduism, and Buddhism. However, these elements are positioned within various practices as cultural frameworks, while prayer, thanksgiving, gratitude to God, and Islamic values occupy a central position in the meaning of the ritual. This phenomenon demonstrates that the relationship between religion and culture does not always take the form of replacing one system with another, but can evolve through a process of selection, adjustment, reinterpretation, and accommodation (Mahfuz, 2019; Muhammad, 2020). Therefore, Nyadran Jembul provides a relevant empirical context for understanding how a Javanese Muslim community maintains its cultural heritage while negotiating it with its religious beliefs.

Previous studies have provided an important foundation for understanding sedekah bumi (earth almsgiving), Nyadran (nature offering), and the relationship between Islam and local culture. Previous research has addressed the symbolic meaning of the Jembul Tulakan ritual, demonstrating that this tradition is not a completely unexplored research object. However, there is still room for further research to examine Nyadran Jembul more specifically through the relationship between Islamic-Javanese acculturation values and its socio-cultural consequences for the community and the younger generation (Arifa et al., 2024; Laura Andri RM & S, 2020). Thus, the novelty of this research

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does not solely come from the location, but from the effort to integrate religious, historical, social, cultural, and intergenerational sustainability dimensions in understanding the acculturation process in a living local tradition.

The focus on the acculturation of Islam and Javanese culture was chosen because this concept allows the research to explain the continuity of Nyadran Jembul without positioning Islam and local traditions as two opposing elements. Empirically, the practice of Nyadran Jembul demonstrates the presence of old cultural elements while simultaneously strengthening the monotheistic orientation of Islam. The research document explains that this encounter process is related to the history of the Islamization of Java, when the spread of Islam took place while still paying attention to the customs and culture that had existed within the community. In subsequent developments, ritual practices underwent adjustments so that Islamic values became increasingly dominant in their meaning. Therefore, acculturation becomes a more productive analytical lens than simply viewing Nyadran Jembul as a traditional ritual. This focus allows the research to identify how elements of history, religiosity, cultural symbols, social relations, and eclectic values converge within a single traditional system and how this process contributes to its acceptance and sustainability within the Javanese Muslim community.

Based on these issues and gaps, this study aims to analyze the forms and values of the acculturation of Islam and Javanese culture in the Nyadran Jembul tradition and explain the contribution of this acculturation to social life, community harmony, and cultural sustainability in Tulakan Village. This focus is consistent with the research findings that identify historical, social, cultural, religious, and eclectic values in Nyadran Jembul, as well as its benefits in strengthening religious harmony, silaturahmi, social communication, mutual cooperation, and tolerance. For the younger generation, this tradition also serves as a medium for gaining cultural experience, cultural knowledge, solidarity, and historical understanding. Theoretically, this study is expected to broaden the understanding of religious and cultural acculturation as a negotiation process that occurs in everyday social practices. Empirically and practically, this study provides an understanding of how local communities maintain traditions without relinquishing their religious identities, while providing a basis for efforts to pass on cultural knowledge to the next generation.

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METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive field research design. This design was chosen to gain a deeper understanding of the acculturation process of Islam and Javanese culture within the Nyadran Jembul tradition and the meanings constructed by the Tulakan Village community. The qualitative approach allowed the research to holistically examine the experiences, perceptions, socio-religious practices, cultural symbols, and interpretations of the community within their natural context. Data were obtained through observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation, then described and interpreted based on the local social and cultural context.

Participants

The research participants consisted of seven informants who had knowledge, experience, or direct involvement with the Nyadran Jembul tradition in Tulakan Village. The informants included the village head/official, the caretaker of the Ratu Kalinyamat Hermitage, youth leaders/chairmen of GP Ansor, village officials, community members, village service staff, and community/religious leaders. Specifically, the informants were Budi Sutrisno, S.Pd.; Muhlisin; Muhammad Adib Luthfi Hakim; Ardhi Yudha Saputra, S.Kom.; Muwaddah; Adi Sudiharta; and KH Hamdan Mustofa. Interviews with the informants were conducted between January 25 and February 25, 2023. Participants were selected because they were deemed capable of providing information regarding the history, rituals, religious values, cultural acculturation, community participation, and the sustainability of the Nyadran Jembul tradition.

Population and Sampling Methods

The social population in the context of this research is the community of Tulakan Village, Donorojo District, Jepara Regency, especially individuals who have knowledge or involvement in the implementation of Nyadran Jembul. Informants were selected using purposive sampling, namely selecting individuals based on the relevance of their knowledge and direct involvement in the tradition. The target group includes community leaders, village officials, caretakers, residents, and village youth. The main criteria for selecting informants were their ability to provide factual information regarding the history and implementation of the tradition as well as their experiences in the social and cultural life of the Tulakan community.

The interview instrument was a semi-structured interview guide with open-ended questions tailored to the position and knowledge of each informant. Examples of questions include: “What is the history of the Nyadran Jembul Tulakan tradition?”, “How is the participation of the Tulakan Village community in the implementation of Nyadran Jembul?”, “Why do the Tulakan Village community still preserve the Nyadran Jembul tradition until now?”, and “What are the values and benefits of the acculturation of Islam and Javanese culture in the Nyadran Jembul tradition?”.

Instruments

Data collection utilized three primary tools: observation guidelines, semi-structured interview guidelines, and documentation. Interviews were conducted openly, allowing informants to develop their opinions and experiences. The researcher prepared a list of primary questions and added follow-up questions based on the informants' responses. Observations were used to observe and record phenomena related to the setting and practices of Nyadran Jembul without the researcher's direct involvement in the subjects' activities. Documentation included photographs, notes, and village documents related to community activities and the traditions of Nyadran Jembul.

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The combination of these three data sources enabled the researcher to obtain information on ritual practices as well as historical, social, religious, and cultural explanations from the informants.

Procedures and Time Frame

The research was conducted in Tulakan Village, specifically in Dukuh Krajan RT 002/RW 001, Donorojo District, Jepara Regency, which was chosen because Nyadran Jembul is an annual tradition typical of the local community and contains elements of the encounter between Islam and Javanese culture. Data collection was carried out in several stages. First, researchers observed the social, cultural, and practical contexts related to Nyadran Jembul. Second, semi-structured interviews were conducted with informants who had been selected purposively. Prior to the interviews, researchers prepared main questions, but follow-up questions could be developed during the interview process to obtain more in-depth information. Third, information from observations and interviews was supplemented with photographs, notes, village documents, and relevant literature sources. Based on the list of informants in the document, interviews were conducted from January 25 to February 25, 2023, with seven informants interviewed on different dates.

Analysis Plan

The data were analyzed using qualitative descriptive analysis following the analysis stages of Miles and Huberman, which include data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing/verification. First, data from interviews, observations, notes, photographs, and documentation were collected as the primary sources of information for the research. Second, in the data reduction stage, information was selected, simplified, and classified based on its relevance to the research focus, particularly regarding the value of Islamic-Javanese acculturation and the socio-cultural benefits of Nyadran Jembul. Third, the reduced data were organized and presented systematically so that the relationships between findings could be interpreted. Finally, the researcher interpreted and drew conclusions based on the patterns that emerged from the classified and presented data. The analysis focused on two main themes: the value of Islamic and Javanese acculturation in Nyadran Jembul and the benefits of this acculturation for community life and cultural sustainability.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

The data analysis shows that the Nyadran Jembul tradition in Tulakan Village is not only maintained as an annual cultural ritual, but also serves as a space for the intersection of Islamic values and Javanese cultural heritage. The research findings identified five main values of acculturation: historical, social, cultural, religious, and eclectic. These five values emerge through the community's interpretation of the history of Jembul Tulakan, their shared involvement in the tradition, their efforts to maintain ancestral heritage, the religious practices that accompany the ritual, and their openness to cultural and religious differences. This tradition has been carried out from generation to generation and involves various community groups, from the younger generation to adults and the elderly. A summary of the research results is presented in Table 1.

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Table 1. Main Findings of Acculturation of Islam and Javanese Culture in the Jembul Nyadran Tradition

Main Aspects	Key Results	Manifestation in Tradition
Historical value	Maintaining memory of history and the struggles of ancestors	Knowledge about the origins of Jembul Tulakan and the figures involved
Social values	Strengthening relationships and concern between communities	Interaction, mutual assistance, mutual cooperation, and togetherness
Cultural values	Preserving traditions as a heritage of Tulakan Village	The implementation of Nyadran Jembul is passed down from generation to generation every year
Religious values	Expression of gratitude to Allah and harmonious life among people	Prayer, istighosah, mauidzoh hasanah, and manganan ritual
Eclectic values	Openness and tolerance towards traditions and differences	Dialogue between Javanese cultural practices and Islamic values
Benefits for society	Harmony, friendship, communication, mutual cooperation, and tolerance	Community involvement in the entire series of activities
Benefits for the younger generation	Historical knowledge, solidarity, experience and cultural knowledge	Youth participation in Jembul Tulakan activities and preservation

Discussion

Research findings indicate that Nyadran Jembul is a space of acculturation that allows elements of Islam and Javanese culture to be maintained side by side without completely eliminating their respective characteristics. This is evident in the emergence of five main values: historical, social, cultural, religious, and eclectic. Specifically, the value of religiosity is manifested through prayer, istighosah, mauidzoh hasanah, manganan, and the interpretation of harvests as sustenance from Allah SWT. While the value of eclecticism is reflected in the community's openness to traditions and diversity of beliefs. These findings are in line with acculturation theory, which views acculturation as changes that occur due to direct and intensive contact between different cultures (la Roi & Mood, 2023; van der Zee & van Oudenhoven, 2022). Kunst & Mesoudi, (2025) explains that one form is syncretism, when different cultural elements are combined into a new system. In the context of Nyadran Jembul, this process not only results in a blending of cultures, but also demonstrates a reinterpretation of tradition, allowing Javanese cultural elements to be retained while their practices and meanings are increasingly placed within an Islamic religious framework.

This acculturation also demonstrates that acceptance of tradition does not mean that society has a completely uniform religious interpretation. Some communities still associate certain symbols in Jembul with hopes for fertility and agricultural yields, while other groups reject these interpretations if they are deemed potentially contradictory to Islamic beliefs. However, these differences do not cause the tradition to lose its social function. Instead, the community maintains Jembul as a shared heritage and a space for building social relationships. This situation supports the view that cultural contact can occur in various domains, including religion, art, social life, and tradition (Jenuri et al., 2024; Khasanah, 2022), while different ideas, norms, values and beliefs can coexist in the process of acculturation (Basong et al., 2024; Salam & Syamsuddin, 2025; Supriadin & Pababari, 2024). Thus, acculturation in Nyadran Jembul is more accurately understood as a dynamic process of cultural negotiation rather than a simple unification of religious and cultural elements.

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The social dimension of this finding can be explained through Talcott Parsons' functionalist theory. Parsons viewed society as a system composed of interrelated parts so that the function of one part is related to the survival of the other parts (Fanshurna & Isnadi, 2025; Lischka-Schmidt, 2023). In Nyadran Jembul, this relationship is evident through the involvement of religious leaders, village officials, the community, and the younger generation in maintaining the tradition. Research results indicate that the activity serves as a means of religious harmony, friendship, social communication, mutual cooperation, and tolerance. These findings demonstrate that the sustainability of Nyadran Jembul is determined not only by the existence of the ritual, but also by the tradition's ability to perform an integrative function within the social system. Shared cultural values enable various community groups to participate despite differences in how they interpret certain elements of the ritual.

The involvement of the younger generation further demonstrates that Nyadran Jembul serves an intergenerational cultural transmission function. Research has found that the tradition provides young people with opportunities to understand local history, build communication and solidarity, and gain cultural experience and knowledge. However, some young people also find that they participate in the series of activities without adequately understanding the history of Jembul Tulakan. This condition is related to the latency function or pattern maintenance, namely the need for a social system to maintain and transmit value patterns so that they can survive between generations (Fitriani et al., 2025; Maula et al., 2024). This concept explains the sustainability of a social system. Therefore, the sustainability of Nyadran Jembul cannot simply rely on the participation of the younger generation in the celebration, but also requires the transmission of knowledge regarding its history, values, and socio-religious significance.

Implications

The research findings imply that preserving local traditions within Muslim communities does not have to be achieved by separating culture from religion, but rather through cultural reinterpretation that aligns with religious values and the community's social needs. From Haviland's perspective, cultural contact allows old and new elements to interact and form cultural patterns that are acceptable to the community. Therefore, village governments, religious leaders, cultural figures, and youth organizations can make Nyadran Jembul not only an annual ceremonial event but also a medium for educating the younger generation about local history, tolerance, mutual cooperation, and cultural literacy.

Research contribution

The main contribution of this research lies in explaining that the acculturation of Islam and Javanese culture in Nyadran Jembul not only produces a unique ritual form, but also forms five dimensions of historical, social, cultural, religious, and eclectic values that have a social function for the community and a function of cultural transmission for the younger generation. By connecting Haviland's acculturation theory with Parsons' functionalist perspective, this research expands the reading of Nyadran Jembul from merely a ritual or cultural symbol to a social mechanism that allows for religious-cultural negotiations, community integration, and the sustainability of cultural identity to take place simultaneously.

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Limitations

The original manuscript did not explicitly include a section on the limitations of the study. However, based on the reported research design, a methodological limitation that can be stated is that the study was conducted in a single cultural community, namely Tulakan Village, with seven informants selected purposively. Therefore, the findings primarily represent the experiences and interpretations of the community in that context and are not intended to be generalized to the entire Nyadran tradition in Java. Furthermore, the primary data relies on observations, documentation, and narratives of informants; therefore, the diversity of interpretations regarding the relationship between Islamic beliefs and traditional elements needs to be understood as contextual findings, not as a single representation of Javanese society as a whole.

Suggestions

Future research is recommended to conduct comparative studies across Nyadran or earth alms locations to see whether the acculturation patterns found in Tulakan also emerge in other Javanese communities. Longitudinal research can also be used to examine the changing meanings of Nyadran Jembul from older to younger generations. Referring to Haviland, future research can focus on changing forms of cultural contact and the selection process of cultural elements over time, while Parsons' AGIL framework can be used to more systematically analyze how aspects of adaptation, goal achievement, integration, and pattern maintenance contribute to the sustainability of Nyadran Jembul. Thus, future research will not only explain the persistence of traditions but also uncover the social and cultural mechanisms that keep them relevant amidst societal changes.

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CONCLUSION

This research shows that the Nyadran Jembul tradition in Tulakan Village represents a dynamic acculturation process between Islam and Javanese culture. This acculturation is not only seen in the continuity of local traditional elements, but also in the integration of religious values in their practice and interpretation. The five main values identified are historical, social, cultural, religiosity, and eclectic values. Historical values relate to maintaining the memory of the origins of traditions and ancestral struggles; social values are reflected in interaction, mutual cooperation, and togetherness; cultural values are evident in efforts to preserve traditions; religiosity values are manifested through gratitude to God, prayer, istighosah, mauidzoh hasanah, and manganan; while eclectic values reflect the community's openness in bringing together local cultural elements with Islamic values. Thus, Nyadran Jembul functions not only as an annual ritual, but also as a space for negotiation between religious identity and the cultural sustainability of the Tulakan community.

In addition to its religious and cultural dimensions, Nyadran Jembul also provides social and intergenerational benefits. This tradition strengthens religious harmony, fosters friendship, fosters inter-community communication, fosters mutual cooperation, and fosters tolerance amidst societal diversity. For the younger generation, participation in Nyadran Jembul provides an opportunity to understand local history, build solidarity, participate in cultural preservation, and gain cultural experience and knowledge. These findings confirm that the sustainability of Nyadran Jembul depends not only on the regular performance of the ritual but also on the community's ability to transmit the values, history, and meaning of the tradition to the next generation. Therefore, the preservation of Nyadran Jembul needs to be directed at a balance between the sustainability of cultural heritage, the strengthening of religious values, and intergenerational cultural education.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

AF contributed to the conceptualization, data collection, data analysis, interpretation of findings, and preparation of the manuscript. TU contributed to research supervision, methodological guidance, critical review, and refinement of the manuscript. Both authors reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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