

AL-ALBAB

CONTENTS

The Theology of The Body as A Pastoral Approach to Preventing Juvenile Delinquency
Dominikus Doni Ola, Risni Karina Bu'ulolo, Evimawati Harefa, Megawati Naibaho, Yusuf Nataeli Lase

Centering the Bayan Youth of Lombok: Local-Based Religious Cultural Tourism Development in Indonesia
Misbah Zulfa Elizabeth, Ririh Megah Safitri, Naili Ni'matul Iliyyun, Akhriyadi Sofian, Endang Supriadi, Luksi Visita

Proud to Bugis: Understanding Faith and the Moral Emotions of The Bugis Community in The Culture of Siri' Na Pesse
Elka Anakotta, Flavius Floris Andries, Hoang Thi Hue

The Catholic Gen-Z on Virtual Eucharist Within the Archdiocese of Pontianak
Angga Satya Bhakti, Bernardus Ario Tejo Sugiarto, Cenderato, Abil Rudi

Jemaah Islamiyah's Collective Memories in Poso: Negotiated Bodies and Shifted Social Spaces
Amanah Nurish, Tsabita Afifah Khoirunnisa, Putri Suryani Samual, Tiara Amima Putri Dewi

Memang Lampung: Discursive Relations of Islam and Local Culture Within The Bark Manuscript No. 2476
Fauzan Fauzan, Ahmad Isnaeni, Faizal Amin, Bakhtiyor Tursunov

Political System Influences within the Indonesian Islamic Da'wah Institute (LDII) and the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood (IM)a
Hilmi Muhammadiyah, Muhammed Sahrin Bin Haji Masri

The Theology of Divine Names and Attributes: A Comparative Examination of Salafi and Ash'ari Doctrines
Muhammad Adli, Perti Rahmah Nur Hakim, Irwan Abdullah, Annisa Dwi Lestari, Tabrani ZA



AL-ALBAB

Volume 14 Number 2 December 2025

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The *Al-Albab* (e-ISSN [2502-8340](#) & p-ISSN [0216-6143](#)) is a double-blind peer-reviewed journal published biannually, in June and December, by Pascasarjana IAIN Pontianak. First launched as a print edition in [December 2012](#), the journal became available online in 2016. It has been a registered member of [CrossRef](#) since then, ensuring that all articles published are assigned a unique Digital Object Identifier (DOI). Recognized for its quality, the journal is indexed in the [Directory of Open Access Journals \(DOAJ\)](#). It has been accredited as a [Sinta 2](#) publication through a decree by the Minister of Research and Technology/Head of the National Research and Innovation Agency of the Republic of Indonesia ([No. 200/M/KPT/2020](#)).

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AL - ALBAB

VOLUME 14 NUMBER 2 (DECEMBER 2025)

CONTENTS

1. The Theology of The Body as A Pastoral Approach to Preventing Juvenile Delinquency
Dominikus Doni Ola, Risni Karina Bu'ulolo, Evimawati Harefa, Megawati Naibaho, Yusuf Nataeli Lase 179
2. Centering the Bayan Youth of Lombok: Local-Based Religious Cultural Tourism Development in Indonesia
Misbah Zulfa Elizabeth, Ririh Megah Safitri, Naili Ni'matul Iliyyun, Akhriyadi Sofian, Endang Supriadi, Luksi Visita.....201
3. Proud to Bugis: Understanding Faith and the Moral Emotions of The Bugis Community in The Culture of Siri' Na Pesse
Elka Anakotta, Flavius Floris Andries, Hoang Thi Hue.....223
4. The Catholic Gen-Z on Virtual Eucharist Within the Archdiocese of Pontianak
Angga Satya Bhakti, Bernardus Ario Tejo Sugiarto, Cenderato, Abil Rudi.....241
5. Jemaah Islamiyah's Collective Memories in Poso: Negotiated Bodies and Shifted Social Spaces
Amanah Nurish, Tsabita Afifah Khoirunnisa, Putri Suryani Samual, Tiara Amima Putri Dewi.....257
6. Memang Lampung: Discursive Relations of Islam and Local Culture Within The Bark Manuscript No. 2476
Fauzan Fauzan, Ahmad Isnaeni, Faizal Amin, Bakhtiyor Tursunov.....281
7. Political System Influences within the Indonesian Islamic Da'wah Institute (LDII) and the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood (IM)a
Hilmi Muhammadiyah, Muhammed Sahrin Bin Haji Masri.....303
8. The Theology of Divine Names and Attributes: A Comparative Examination of Salafi and Ash'ari Doctrines
Muhammad Adli, Perti Rahmah Nur Hakim, Irwan Abdullah, Annisa Dwi Lestari, Tabrani ZA321

THE THEOLOGY OF THE BODY AS A PASTORAL APPROACH TO PREVENTING JUVENILE DELINQUENCY

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ABSTRACT

Theology of the Body is a theological and philosophical reflection that seeks to help adolescents understand their identity as human persons created in the image and likeness of God. This study aims to examine the Theology of the Body and deepen understanding of the meaning of the human body and the value of human dignity in adolescent life, based on the teachings of Pope John Paul II. The method used is library research, involving the collection of relevant literature, critical reading, and the analysis of academic sources. The findings suggest that a comprehensive understanding of the Theology of the Body can foster a greater respect for the dignity of the human person and an increased awareness of the purpose of creation. In practical terms, these insights may be applied through character education programs rooted in the spirituality of the body within Catholic schools, pastoral accompaniment for adolescents that emphasizes the body as a gift, and the development of catechetical modules that integrate Theology of the Body with contemporary issues such as pornography, premarital sex, and identity crises. The scholarly contribution of this study lies in its formation of a theoretical framework that supports further development in the fields of theology, philosophy, and moral education for youth. Moreover, this study provides space for interdisciplinary dialogue between theology and the social sciences in

addressing the complexity of juvenile delinquency in a more holistic and contextualized manner.

Keywords: Theology of the Body; Pastoral Approach; Preventing Juvenile Delinquency

INTRODUCTION

The Theology of the Body, as proposed by Pope John Paul II, is a systematic study that emphasizes the meaning and value of the human body in the context of the Christian faith, particularly in understanding human sexuality and authentic love for others. This teaching invites each human person to explore the nature of the body through the perspective of faith—an approach that regards the body as an integral part of the Divine plan. In the Christian tradition, the human body possesses inherent dignity before God, as the human person is created distinct from other creatures, endowed with reason and conscience, and entrusted with the responsibility to care for and respect both their own existence and that of others (Beetz-Kleden, 2014; Firmanto, 2020; Blegur, 2024; Tolo & Manca, 2024; Mayolla & Rynanta, 2024).

However, in an era of increasingly rapid technological advancement, the body is often treated as an object of visual consumption for particular interests, which frequently leads to the neglect of its dignity and sacred value. One phenomenon that has drawn attention in contemporary theological discourse is the shift in the meaning of the human body—from a spiritual reality to a material object subject to exploitation. Once understood as bearing the image of God, the body is increasingly stripped of its sacred value under the influence of mass media and popular culture. The phenomenon of juvenile delinquency—including promiscuity, sexual violence, drug abuse, and the commodification of the body through social media—reflects a profound crisis of values and morality, which threatens the physical, psychological, and social well-being of adolescents.

From the perspective of Pope John Paul II's teachings, he strongly emphasized the importance of caring for and respecting the body through the lens of faith, which serves as the moral foundation for life (Primus, 2014; Valdo et al., 2024). The Theology of the Body is not merely a reflection on the physical aspects of the human person, but also underlines that the body is the centre, source, and means through which human life is formed and fulfilled in its entirety, in accordance with God's will and plan (Steinberg, 2014; Santrock, 2020; Darnoto & Dewi, 2020; Susanti, 2022; Mawaddah & Prastya, 2023; Indari et al., 2023; Rabim & Made, 2023).

So far, previous literature on the Theology of the Body in Indonesia highlights the relevance of this theme in the context of adolescent formation and sexuality education. Dessi Christanti et al. developed a psychoeducational approach for parents in guiding adolescents' sexual development, grounded in the Theology of the Body (Christanti et al., 2025). This initiative seeks to equip Catholic parents to assist their children in navigating sexual influences and social pressures in accordance with the teachings of the Church. Meanwhile, David Rabim & Raymundus I Made critique the commercialization of the human body in consumer culture through the lens of Pope John Paul II's Theology of the Body (Rabim & Made, 2023). While Christanti et al. emphasize psychoeducational support for parents, Rabim and Made underscore a cultural critique of bodily exploitation. In contrast, this present study centers on the formation of adolescents' spiritual identity and character education through the framework of the Theology of the Body.

The distinctiveness and key contribution of this study lies in its approach that places adolescents as the primary subjects in the formation of spiritual identity and self-awareness, grounded in the teachings of the Theology of the Body. This contrasts with previous studies that have focused more on psycho-educational support for parents (Christanti et al., 2025) or cultural critiques of body commodification (Rabim & Made, 2023). This research develops the Theology of the Body as an integrated pastoral framework for preventing juvenile delinquency, building bridges between theology, education, and pastoral praxis—an intersection that has not been explicitly explored in earlier scholarship. The body is understood not merely as a spiritual symbol, but as a center of ethical and moral formation, thereby expanding the Theology of the Body from a theological domain into practical education with direct implications for curriculum development and youth formation programs in Indonesia.

The main objective of this study is to examine how an understanding of the Theology of the Body, as taught by Pope John Paul II, can help adolescents recognize their identity as human persons created in the image of God and cultivate a spiritual awareness of the dignity of the human person. Furthermore, this study explores how the implementation of the Theology of the Body can foster respect for human dignity through body-centered education.

This study employs the method of library research—a systematic, analysis-based approach conducted through the collection, documentation, selection, and processing of data from various relevant reference sources. This process includes critical reading of literature, examination of related concepts, and interpretation of findings from previous studies to construct a robust

theoretical foundation (Zed, 2004; Boaheng, 2024). The sources used include Church documents, books by Pope John Paul II, scholarly journals, dictionaries, encyclopedias, and credible online publications. The selection of these sources is based on the consideration that Church documents and the works of the Pope serve as primary authorities in the teachings of the Theology of the Body, while academic and scientific literature provides conceptual and contextual frameworks that enrich the analysis.

To ensure the validity and relevance of the information gathered, the researcher applied inclusion criteria comprising: (1) sources that directly discuss the Theology of the Body according to Pope John Paul II; (2) literature addressing adolescent formation, character education, and contemporary Christian anthropology; and (3) publications with academically and theologically accountable foundations (Dekkers et al., 2022). Sources that do not meet academic standards or are irrelevant to the research focus were excluded from the analysis.

Data analysis was conducted using content analysis and theological hermeneutics. Content analysis was employed to identify thematic patterns in theological and pastoral texts and to explain the characteristics of messages contained in written sources (Badzinski et al., 2021). Meanwhile, the hermeneutical approach was used to interpret the theological meaning of texts within the context of adolescent life and the Church's pastoral praxis (Briggs, 2020). These two approaches complement each other in producing conceptual synthesis and contextual understanding of the Theology of the Body.

The validity of this method lies in the systematic nature of the analysis and the depth of interpretation of relevant primary and secondary sources. However, its limitations include reliance on available literature and the potential for interpretive bias by the researcher in reading the texts. Therefore, the findings of this study are reflective and theoretical in nature and should be further tested through field studies or empirical approaches to strengthen their application in the context of youth education and pastoral ministry.

THE CONCEPT OF THEOLOGY OF THE BODY

The Theology of the Body, as proposed by Pope John Paul II in a series of general catecheses delivered from September 1979 to November 1984, is a systematic study that reveals the glory of God's love as manifested in the existence of the human body, both male and female. Through this teaching, Pope John Paul II emphasized that the human body possesses great dignity as an embodiment of the Divine image. The body not only reflects God's love and

goodness but also plays a fundamental role in interpersonal relationships, the vocation of the human person, and the fulfillment of the purpose of creation. Thus, the Theology of the Body does not merely address the physical aspects of the human person but also explores the spiritual, anthropological, and moral meaning of bodily existence in the light of the Christian faith (Kleden-Beetz, 2014).

According to Pope John Paul II, the visible human body is a reflection of the invisible God, making it an entity that carries a symbolic and theological function in revealing the Divine presence in the world. From the perspective of the Theology of the Body, the human person is understood as *theologos*, that is, as a living theology that reveals the mystery of God through physical existence. The body is not merely a biological reality but also a means of revelation, playing a role in communicating and manifesting the eternal mystery of God within the context of worldly life. The existence of the human person not only reflects God's truth and love, but also serves as a means of revelation that brings spiritual and transcendent reality into the material world. Through the body, the human person concretely participates in divine life, making the physical dimension a manifestation of an existential relationship with the Creator (Paul II, 2005; Mayolla & Rynanta, 2024).. As a creation willed by God, the body is endowed with high dignity, becoming a tangible sign of His love in worldly life. The physical existence of humans is not merely a biological reality, but also a symbol of spiritual existence that unites the material dimension with the divine essence. This concept underscores that the human body possesses noble dignity because it contains spiritual values that unite the human person with the Creator and reinforce the harmony between the physical and spiritual dimensions of life (2009; Paul II, 2005; Blegur, 2024).

Pope John Paul II emphasized that human dignity exists from the beginning of life, from the moment of conception in the womb, because human beings are creatures that possess a unity between the physical and spiritual dimensions (Paul II, 2005). The divine presence is not only reflected in human existence, but is also manifested in every action and relationship expressed through the body. Thus, the body acts as an instrument of revelation that actualizes the mystery of creation and reveals God's love as the foundation of all life (Paul II, 2005; Valdo et al., 2024; Kleden-Beetz, 2014; Kayaman, 2025).

Theology of the Body is currently being developed as a living spirituality that helps adolescents understand sexuality in a holistic and responsible amid the challenges of the digital age (Prihartanti & Andalas, 2025). The study by Rabim & Made (2023) also critiques the exploitation of the body in consumer culture,

which contradicts the dignity of the human person as a reflection of God. This perspective is reinforced by the understanding that the body is a sign that embodies both spiritual and divine reality. Thus, Theology of the Body offers a relevant anthropological and spiritual framework for responding to the crisis surrounding the meaning of the body and sexuality, while also serving as a critique of the objectification of the body in contemporary popular and digital culture.

The document *Gaudium et Spes* affirms that the dignity of the human person is rooted in their identity as a creature created in the image and likeness of God (*Gaudium et Spes*, 1965). This concept emphasizes that the human person possesses intrinsic worth that does not depend on social, economic, or physical status, but on their very existence as a reflection of the Divine. As the image of God, the human person is called to live a life that reflects God's love, justice, and wisdom. This identity is foundational for understanding human existence in the world and for embracing the human person's responsibility toward creation and fellow human being.

The first dimension of the human person as the image of God concerns their relationship with the Creator through the profound spiritual dimension of their being. The human person, as a rational being endowed with intellect and free will, has the capacity to establish a personal relationship with God. This relationship is realized through prayer, spiritual reflection, and moral actions that align with the Divine will (*Gaudium et Spes*, 1965). This spiritual capacity provides the human person with an awareness of their ultimate purpose and their vocation to seek the truth and to live in harmony with Divine law.

THEOLOGY OF THE BODY AS A PASTORAL APPROACH TO YOUNG PEOPLE

Adolescence, meaning "to grow toward maturity," is a developmental phase encompassing physical, mental, emotional, and social changes that influence the formation of an individual's identity as they transition from childhood to adulthood. The age range for adolescence is generally considered to span from 12 to 21 years and is characterized by the search for identity, the development of abstract thinking, and changes in patterns of social interaction (Santrock, 2020b). Beyond psychological development, social and cultural contexts also play a significant role in shaping adolescents' self-concept. Environmental influences such as family, peers, and media substantially affect their thought patterns and behaviors. Positive social support has been shown to help adolescents navigate developmental challenges and enhance psychological well-being (Steinberg, 2014). Therefore, a comprehensive understanding of

adolescence is crucial for parents, teachers, and communities in fostering an environment that promotes the holistic and optimal development of adolescents (Gunarsa, 2008).

Adolescents increasingly play a significant role in contemporary society, particularly in the social and political spheres, demonstrating a growing participation and awareness of public issues. However, they also face numerous challenges in adapting to the demands of modern life, including academic and social pressures, as well as expectations placed upon them as the future of both the nation and the Church (Steinberg, 2014). These challenges can significantly affect mental health and identity formation, thereby necessitating strong social support systems provided by families, peers, and communities (Santrock, 2020b). The capacity to foster harmonious relationships and engage in constructive dialogue is a vital component in building adolescents' psychological resilience, enabling them to overcome uncertainty and doubt during their transition to adulthood (Arnett, 2014; Steinberg, 2014; Indari et al., 2023). In this context, Pope John Paul II emphasized that adolescents have a fundamental role in embodying the teachings of the Gospel in their lives. He asserted that the transformation of the world largely depends on their active participation in living out Christian values. Adolescence is viewed as a dynamic phase marked by inner exploration, existential questions, and the potential for restlessness, anxiety, and frustration—factors that require attentive pastoral accompaniment by the family, the Church, and society, so that adolescents may develop character and actualize their vocation according to God's will (Tse, 2011). In this regard, adolescents' social interactions become a crucial factor in shaping the trajectory of their lives, particularly when confronting serious social threats such as drug abuse. Pope John Paul II identified drug abuse as a grave danger to adolescents because of its destructive effects on physical and mental health, as well as on the quality of social life (Paul II, 2005).

Data from the Indonesian Child Protection Commission (KPAI) in 2024 recorded 2,057 complaints of children's rights violations, 409 of which involved adolescents aged 15–17 as victims of physical and psychological violence. This age group ranks second highest after toddlers, indicating the vulnerability of adolescents to various forms of violence within family, educational, and social environments. These figures highlight the urgent need to strengthen child protection systems that are responsive to adolescents' specific needs and to increase public awareness regarding their rights. Preventive and rehabilitative efforts—based on a multidisciplinary approach—are essential to fostering a safe and supportive environment for the holistic development of adolescents.

Meanwhile, data from the National Population and Family Planning Agency (BKKBN) indicate a concerning trend in sexually active behavior among Indonesian adolescents: 74% of males and 59% of females aged 15–19 reported having engaged in sexual intercourse. Globally, although rates of juvenile delinquency decreased by 18% between 2016 and 2022, the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) documented a 65% increase in cases of armed violence involving adolescents. This trend suggests a behavioral shift toward more extreme forms of delinquency, necessitating an interdisciplinary response that includes values-based sexuality education, family resilience, and community-based social interventions.

Within the framework of the Theology of the Body, empirical data on violence and risky sexual behavior among adolescents underscores the urgent need to re-examine the dignity of the human person and the human body as a divine gift to be respected and protected. As taught by Pope John Paul II, the Theology of the Body affirms that the body is not merely a biological reality but a spiritual medium that expresses God's love and facilitates meaningful relationships between the human person and God. When adolescents experience physical and psychological violence, as reflected in the 409 reported cases involving 15–17-year-olds (KPAI, 2024), or engage in sexually active behavior (BKKBN data), it signals a deeper crisis in understanding the sacred value of the body and sexuality as part of a divine vocation.

The Theology of the Body offers a values-based framework for sexuality education that emphasizes not only self-mastery but also the development of an awareness of one's spiritual identity as a person created in the image of God. In this vision, the body is not an object of exploitation or a mere outlet for desire, but a place of the revelation of love. Therefore, sexuality education rooted in the Theology of the Body is a vital strategy for cultivating adolescents' moral and psychological resilience and for preventing behaviors that degrade the dignity of the human person. This approach also necessitates the active involvement of families, the Church, and broader communities in fostering a transformative support system—one in which adolescents' bodies are cherished as reflections of God's love rather than commodified by a permissive culture.

Social phenomena in Indonesia reinforce this urgency. In Ponorogo, 191 junior high and high school students applied for marriage dispensations due to early pregnancy, the majority of them under the age of 19 (Pebrianti, 2023). In the digital realm, UNICEF reports that up to 56% of incidents involving the online sexual exploitation of children go unreported, highlighting both a weak

protection system and a lack of awareness regarding the dignity of the human person. These facts indicate that adolescents' bodies are increasingly treated as objects rather than as subjects endowed with spiritual and moral value. When the body loses its sacred meaning, adolescents become more vulnerable to identity crises, psychological disorders, and social isolation.

The Theology of the Body affirms that the human body is a visible sign of the invisible—the spiritual and the divine. The body is not merely a biological function or an object of moral regulation, but a living sacrament that expresses God's love and serves as a means of forming meaningful relationships. When adolescents' bodies are exploited—whether through violence, promiscuity, or a permissive culture—it harms their spiritual identity as persons created in the image of God. Therefore, a pastoral and educational approach rooted in the Theology of the Body is essential for cultivating adolescents' awareness that their bodies are gifts bearing moral and spiritual responsibilities. The body must not only be protected from violation but also respected as a sacred space for the revelation of God's love. Holistic support from the family, Church, and community is essential to enable adolescents to actualize the dignity of the human person in a life aligned with God's will (Santrock, 2020; Rodriguez, 2023; Kayaman, 2025).

While Christian theology-based approaches possess significant ethical and spiritual value, they must be examined critically and contextually. In today's pluralistic and multicultural society, adolescents no longer grow up in culturally or religiously homogeneous environments, but instead navigate a diverse spectrum of values, ideologies, and moral frameworks (Taylor, 2007; Santrock, 2020). The formation of adolescent identity is shaped not only by Church teachings but also by media, educational institutions, economic realities, and complex socio-political dynamics (Marcia, 1980; Rodriguez, 2023). Consequently, a purely theological approach—if disconnected from contemporary social realities—risks being reductionist and less effective in addressing the multidimensional challenges of the holistic development of adolescents.

To avoid an overly theological and reductionist approach, churches and Christian educational institutions are encouraged to design thematic and contextual curricula for adolescent development. Each weekly or monthly theme could address relevant issues—such as mental health, social media pressure, or environmental justice—while linking them to values drawn from the Christian faith through Bible study, group discussions, and personal reflection. These themes may be reinforced through practical methods such as faith journals, case studies, and social action projects that allow adolescents

to apply Christian principles in real-life situations. Learning materials should be created with flexibility and interactivity, incorporating digital media, short videos, and communication platforms familiar to adolescents (Livingstone, 2014; Rodriguez, 2023). This strategy aligns with the principles of experience-based education and contextual theological reflection, which emphasize the active engagement of adolescents in their identity formation process (Bevans, 2002).

In addition, churches can form interdisciplinary teams composed of clergy, religious teachers, psychologists, and youth facilitators to design and implement development programs. Activities such as cross-value seminars, small-group mentoring, and pastoral counseling can be organized regularly to support the holistic formation of adolescent identity. Churches may also collaborate with schools, local communities, and social organizations to broaden learning opportunities and increase adolescents' engagement with social issues (Santrock, 2020; Marcia, 1980). Through such efforts, faith education becomes not only a space for doctrinal instruction but also an arena for character development and spiritual formation that is relevant, reflective, and socially transformative. This approach empowers adolescents to critically and constructively integrate their faith with the complex realities of life in a pluralistic world (Taylor, 2007).

CROSS-DISCIPLINARY COLLABORATION

In the context of the Theology of the Body, the approach to adolescents experiencing violence and risky sexual behavior must be enriched with a holistic anthropological and spiritual perspective. The Theology of the Body, as taught by Pope John Paul II, affirms that the human body is not merely a biological entity or an object of moral regulation, but rather a living sacrament that expresses God's love and serves as a means of fostering meaningful relationships between human beings and God.

Pope John Paul II's vision of the body as a medium of divine revelation and an expression of human dignity is in line with the perspectives of contemporary theologians such as Setiawan, Müller, and Haack. Setiawan (2022) argues that sexuality and the body are transcendent expressions of human dignity as the image of God, not merely biological realities. The body is not merely a biological instrument, but also a sacrament that reveals the divine mystery in human life. This idea is further reinforced by Müller's work, which explores the contribution of the Christian tradition to the understanding of human dignity and rights through four key dimensions: anthropological, moral, legal, and practical. He places particular emphasis on the *imago Dei* paradigm and

the dignity of the human person. Müller argues that Christian thought offers a strong foundation for ethical narratives and engagement, but warns that interpretations that ignore the universal aspects of this paradigm can hinder comprehensive understanding—thus calling for ongoing ecumenical dialogue (Muller, 2020). Similarly, Haack emphasizes that human dignity, as an expression of transcendence, can only be fully understood through Christian theological anthropology—particularly through this concept, in which the body becomes the place of revelation of God’s love and the ethical foundation for social relations (Haack, 2012).

All three emphasize that the body is a spiritual manifestation of human identity as the image of God. In the Theology of the Body, the body is not only biologically functional but also sacramental—expressing divine mystery and serving as an ethical basis for social and moral engagement. This perspective broadens the understanding of human dignity as a unity of body and soul, which has intrinsic value from the beginning of life. This theological vision is in line with *Gaudium et Spes*, a key document of the Second Vatican Council, which affirms that human dignity is rooted in the identity of human beings as creatures made in the image and likeness of God (*Gaudium et Spes*, 1965).

This document emphasizes that human value does not depend on social, economic, or physical status, but rather on human nature as a reflection of the Divine. As bearers of God’s image, humans are called to live in love, justice, and wisdom, and to be responsible for creation and their fellow human beings. Therefore, both the Theology of the Body and *Gaudium et Spes* emphasize the integral spiritual and social role of the body in realizing human dignity and fulfilling the human calling.

The Theology of the Body approach offers a holistic preventive strategy that encompasses spiritual, emotional, and social dimensions. This aligns with Erik Erikson’s theory of psychosocial development, which posits that adolescence is a critical stage of identity formation versus role confusion. Adolescents require a healthy environment for exploration, robust social support, and deep value-based education in order to form a stable identity (Erikson, 1968; Kamilla et al., 2022; Julieta, 2023). In this regard, Santrock emphasized that adolescent development involves the interaction of biological, cognitive, and socio-emotional aspects, which collectively shape an individual’s self-concept and behavior (Santrock, 2020a). The Theology of the Body complements this psychological framework by offering a spiritual foundation that affirms the body as both a gift and a responsibility—never merely a biological mechanism or moral object

A study by Kalalo et al. (2025) demonstrates that a holistic Christian educational

approach—integrating spiritual, social, emotional, and physical dimensions—has a positive impact on the personal development and the psychological well-being of adolescents. In this framework, teachers and teachers serve not only as academic instructors but also as spiritual mentors who nurture adolescents’ emotional and mental development, enabling them to face the challenges of the digital age with integrity and wisdom. Accordingly, the Theology of the Body functions not only as a theological doctrine but also as a practical foundation for designing comprehensive, relevant, and transformative educational and pastoral interventions for today’s adolescents.

The implementation of the Theology of the Body in Catholic settings, particularly for adolescents, can be effectively realized through catechesis that is informed by Erikson’s psychosocial development theory—especially the fifth stage: identity versus role confusion. Erikson noted that adolescence (approximately ages 12–18) is a pivotal period for forming self-identity, during which individuals explore values, beliefs, and social roles that will shape the direction of their lives. At this stage, adolescents are especially vulnerable to identity confusion when they lack sufficient guidance from both social and spiritual environments.

The Theology of the Body, as articulated by Pope John Paul II, provides a robust spiritual framework to assist adolescents in understanding their bodies as both gifts and vocations—not merely biological or moral entities. The body is viewed as a living sacrament that manifests divine love and facilitates communion between humans and God. Through catechesis grounded in the Theology of the Body, adolescents are encouraged to recognize the dignity of the human person and their own bodies as images of God, empowering them to cultivate a holistic identity encompassing spiritual, emotional, and social dimensions.

Catechetical programs have shown the effectiveness of this approach. Psycho-educational sessions offered to parents and caregivers of adolescents have deepened their understanding of bodily dignity and sexuality within the framework of Catholic faith. Catechetical materials—addressing themes such as “Who am I?,” “Body and soul,” “Sexuality and purity of heart,” and “Hope and the future”—have supported adolescents in developing identities aligned with Gospel values, helping them to resist role confusion often exacerbated by peer pressure and a permissive cultural climate.

Thus, the Theology of the Body is not merely a set of moral teachings; it is a relevant and transformative pastoral approach that supports adolescents in their search for identity. When integrated with Erikson’s developmental theory, the Theology of the Body functions as a spiritual intervention that strengthens

identity formation, prevents role confusion, and guides adolescents toward a responsible and faith-grounded adulthood rooted in the love of God.

According to Pope John Paul II, every believer has the right to receive proper catechetical instruction, and religious leaders have the responsibility to provide it. Catechesis plays a crucial role in shaping adolescents' understanding of the faith and fostering a profound respect for the dignity of the human person. Adolescents are often drawn to the pursuit of worldly pleasures that can obscure the deeper meaning of life. Therefore, faith formation through catechesis is an essential means of guiding them to discover the true purpose of life and to build meaningful relationships with God and others.

Through catechesis, adolescents are led to develop attitudes and behaviors that align with the Divine will, enabling them to live according to moral and spiritual values. In addition to nurturing their understanding of the faith, catechesis contributes significantly to character formation, equipping adolescents to face contemporary challenges with firm Christian principles. Thus, this form of education serves as a compass for adolescents in fostering harmonious relationships with God, others, and the environment in a sustainable way, helping them to fulfill their vocation as evangelizers in daily life (Keron & Tarihoran, 2024).

Next, specific implementation strategies will be described, involving pastoral agents within the Catholic Church, including the integral role of parents in the family and Catholic teachers in educational institutions. These efforts form part of a systematic approach to accompanying and holistically shaping adolescents. The active involvement of these agents is crucial in transmitting the values of the Theology of the Body through catechesis, character education, and contextual spiritual formation, in order to strengthen adolescents' understanding of the dignity of the human person, self-identity, and moral responsibility in the light of the Catholic faith.

ACTORS FOR THE PREVENTION OF JUVENILE DELINQUENCY

Adolescents need to be equipped with fundamental values that can shape their character and support their development in a positive direction. In guiding adolescents towards a dignified adulthood, various actors have strategic roles, especially the family as the first and primary educational community. Pope John Paul II emphasized that the family is a community of love and life, which serves as the foundation for the formation of the human person. In this context, parents act as the primary educators who instill essential human values, particularly the value of love. This love becomes the foundation for

adolescents to develop respect for the dignity of every human person and to foster a spirit of harmony and peace within their social environment (Wijaya, 2009).

In addition to parents, catechists (faith educators) play a crucial role in guiding adolescents in understanding and living the Christian faith. As teachers and spiritual mentors, catechists help adolescents to deepen their knowledge of the teachings of Christ, so that they may personally encounter the presence of God in their lives. Through the process of faith formation, adolescents are not only introduced to moral and spiritual values, but are also encouraged to internalize the message of salvation offered by Christ. Catechists thus contribute significantly to the formation of the religious character of adolescents, which can guide them towards a meaningful life aligned with Christian values (Pope John Paul II, 2016). In the development of adolescent faith and character, catechists have a strategic role in teaching two main aspects: First, the understanding of religious values. Through structured and continuous catechesis, catechists assist adolescents in internalizing and deepening their faith. This process not only involves understanding Christian doctrines and teachings but also encourages adolescents to integrate spiritual values into their daily lives; Second, the formation of social awareness in adolescents. At this stage of development, adolescents often face various value conflicts, attitudinal struggles, and social responsibilities. Catechists play a crucial role in guiding them towards positive behaviors by encouraging participation in activities that foster their potential. Through a community-based approach, adolescents can learn to appreciate diversity, develop empathy, and abandon attitudes and behaviors that are not in accordance with Christian values. With consistent, faith-based, and value-oriented accompaniment, catechists contribute to forming adolescents who are faithful and have high social responsibility (Paulus, et.al., 2020).

In addition to parents and catechists, Catholic Religious Education teachers have an important role in guiding adolescents towards a deeper understanding of the faith and the dignity of the human person. In his address (lecture) to Catholic educators in New Orleans in 1987, Pope John Paul II emphasized that Catholic educators have the primary responsibility to convey the truth about the dignity of the human person, who is created in the image and likeness of God. Catholic Religious Education (PAK) teachers are not only responsible for imparting religious knowledge but also serve as spiritual guides who accompany students to live in the light of Christ through the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, Catholic Religious Education (PAK) teachers also function as counselors, who provide pastoral attention to the various challenges

faced by adolescents. As counselors, teachers are called to conduct a careful and comprehensive discernment regarding the difficulties experienced by their students, so that the guidance they offer can effectively help adolescents to find solutions that are aligned with Christian values. Through this holistic approach, the role of Catholic Religious Education (PAK) teachers becomes essential in the formation of adolescents who are faithful, who possess a well-formed character, and who demonstrate high social responsibility (Sukarman, 2021).

BUILDING POSITIVE ATTITUDES AND RESPECTING HUMAN BODY

Pope John Paul II taught that the human body possesses a profound spiritual and moral dimension, serving as a means of self-expression that reflects the soul and the personality of the human person. From the perspective of the Theology of the Body, the human person is called to understand the body as a sign of God's presence in the world, so that its use should always reflect gratitude for the Divine gift and deep respect for the dignity of the human person.

For adolescents as the next generation, developing an awareness of the true meaning of the body is a crucial aspect of character formation grounded in Christian values. The positive use of the body—through acts of service to others, the expression of creativity, and the building of healthy interpersonal relationships—is a concrete form of respect for human dignity. With this understanding, adolescents can foster a responsible attitude in using their bodies as instruments for realizing authentic love and peace in social life.

One of the positive attitudes that must be fostered and developed in adolescents is active participation in World Youth Day (WYD). This event is a manifestation of Saint John Paul II's profound pastoral concern for young people. It serves as a platform for dialogue, deepening of faith, and the strengthening of a solid Christian identity amid the complexities and challenges of contemporary society.

World Youth Day (WYD) offers various activities that strengthen spirituality and foster a spirit of communion, such as the celebration of the Eucharist, the procession of the WYD Cross, communal prayers, artistic and cultural performances, religious music concerts, as well as social outreach and community service. Through participation in these activities, adolescents not only experience a personal encounter with Christ but also strengthen their solidarity as members of the living and dynamic Body of the Church. By instilling the value of involvement in WYD, adolescents are invited to become more aware of their vocation as part of a community of faith that contributes

to building a world more deeply rooted in love and peace (Natalia, 2021).

In addition to participation in religious activities, fostering the cultural engagement of today's adolescents is an essential element in shaping their identity and character. The younger generation serves as agents of change, bringing new approaches to social realities with characteristics that are unique and distinct from those of previous generations. In the era of rapidly advancing digital transformation, adolescents are accustomed to the use of technology, dynamic lifestyles, and active interactions through social media. Their openness to diverse perspectives and cultural plurality is a defining trait, enabling more inclusive cross-cultural and social relationships. Therefore, it is essential for adolescents to continue developing dialogical, appreciative, and collaborative attitudes, so that they can prudently use the cultural potential of their time to build a more harmonious and respectful environment. By engaging in activities that promote cultural and social values, adolescents not only strengthen their own identity but also contribute to the formation of a society that is more open and respectful (Synod of Bishops, 2019).

Furthermore, social commitment is one of the defining characteristics of today's adolescents, which is reflected in their readiness and willingness to participate in various voluntary initiatives aimed at strengthening solidarity within society. This spirit of volunteerism needs to be properly directed and supported so that the potential possessed by young people—including their talents, abilities, and creativity—can be developed optimally. With appropriate guidance, social commitment becomes not only a channel for expressing compassion but also a means of fostering a sense of responsibility in fulfilling the tasks entrusted to them (Synod of Bishops, 2019).

The Synod of Bishops emphasized the importance of the participation and active involvement of adolescents in both social life and the life of the Church. This involvement encourages the emergence of new ideas and initiatives, especially in using digital communication as a tool for social mobilization and constructive political advocacy. Through meaningful participation, adolescents contribute to defending the welfare of the weakest and most marginalized members of society, thereby fostering a stronger culture of solidarity and social concern (Synod of Bishops, 2019).

Pope John Paul II's Theology of the Body emphasizes the unity of body and soul as a spiritual expression that reveals God's love and affirms human dignity. This stands in contrast to secular psychological approaches, which often separate the spiritual dimension from the analysis of human behavior. Secular psychology, in many cases, operates within frameworks of materialism or atheistic naturalism, recognizing the body and mind but neglecting the soul or

transcendent aspects (Ashcraft, 2021). As a result, psychological interventions frequently focus on symptoms and behaviors rather than the spiritual roots of identity crises or juvenile delinquency.

Nevertheless, the discourse surrounding Theology of the Body is not without critique, particularly from feminist theological circles. Some feminist theologians argue that the teaching remains rooted in patriarchal frameworks, emphasizing the role of the body within heterosexual relationships and marriage, thereby offering limited space for diverse and contextualized experiences of the female body (Moulaison, 2007). Feminist theories of the body highlight how women's bodies are often subjected to social and religious control, and they frame the body as a site of resistance and transformation against oppressive norms (Cleary, 2015).

In this context, Theology of the Body must be further developed to address critical questions of gender, sexuality, and bodily justice in light of Christian faith. Some critiques also suggest that the teaching is overly idealistic and insufficiently grounded in the complex realities of adolescent life—particularly within digital culture and value pluralism (Johnson, 2001). Therefore, advancing a more inclusive and contextual theology of the body is essential to bridge bodily spirituality with contemporary social dynamics.

CONCLUSION

This study affirms that an understanding of the Theology of the Body, as taught by Pope John Paul II, offers a significant contribution to the formation of adolescents' spiritual identity as persons created in the image of God. The body is understood not merely as a biological entity, but as a living sacrament that reveals God's love and presence within human relationships. In addressing contemporary challenges such as sexual disorientation and moral fragmentation, this spiritual approach provides a relevant foundation for cultivating awareness of the body as both a gift and a moral responsibility. The contributions of this research include: a) Theoretical contribution: the development of theological anthropology that views the body as a spiritual and moral expression; b) Practical contribution: a contextual and pastoral model for character education for adolescents in the digital age; c) Future research directions: recommendations for systematic and interdisciplinary educational strategies that integrate the Theology of the Body with developmental psychology, digital ethics, and Christian spirituality. Thus, this study strengthens the theological and pedagogical foundations of the Church in forming a generation of young people with spiritual integrity, moral awareness, and deep respect for human dignity as the image of God.

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CENTERING THE BAYAN YOUTH OF LOMBOK: Local-Based Religious Cultural Tourism Development in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Tourism development strategies are an important aspect of tourism development. Bayan Mosque in Lombok is important to develop as religious cultural tourism using a local approach. Applying qualitative methods, case study approach and field research this study aims to uncover the problems faced by the local community in developing cultural tourism; the local community has done to overcome these problems; the impact these efforts have had on the development of Bayan cultural tourism. The study revealed that the problems faced by the local community in developing Bayan religious cultural tourism include a lack of awareness among the local community regarding the potential of Bayan Mosque as a tourist destination, the absence of any institution managing the potential of the tourist destination; insufficient government attention to designing integrated cultural tourism within the community, and the scope of development efforts remains limited. Some young people in Bayan have made efforts such as supporting the emergence of local identity; developing visits to traditional villages around the Bayan Mosque; hearings with the Tourism Office for possible assis-

tance; forming a youth group that promotes tourism awareness; and involving the media in major events at the Bayan Mosque. The impact of these efforts has already led to a significant increase in tourist visits to the Bayan Mosque. These increasing visits are related to the efforts of the local community to involve the media in attracting tourists. It can be concluded that efforts to develop tourism must be comprehensive, including the media.

Keywords: Tourism; Cultural Conservation; Bayan Mosque; Traditional Village; Media

INTRODUCTION

Strategy for tourism development has been widely defined as a comprehensive planning and management framework that integrates economic, cultural, and environmental dimensions to achieve long-term sustainability (Hall, 2008; Inskeep, 1991). Scholars argue that strategic approaches are essential in ensuring that tourism not only contributes to economic growth but also protects cultural resources and strengthens community participation (Dredge, 2007). In particular, when tourism is linked to cultural and religious heritage, strategic planning becomes critical to balance authenticity, conservation, and visitor expectations (Prawiro, 2022). Therefore, tourism development strategy should be viewed as a negotiated and context-sensitive process rather than a purely technical instrument of economic planning.

Academic debates on tourism development strategy have shifted significantly over the past three decades, moving from growth-oriented frameworks to more sustainable and community-based paradigms. Early studies emphasized national planning and infrastructure development as central pillars of strategy (Hall, 2008). Later research, however, critiqued such approaches for neglecting local agency and cultural authenticity, leading to the rise of community-based and participatory tourism models (Lu et al., 2020; Scheyvens, 2011). More recent works highlight the importance of governance, networks, and collaborative arrangements in tourism development, particularly in contexts where multiple stakeholders—including local communities, governments, and private actors—must negotiate interests and responsibilities (Lane, 2011; Camargo, 2014). These scholarly debates underline that tourism development strategies are no longer seen as top-down planning tools but as dynamic processes shaped by local culture, institutional arrangements, and global tourism trends.

Cultural tourism has been increasingly recognized as a cornerstone of sustainable tourism due to its ability to preserve heritage while generating economic benefits. Scholars underline that cultural authenticity and community

ownership are critical elements for long-term success. Su et al. (2020) showed that heritage preservation in China requires not only physical conservation but also the safeguarding of intangible traditions (Lu et al., 2020). Wijesinghe et al. (2020) highlighted that in Sri Lanka, local communities benefited from cultural tourism only when decision-making was participatory (Wijesinghe, 2020). Richards and Du Cros (2021) further emphasized the risk of cultural commodification when heritage assets are packaged solely for tourist consumption (Richards, 2021). In contrast, Li et al. (2021) demonstrated that heritage tourism in Europe flourishes when authenticity is maintained through transparent interpretation practices (Li, 2021). Collectively, these works point to the fact that cultural tourism development sustains its appeal only when cultural integrity and local benefits are prioritized.

Religious cultural tourism has emerged as a distinctive subfield that integrates spiritual practice with cultural appreciation. Researchers consistently stress that religious sites require sensitive management to serve both worshippers and tourists. (Shinde, 2020) noted that in India, over-commercialization of sacred spaces risks alienating pilgrims, while Hsu C (2020) documented how Egypt's religious tourism struggles with balancing visitor numbers and the preservation of sanctity (Hsu et al., 2020). Jørgensen (2021) argued that successful religious tourism in Europe depends on clear zoning between sacred and tourist areas. Similarly, Goh and Ramli (2022) highlighted that Malaysia's religious destinations prosper when religious authorities are actively involved in planning processes (Goh, 2022). Darmawan et al. (2023) provided evidence from Indonesia, showing that maintaining spiritual authenticity is the cornerstone of sustainable religious tourism (Darmawan, 2023). Together, these works confirm that religious cultural tourism must prioritize spiritual integrity while also creating avenues for local benefits.

Despite the growing literature on tourism development strategies, studies that focus on religious-based cultural tourism remain limited, especially in the Indonesian context. Having diverse cultural and religious heritage Indonesia provides unique opportunities for tourism development, but also poses challenges of conservation, authenticity, and community participation (Hitchcock, 2007). The Bayan Mosque in North Lombok, as one of the oldest mosques in the region, represents not only a historical site but also a living cultural and religious tradition. Yet, the strategic development of this site as a cultural tourism destination has received little academic attention. This study addresses this gap by analyzing how local communities in Bayan design and implement tourism development strategies around the mosque, and how these efforts contribute to both cultural conservation and tourism growth.

The novelty of this research lies in linking tourism strategy discourse with the dynamics of local religious heritage management.

Based on the above description, this study focuses on exploring strategies for community-based religious cultural tourism development in Bayan, with emphasis on local initiatives and challenges. There are three interrelated research questions to explore the focus: (1) What problems are faced by the local community in developing Bayan Mosque as a cultural tourism destination? (2) What efforts have the local community tried to address these problems? and (3) What impacts have these efforts produced on the development of religious cultural tourism in Bayan? Those questions based on the assumptions that there are problems that local community facing in developing local potentials in shaping the trajectory of cultural tourism development. It also assumes that local communities have their own ways to solve the problems; and to some extent there must be some impacts come out from the efforts.

This study was conducted in Bayan, North Lombok, Indonesia, with a particular focus on the Bayan Old Mosque (*Masjid Kuno Bayan*). The mosque, built in the 16th century, is not only one of the oldest mosques in Lombok but also represents a unique intersection of Islamic and local Sasak traditions, making it a vital site of religious cultural heritage (Hitchcock, 2007; Prawiro, 2022). Despite its historical and cultural value, the site has not been fully developed as a cultural tourism destination.

The study employed a qualitative research methodology with a case study, which is appropriate for examining social phenomena in depth and within their real-life context (Creswell, 2018; Yin, 2018). A descriptive approach was used to capture community perspectives, local practices, and institutional dynamics in developing cultural tourism. Such an approach is suitable for exploring local strategies that emerge organically from community engagement rather than being externally imposed (Merriam, 2016). The data consisted of primary and secondary sources. Primary data were drawn from in-depth interviews with local community leaders, youth organizations, mosque caretakers, and government officials in Lombok. Secondary data included local government reports, media coverage, and previous studies on cultural tourism in Lombok. According to Flick (2018), combining multiple sources of data enables triangulation, thereby strengthening the credibility of the findings (Flick, 2018).

Data collection relied on three main techniques: in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. Interviews were conducted using semi-structured guides, allowing flexibility to capture participants' lived experiences (Kvale, 2015). Informants for this interview were selected in the

principle of representativeness, and there are seven informants involved in this research. Tabel 1 below shows the list of the informants. Participant observation was employed during cultural and religious events at the Bayan Mosque and surrounding traditional villages, in line with ethnographic approaches that highlight cultural practices in situ (Angrosino, 2016). Document analysis involved reviewing written records, government documents, and media reports related to tourism and cultural development in Bayan.

Tabel 1. List of Informants

No	Name/Initials	Gender	Position
1	Br	Man	Tourist activist
2	Nd	Woman	Tourist activist
3	Shd	Man	Community leader
4	Sr	Woman	Woman community leader
5	Td	Man	Tourism Office
6	Rh	Man	Mosque management
7	Dn	Man	Local area management

Source: *Primary data*

The collected data were analyzed applying a thematic analysis approach, allowing the identification of patterns and themes emerging from the field (Braun S Clarke, 2019). The analysis followed the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2019), which includes data condensation, data display, and drawing/verifying conclusions (Miles, 2019). This approach enabled the researcher to link community narratives with broader issues of tourism development and cultural preservation.

MINDSET ABOUT WELFARE IMPACT OF TOURISM

Some interviews revealed that many residents perceive tourism as benefiting only a few actors, with little impact on household welfare. For example, as said by Sr, a woman community leader in Bayan:

We were very familiar with the historic Bayan Beleq Mosque. But we didn't realize that this neglected mosque had economic potential due to its historical and cultural significance. I, as did the local people, wondered what could be done with a mosque that was in such disrepair.

The statement was strengthened by Dn, the local area management:

In my opinion, the existence of this mosque is indeed a source of pride, as we, the people of Bayan, have a very ancient Islamic history. But who could have imagined that this historic mosque would benefit the surrounding community? Our livelihoods are still like this. For a mosque to attract tourists, it must be provided with various facilities. This is what we find difficult to imagine. What can we do and what can we gain?

The personal from the Tourist Office of North Lombok Regency, Td, also underlined the point:

As a tourism authority, I understand why the community views Bayan's local tourism with skepticism that it will bring prosperity if properly managed. Good management requires the involvement of all parties. This is something the Bayan community has never witnessed before, so it's understandable they are unsure whether developing religious and cultural tourism at the Bayan Mosque will impact their well-being.

Based on the presentations from several informants, it is understandable why the community feels doubtful that the Bayan Mosque's potential as a local asset can provide prosperity for them because they have not yet lived it, have not experienced it, while the parties with the authority for tourism development have not given it proper attention, resulting in the tourist location not being managed properly. However, community involvement in managing tourist locations is very important in tourism development. In Zimmermann's model, this reflects a weakness in ancillary services, particularly community support. Studies in rural Indonesia and Southeast Asia show that when benefits are uneven, communities resist tourism development (Nepal, 2021).

Perception of distributive justice strongly influences whether local people become supporters or opponents of tourism (UNWTO, 2020; OECD, 2021). Research on community-based tourism in Bali also demonstrates that transparent revenue-sharing fosters stronger local involvement (Hitchcock, 2007). Thus, the Bayan case highlights the importance of embedding inclusive benefit-sharing mechanisms to shift local mindset from skepticism to ownership.

LIMITED UNDERSTANDING OF LOCAL POTENTIAL

As explained by Br, youth activist from Bayan:

Because Lombok is renowned for its natural beauty, both beaches and mountains, it seems that the rich potential for socio-cultural tourism has received less attention. This results in a gap in the development of cultural tourism compared to natural tourism.

Additional explanation of Td, as the side of tourism office:

According to the formal task, there is no intention to neglect cultural tourism. However, the agency's capabilities cannot satisfy all needs, as it prioritizes tourism that has already been developed. Therefore, the road map has not yet achieved the target of developing cultural tourism. Only Sade Village, Sukarara Village, and Banyumulek Village have been relatively developed.

The above data underlined that factually most local tourist operators rely only on natural landscapes, leaving cultural heritage, crafts, and local cuisine underdeveloped. In fact, cultural wealth with its various diversities is an additional aspect of comfort, attractions and amenities in carrying out tourism. According to Zimmermann in the context of tourism, attractions must be converted into consumable experiences. Similar findings from Yogyakarta reveal that without packaging cultural resources into structured products, destinations lose competitiveness (Nurozi, 2021). Asset-mapping approaches in Malaysian and Thai villages proved effective in identifying overlooked tourism resources (Radianti, 2024). Richards (2021) further shows that creative tourism—co-creating experiences with locals—enhances both visitor satisfaction and local pride (Richards, 2021). Thus, capacity building and cultural product development are crucial for Bayan to strengthen its tourism portfolio.

CHALLENGING PROMOTION FROM OUTSIDE LOMBOK

Informants noted that tourists prefer destinations like Bali and Flores due to stronger promotion and branding. As Td, the personal of Tourism Office of North Lombok Regency

We realized that local promotion wasn't very progressive. We were a bit surprised when the Labuan Bajo tourist destination, for example, was heavily promoted. We realized that we hadn't made the necessary steps with media efforts. Media promotion is a necessity these days. Given this situation, we must consider how to promote Lombok's rich heritage to the world.

Informants, Br and Na, added the explanation about the problem on promotion.

Yes, Bayan's presence on digital platforms is minimal, and promotion relies mainly on word of mouth. Factually we have We use Instagram to spread information about the Bayan Mosque. Of course, because it's not a promotional platform and isn't paid, its reach is limited. It is only specific person who watch our platform.

So, it's understandable that the problems that arise stem from two directions: internal and external. Both directions influence each other. Internal promotion that hasn't been developed in a planned and widespread manner using simple media, compared to massive promotion with media that has a global reach, makes simple promotion appear to increasingly hinder the development of local potential. This relates to attractions positioning and ancillary marketing services. Zimmermann's model underlines that attractions must be supported by effective promotion to compete. Studies on Indonesian island tourism stress that branding and differentiation are decisive in competing with established destinations (Chin et al., 2017). Buhalis (2000) argues that niche positioning—rather than generic nature-based marketing—is key in competitive markets (Buhalis, 2000). Evidence from community tourism in Vietnam shows that crafting unique narratives allowed smaller destinations to draw attention despite limited resources (Nguyen, 2022). For Bayan, this means investing in unique storytelling around crafts and community culture.

In Zimmermann's framework, this is a failure in ancillary services—particularly communication infrastructure. Digital marketing has become central to destination competitiveness; destinations without online visibility are effectively “absent” from global tourism maps (Mitova et al., 2021). Show that user-generated content drives trust and engagement more than official campaigns (Hochstein et al., 2025). In Indonesia, found that micro-influencer collaborations significantly boosted small destinations' visibility (Candraningrum et al., 2022). Hence, Bayan urgently needs a systematic digital marketing strategy, leveraging social media storytelling, online booking platforms, and partnerships with travel bloggers.

INADEQUATE FACILITIES AND INFRASTRUCTURE

The observation in situ showed that although Bayan Beleq Mosque is an important historical and cultural artefact but the facilities supporting the

tourist destination is very limited. Some facilities that often draw attention from visitors, such as environmental cleanliness, comfortable walking paths, clean water availability, and toilets, have yet to be addressed.

These observations were also acknowledged by an informant, Dn, who noted that there have been no serious efforts to better manage the Bayan Beleq Mosque tourist attraction. Br also stated that the condition of the Bayan Beleq Mosque tourist attraction remains rudimentary. There have been no attempts to renovate the mosque, which has been severely damaged, nor have there been any efforts to organize the surrounding area. Based on the observation results and explanations provided by informants, it can be confirmed that the Bayan Beleq Mosque tourist destination is a very important tourist destination that deserves development. Despite its under-management, tourist visits are already quite good. Better management would certainly boost the development of the tourist location and its community.

In the perspective of Zimmermann, the weakness of accessibilities and amenities in tourism destination will undermine the impressions and experiences of visitors, no matter how attractive the site. Research in Lombok and East Nusa Tenggara confirms that inadequate accessibility is a major barrier to sustainable tourism (Sari, 2024). ADB (2021) further shows that low-cost but targeted improvements—signage, rest stops, basic hygiene facilities—substantially increase visitor satisfaction and length of stay (Lee et al., 2020). Collaborative infrastructure initiatives involving local government, community groups, and private investors are therefore essential to strengthen Bayan's tourism readiness.

THE ROLE OF YOUTH IN DEVELOPING LOCAL TOURISM Dissemination of Knowledge and Awareness-Raising Among Communities

One informant, Dn, stated that raising public awareness takes a long time because it involves thinking and awareness. Therefore, the approach taken by the younger generation is informal. For example, regarding the rules for entering the mosque area, which require wearing traditional clothing. To anticipate visitors not bringing the minimum traditional attire, officers provide *sarong*. Another informant, Br, added that the *sarong* was obtained by borrowing from local residents. The system is like a loan service, so the owner of the *sarong* will get financial results. Although not much, it is gradually raising awareness among residents that visitors to the mosque bring sustenance to the community that supports it. Picture 2 shows the visitors of Bayan Beleq Mosque wearing *sarong* with specific style, and traditional head

cap for man visitor. Nd, a youth female activist added more explanation:

Involvement of community members was also done by asking them to become internal guide who accompany the visitor and explain about the historical locus. At first many people reject the job, but now there is a schedule for whom want to take part as guide.

Thus, the process of raising awareness about the importance of tourism development to provide welfare benefits is by providing community members with the experience of being involved. Ancillary services, particularly community support, are the backbone of sustainable tourism (Zimmermann, 2020). Raising awareness that tourism can generate equitable welfare is crucial to shift perceptions. Studies in Indonesian rural tourism demonstrates that community workshops and participatory planning increase local trust and ownership (Okazaki, 2008). Research from Thailand also shows that structured training empowers villagers to see themselves as active agents rather than passive beneficiaries (Kowitt et al., 2015). Hence, knowledge-sharing programs in Bayan should not only inform residents about potential benefits but also ensure that revenue-sharing models are transparent and inclusive.

Coordination and Capacity Building for Tourism Actors

One informant, Shd, as local community leader related to coordination and capacity building for tourism actors said:

We believe we can't develop this traditional tourism industry on our own. Therefore, the youth, in particular, are trying to coordinate with the district tourism office and several tour operators to bring tourists they manage to visit the Bayan Beleq Mosque as part of their Lombok tours. For example, on the trip from Senggigi to Rinjani, they can also visit the Bayan Beleq Mosque.

Nd, another informant also said:

Several tours have already included a visit to this oldest mosque in Lombok. For now, we are emphasizing the historical aspect of this mosque, as other supporting tourist attractions are not yet visible. So, some of the youths in our community tried to combine data, both from our side, such as written documents and oral sources from the eldest, as well as from academic documents.

Attractions and amenities are aspect that need professional management for

a good tourism destination. Strengthening local operators' skills in packaging cultural, culinary, and natural assets into consumable products is essential (Zimmermann, 2020). Evidence from Yogyakarta shows that guided training in storytelling and product diversification increased both tourist satisfaction and average spending (Trisoko et al., 2024). Richards (2021) argues that "co-created experiences" generate higher value than passive sightseeing (Richards, 2021). Moreover, case studies from Malaysia confirm that when artisans are trained to link crafts to tourist experiences, visitor engagement rises significantly (Ahmad et al., 2023). For Bayan, structured capacity-building programs will help operators develop authentic, competitive, and marketable tourism packages.

Strategic Promotion Applying Global Digital Marketing Platforms

In general, informants are aware about the need of digital media-based advertisement for promoting Bayan Mosque to global world. Dn, as local area management said:

We realize that nowadays, it's impossible to offer anything, including tourist attractions, even good ones, without promoting them through digital media. Previously, it was considered sufficient to offer them through flyers and print media coverage. Now, with the development of digital media, digital media should be used. But this kind of media must be managed by young people. If we're like that, we can't keep up.

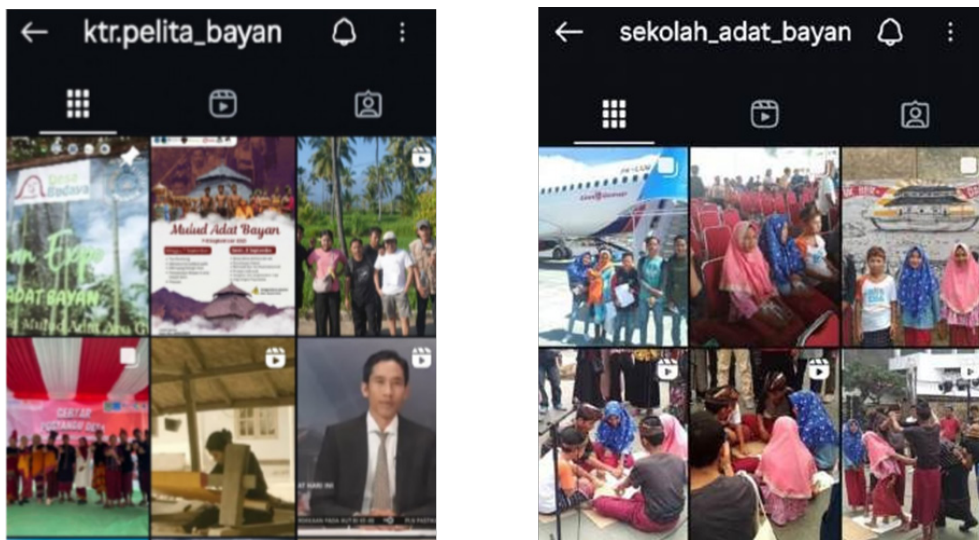
Br shared this:

We have tried to utilize several platforms, such as Instagram, using the name "ktr.pelita_bayan" to spread information about Bayan to a global audience through digital media. The support from our friends has also been extraordinary, as they have also helped spread information about Bayan through their accounts, for example the account of "sekolah_adat_bayan". Indeed, creating a serious tour package offer using digital platforms requires special skills, but we haven't tried it seriously yet. Hopefully, we can do it in the future.

The informants' comments indicate a growing awareness among local communities of the importance of digital marketing efforts. Figure 3 is the example of performance of Instagram account as mentioned by informant. Although their current efforts are still minimal and don't involve much professional effort but their impact is important to note Mentioning ancillary marketing services is directly relevant here. Effective promotion is needed to

challenge competitors and increase visibility. Buhalis (2020) stresses that small destinations must adopt niche branding strategies that differentiate them from established hubs (Buhalis, 2000). Studies from Lombok show that highlighting unique selling points, such as traditional weaving and village festivals, effectively attracted domestic tourists (Sulfardin et al., 2024). Similarly, Nguyen (2022) shows how narrative-based campaigns helped remote communities in Vietnam gain recognition despite limited budgets (Nguyen, 2022). For Bayan, coordinated branding—emphasizing crafts, cultural traditions, and eco-friendly practices—can strengthen its market position.

Figure 1. Instagram Platform of @ktr.pelita_bayan and @sekolah_adat_bayan



Source: *Instagram*

The minimal expose of Bayan in digital ecosystems is a critical weakness in communication-related ancillary services. According to Zimmermann's framework attractions are irrelevant without visibility (2020). Királová S Pavlíčka (2015) demonstrate that destinations with active digital presence achieve exponential growth in reach. Correia et al., (2025) emphasize that social media and user-generated content shape destination image more effectively than official advertisements Research in Indonesia also found that Instagram-based campaigns and influencer collaborations significantly boosted small-scale tourism destinations (Hochstein et al., 2025). Thus, Bayan should invest in digital branding, optimize Google Maps presence, develop multilingual websites, and collaborate with micro-influencers to extend its reach internationally.

Collaborative Infrastructure Development

Pertaining to the infrastructure development in Bayan, Td said:

Supporting factors for attracting more tourists require serious networking efforts. There are some cooperations with other institutions for supporting Bayan development. For example, cooperation with University of Mataram in the program of the Community Service Program (KKN). In this program students helped create signage, including around the Bayan Mosque (Figure 5). The cooperation with Regional Drinking Water Company (PDAM) which provided water installation facilities and water tanks. The cooperation with Public Works Department resulted in toileting program. But they are not enough for supporting the local tourism isn't enough, because all of these programs are incentive programs. We must follow up on our own. This is our limitation. For further development, we must always strive for collaboration with.

Based on the above data, the point here is that infrastructure in Bayan Mosque surroundings as tourist destination is still limited. According to Zimmermann (2020) accessibility and amenities is something fundamental. Without basic infrastructure, attractions cannot deliver meaningful experiences. ADB (2021) found that even modest infrastructure improvements (roads, signage, hygiene facilities) enhanced visitor length of stay by up to 30%. Nalikan et al. (2025) argue that government-community-private sector collaboration ensures sustainability in infrastructure investment. Evidence from East Nusa Tenggara shows that community-driven tourism infrastructure reduced maintenance costs and fostered local pride (Hamid, 2025). For Bayan, infrastructure development should prioritize low-cost, high-impact improvements while ensuring participatory governance, so the community feels both ownership and responsibility.

The Impacts of Tourism Development Strategies

There are several social and cultural impacts from the various efforts undertaken by the younger generation in Bayan, for example, in the area of participation in the management of tourism at the Bayan Mosque. As stated by ShA, a community leader, who stated: "It's a slow process, but I see changes. For example, the community is starting to participate, for example, by lending sarongs for visitors to wear, acting as guides, and other roles that appear to

support tourism at the Bayan Mosque.” Td, a official of the tourism office, stated that the effort to mandate the use of sarongs and head coverings for entry into the mosque grounds strengthens the identity of the Bayan community.

Economically, although not yet optimal, community involvement has generated some economic benefits. Sr, a female leader of the local community, stated that now, in addition to giving alms upon entering the mosque grounds, visitors rent sarongs and are accompanied by a local guide. Guests are almost always directed to visit the traditional house located next to the mosque. As guests, the hosts often offer hot drinks, such as local coffee. Visitors generally offer a small token of gratitude for the hospitality. It may not be much, but the good relationship makes us happy.

Another economic aspect, for example, was conveyed by Br:

Although proceed slowly but our efforts in collaboration with some tourism agents supported the tourist visit to Bayan Beleq Mosque. So, it will support all economical profit of community members surrounding the mosque. For example, related to the existence of parking services, soft drink sellers and simple food, which according to him is a potential that can be developed.

The growing awareness among youth to mobilize local communities in safeguarding and developing tourism assets indicates a shift in collective mindset. This reflects Zimmermann’s (1995) notion of *psychological empowerment*, where community members begin to perceive tourism as part of their agency and identity (Zimmerman, 1995). Similar findings are noted by (Nepal, 2021), who argue that youth-driven initiatives in coastal tourism areas often stimulate broader civic participation. In Lombok, such awareness aligns with community-based tourism models emphasizing local stewardship (Darmawan, 2025).

The creation of tourism packages by young people suggests the development of entrepreneurial capacities and practical skills in local tourism economies. This resonates with Zimmermann’s (2000) framework of *behavioral empowerment*, where empowerment is expressed through proactive action (Zimmermann, 2000). Empirical studies in Indonesia show that youth involvement in package design increases the competitiveness of less-known destinations by highlighting unique cultural and natural assets (Sihombing, 2023). It also indicates that empowerment goes beyond awareness, translating into concrete economic activities.

The effort to produce video marketing content reflects adaptive responses to

the digital era in promoting destinations. According to Zimmermann (2000), empowerment also involves *control over resources*, including access to new communication technologies. Studies have found that social media and visual storytelling by local actors can significantly expand destination visibility and authenticity (Maares et al., 2021). In Bayan Lombok, these attempts show that young people are not only consumers of digital content but also producers, positioning themselves as agents in the global tourism discourse.

Related to the institutional and infrastructure improvement impact among Bayan community, Td, an official at the North Lombok Tourism Office, said:

“The pioneering collaborations that have been undertaken by the community, for example with several regional companies and agencies such as the Regional Drinking Water Company and the Public Works and Public Housing Agency, universities, travel agencies, and visitors themselves, have fostered inter-institutional collaboration with the local community, enabling the development of these partnerships.”

Br, as a local youth activist, also emphasized:

Collaboration with various parties, although still in the initial stages and not yet fully developed, is crucial because it allows us to easily communicate our needs. Although the implementation is also very dynamic, we know which institutions or parties to turn to when we need something. That is the positive point of having collaborative relation to others, both institutional and personal.

Observation reveals that the infrastructure needed to support the development of tourism at the Bayan Beleq Mosque has not received sufficient attention. Sanitation facilities, such as water and toilet facilities, are very limited and inadequate. Despite this, the presence of infrastructure facilities, no matter how simple they are, demonstrates that efforts are being made by Bayan community members to improve infrastructure surrounding Bayan Mosque surroundings. This infrastructure improvement illustrates a form of political empowerment in which communities engage with decision-making processes that affect their environment. Research in similar rural tourism contexts reveals that when communities proactively articulate demands for infrastructure, it increases the likelihood of government responsiveness and sustainable development (Xiao et al., 2024). In Bayan Mosque surroundings, this signifies a transition from passive beneficiaries to active stakeholders in tourism governance.

The findings from Bayan Lombok highlight a dynamic process of empowerment that aligns closely with multidimensional framework (Zimmermann, 2000). The problems initially rooted in structural barriers—such as weak promotion, inadequate infrastructure, and limited local capacity—are progressively addressed through coordinated strategies and youth-driven initiatives. The impacts observed, ranging from heightened awareness to entrepreneurial ventures and advocacy for infrastructural improvement, suggest a transition from psychological empowerment (changing mindsets) to behavioral empowerment (concrete action) and ultimately to political empowerment (engaging institutions). These trajectories are consistent with studies on community-based tourism in Indonesia, where youth often serve as catalysts for collective mobilization and innovation (Nepal, 2021). In this sense, tourism in Bayan Lombok is not merely an economic sector but also a platform for social transformation, where communities redefine their relationship to local assets and external markets. However, sustaining these impacts requires continuous institutional support, inclusive participation, and equitable benefit distribution, as emphasized in broader debates on sustainable and community-based tourism (Scheyvens, 2011).

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study indicate that the development of tourism in Bayan Lombok is still confronted with multiple and interconnected challenges. The mindset of the local community often reflects skepticism toward tourism as a pathway for welfare improvement, showing that benefits are not yet visible in everyday life. This perception is compounded by the limited capacity of local tourism actors who are not fully aware of, or able to maximize, the unique potential of their surroundings. Moreover, external competition from the promotion of natural tourism destinations outside Lombok has created an overshadowing effect that reduces attention to local attractions. The weakness of local promotional efforts and the inadequate availability of infrastructure further aggravate these obstacles. Despite these barriers, this study finds that the seeds of empowerment are emerging at the community level through small but significant actions that signal opportunities for long-term transformation.

In relation to the wider scope of studies on tourism development and community empowerment, this research provides a distinctive contribution by situating Bayan Lombok as a case where empowerment is understood as both a process of mindset transformation and as a collective effort for local advocacy. Many previous studies have focused on structural or policy-oriented perspectives of tourism development, while this study emphasizes

the dynamics of agency at the community level. It shows how young people, families, and local actors initiate small interventions such as raising awareness, organizing collaborative discussions, producing promotional content, and advocating for infrastructural improvement. This places the study in the midst of ongoing academic debates that ask whether tourism can truly become a driver of equitable development when communities themselves are not only the beneficiaries but also the active agents of change. The Bayan case demonstrates that empowerment is not a static outcome, but a continuous process that links awareness, coordination, and collective resilience in the face of structural constraints.

Like most case studies, this research is not without limitations. The analysis is largely dependent on qualitative data derived from observation and interviews, which means that broader structural or policy-level influences are not deeply covered. The geographic scope is also limited, which restricts the extent to which the findings can be generalized to other contexts beyond Bayan Lombok. Nevertheless, these limitations open up promising avenues for further research. Future studies could undertake comparative analysis across multiple tourism destinations in Lombok and beyond, incorporate perspectives from policymakers and private actors, and explore how digitalization and global media can enhance local empowerment strategies. Expanding the scope in this way would enrich the understanding of how community-based tourism initiatives can be strengthened and how empowerment processes can translate into sustainable, inclusive, and widely shared development outcomes.

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PROUD TO BUGIS: Understanding Faith and the Moral Emotions of The Bugis Community in The Culture of Siri' Na Pesse

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines how the moral emotions, i.e. pride and shame, are formed and manifested within the Bugis community's Siri' culture, especially through its three main values: sipakatau, sipakainge, and sipakalebbi. In sipakatau, the status of the person is dominant, and personal dignity and honor are maintained. According to sipakatau, the spirit of reciprocal respect between human beings known as sipakainge comes out. Moreover, in sipakalebbi, respect and appreciation are the basis of advising and reminding each other, so that the life of the community is in harmony. These three values are an inseparable unity in the Siri' culture that is maintained in the Bugis communal life, which creates the moral emotions of pride and shame. Pride is the ethical feeling that forms the foundation of self-awareness of a person to appreciate himself (sipakatau), which in turn forms the foundation of the Bugis community in establishing harmonious interpersonal relations. Personal dignity affects the respect of others, which is expressed in harmonious and equal social relations. Shame, guilt, and embarrassment are the forces that work together with the realization of pride in sipakatau, sipakainge, and sipakalebbi. The moral emotions of shame, guilt, and embarrassment become integrated as mechanisms to safeguard pride as a Bugis person, ensuring that the pride of being Bugis is internalized throughout an individual's life.

Keywords: Moral Emotions; Bugis Community; Culture of Siri' Na Pesse

INTRODUCTION

The diversity of ethnicities and tribes is accompanied by the diversity of cultures that form social groups that interact with each other. In these interactions, we

are able to see the cultural differences that make each ethnic group different. Culture is what makes a community who they are, individually and collectively, and governs every facet of life in the community (Jenkins, 2008). This is also the case with the Bugis community, where culture is a critical factor in determining their social order. Culture is an ethical and normative norm in the society, which regulates all types of behavior and eventually defines the identity of the Bugis people. The culture of the Bugis can be traced through a number of *lontar* manuscripts, which contain various aspects of Bugis communal life. The “Lontara” consist of writings that record all dimensions of Bugis society. One of the core elements found in the Lontara is the *Siri'* culture. In the Bugis language, *lontarak* is referred to as *sure' attorilong*, which means texts that contain stories of past generations presented in a chronological narrative (Bahri & Tati, 2019).

Moreover, *lontarak* itself is a word with multiple meanings, some of which are related to the leaves of the *lontar* tree, as the *lontar* leaves were traditionally used as a medium of writing. The *lontarak* are the holy books of the Bugis-Makassar people, which have been transmitted across generations. The earliest manuscript is believed to have been written in 900 AD, the I La Galigo manuscript, comprising of about 6,000 pages. The Bugis *lontara* as an ancestral heritage are rich in meanings that can be used as a cultural reference and even as a means of control in the maintenance of cultural traditions.

To the Bugis people, the *Siri'* culture is a system of values that is created and institutionalized in every sphere of life (Subri, 2016). That is, *Siri'* has become a normative standard that governs social life, both individually and collectively, and is still effective today. Interestingly, the culture of *Siri'*, and all the aspects that are incorporated in it, was a result of the cultural interaction between the Bugis people of the past and Islam. This experience of Islamic teachings and Bugis cultural values ultimately influenced the identity of the community, on the one hand, showing obedience to religion, and on the other hand, being very loyal to the traditions of the ancestors that have been living since the times immemorial and still living today.

The *Siri' na pesse* culture has not been studied in the light of the moral emotions of pride and shame, but such research is worth conducting, since it has been demonstrated in a number of recent studies that *Siri' na pesse* itself is slowly dying out, although it harbors very valuable principles which ought to be preserved and continued in the Bugis society. *Siri' na pesse* is considered a dominant cultural foundation of the Bugis people (Darussalam, 2021), with applications spanning almost all areas of life—such as the digitalization of education (Hasni et al., 2022), family life (Maddukelleng & Muhammad, 2021)

which does not bode well for the Bugis. Because "siri" is frequently associated with violence and murder, the slogan "ejapi naeja" is frequently used (red later if you want red, finance and business (Misbach, 2020), economics and women's issues (Fathimah et al., 2022), governance and leadership (Rosadi et al., 2021), Islamic education (Subri, 2016), and community life, among others. Despite its broad and profound influence, it is unfortunate that several studies indicate that the values of this culture are fading. Research by Alamsyah, (2022) shows that with technological developments that increase access to external cultures, the values of *Siri' na pesse* are becoming increasingly eroded within Bugis society.

The flow of popular culture has brought about social changes that have affected the behavior of certain members of the Bugis community, leading to the values of *Siri' na pesse*, which once dictated dignity and governed behavior, to start to weaken. This is evidenced by the rise of criminal activities and sexual violence, which implies a loss of the moral processes that have traditionally underpinned social life. However, other studies indicate that *Siri'* continues to have a lot of normative power and still influences a lot of life in the daily life. Thus, there is a need to reestablish the values of *Siri'* by following the fundamental moral principles that make it up.

This paper focuses the ways in which *Siri'* culture incorporates moral emotions, such as pride, shame, guilt, and embarrassment, into its three primary pillars, which are *sipakatau*, *sipakainge*, and *sipakalebbi*. These principles do not only form an ethic of self-respect and respect towards others but also form a dialectical space between pride and other moral emotions that avoid disgraceful acts, maintain dignity, and honor. Through this, *Siri'* serves as an ethical system that integrates emotions, standards, and action- one that still persists in the internal affairs of the Bugis people and in their relations with the rest of the society.

Moral emotions play a crucial role in human life, as they determine the way people perceive their compliance with moral norms (Tangney et al., 2007). Tangney, referring to Haidt, states that moral emotions are connected with the interests or well-being of the society or at least of other people. Moral emotions are a motivating factor that encourages people to do good and shun evil. This is a distinctly human ability; as early as William James (in Tracy and Robins, 2011), humans have been characterized as having a complex sense of self, self-awareness, and the capacity to represent and judge themselves.

MORAL EMOTION AS CULTURAL LENS IN SEEING BUGIS TRADITIONS

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Moral emotions are self-conscious, evaluative, and other-oriented (Malti and Dys, 2015; Gray et al., 2017). Moral emotions suggest that people consider their actions in terms of the impact that their actions have on other people. They entail incentives that compel an individual to behave in a manner that takes into account the welfare of others. According to Jessica L. Tracy and Richard W. Robins (2007), self-conscious emotions, which include shame, guilt, embarrassment, and pride, are as follows:

“Shame and guilt should be well differentiated. Shame is a negative feeling that cannot be controlled, and guilt is a negative feeling about certain behaviors or actions that the self does but can be controlled. Therefore, in the case of shame, an individual will position themselves as “I am a fool”, and guilt will be positioned as “I did not work hard enough.” Both are related to the sense of wrongdoing, but shame is more global negative self-perception, and guilt is more positive.”

Moreover, the element of embarrassment is also connected with the sense of shame due to the events which are caused by internal factors, which are not controllable and which are publicly revealed. Unlike shame, guilt, and embarrassment, pride is linked to positive self-assessments and can be classified into two categories: authentic pride and hubristic pride. True pride is linked to accomplishments that are the result of one's efforts (confidence and

healthy self-esteem), whereas hubristic pride is linked to accomplishments that result in more undesirable traits (arrogance, conceit, egoism) (Tracy and Robins, 2018).

Guilt takes a more limited place since it is directly connected with moral transgressions, but shame can be provoked by a broader set of circumstances, including moral and non-moral failures. Lying, cheating, and stealing are acts that can cause shame, but they can also lead to guilt. Therefore, the nature of an event does not necessarily give a clear picture of whether an individual will feel shame or guilt (Tangney et al., 2011). This is why attempts to distinguish the two emotions have classified them according to: the types of events that cause them; the public or private nature of the violation; and the degree to which people perceive the event that causes them as a failure of the self or of behavior (Barón et al., 2018).

Shame in the context of moral ethics (Tangney et al., 2007) is more directly linked to the breach of communal and divine values or social order-reminding people of their identity and location as human beings. Culturally, shame and guilt are both caused by moral failures, and pride is caused by positive judgments of personal actions, which are linked to personal achievements (Etxebarria et al., 2014). Since ancient times, pride has been a philosophical topic, especially in the works of Aristotle (Gordon, 2017). To Aristotle, pride was considered to be positive, and it was a result of successes that an individual deserves. Pride is a good quality when it is associated with true accomplishments and individual excellence. It may also be directed to others and constructed within the group, which makes people proud to belong to that community. In this regard, pride is what Aristotle calls a virtue. Aristotle (in Weidman, 2013) also differentiates between proper pride (*megalopsuchia*) which is noble and appropriate and excessive pride (*hyperephanos*).

Expanding on the distinction between proper and excessive pride, researchers have identified authentic pride and hubristic pride (Tracy & Robins, 2007; Etxebarria et al., 2014; Weidman et al., 2016; Soriano & Valenzuela, 2022). This difference assists in explaining what is psychologically healthy, virtuous pride and narcissistic pride. Individuals with authentic pride are likely to exhibit high adaptive traits like extraversion, agreeableness, diligence, and true self-esteem. Meanwhile, individuals who have hubristic pride tend to have poorer interpersonal relationships, are more prone to aggressive and antisocial behaviors, and more susceptible to mental health issues, including anxiety and depression (Carter & Gordon, 2017; Liao, 2023)

Moral emotions in the Bugis culture are not only personal psychological reactions but also cultural systems that govern social relations in the context

of *Siri'* na Pesse. Therefore, pride, shame, guilt, and embarrassment are a moral compass that connects actions to individual and group dignity (Haidt, 2003; Tangney et al., 2007). The three primary principles of *Siri'*-*sipakatau*, *sipakainge*, and *sipakalebbi*- can be interpreted as cultural spheres where self-conscious feelings are aroused and bargained. Self-respect and respect towards others are not only taught normatively but also felt emotionally, which encourages people to maintain honor and shun disgraceful behaviors (Abidin, 2005).

Despite the abundance of research on *Siri'*, little is known about the role of moral emotions as internal processes in the Bugis honor system (Hasni et al., 2022; Jamaluddin et al., 2022), although the literature on honor cultures demonstrates that moral emotions play a central role in maintaining honor-related practices (Mesquita and Walker, 2003). This study fills this gap by showing that *sipakatau*, *sipakainge*, and *sipakalebbi* are not just social rules but a living ethical system that the Bugis people use to define the meaning of respect, maintain dignity, and react to moral violations within their community and in their relationships with the wider social world.

TRIAD OF BUGIS HONOR VALUES: *SIPAKATAU*, *SIPAKAINGE*, AND *SIPAKALEBBI*

Siri' literally translates to shame or a feeling of shame that is closely associated with honor and dignity. This idea is a key ethical pillar of the Bugis people. *Siri'* inspires people to protect their dignity, personal and family, and promotes honest, fair, and honorable conduct (Zainal, 2020). Breaking *Siri'* is a very shameful thing. *Siri'* na pacce (*Siri'* na pesse in the Bugis language) is a pair of significant ideas related to honor and empathy. Pacce or pesse is etymologically translated as pain or sorrow, which is the emotional pain of feeling the pain of another person. Pacce/pesse is a lesson that teaches the Bugis to assist and support each other, particularly in times of difficulty or misfortune (Latief, 2020; Hisbul et al., 2024). This idea creates a strong social connection and a strong sense of unity.

The culture of *Siri'* na pacce/pesse was historically developed in the social and environmental environment of the Bugis-Makassar community. These two ideas are philosophically complementary: *Siri'* protects honor and dignity, whereas pacce/pesse is the lesson of mutual support and solidarity in the face of life challenges. That is, *Siri'*/na pacce/pesse is essentially connected with the dignity and honor of the Bugis people.

The *Siri'* cultural system was a result of the adherence to the cultural values- such as the value of respecting others. This is why it is considered that insulting or

humiliating a person in front of people is automatically considered *napakasiri*, or shaming or disgracing another person in front of people (Jamaluddin et al., 2022).

Siri, as a type of shame in Bugis life traditions, has a deep philosophical meaning. One of the principles of *Siri* is the philosophy of values of life. The Bugis aim to coexist in a spirit of kinship, to shun aggression, and to avoid offending or demeaning each other (Sawaty, 2021; Badewi, 2019; Ruyadi and Wilodati, 2025). Based on these descriptions, it is clear that the Bugis are supposed to maintain traditional norms by living with a sense of family, mutual respect, and harmony not only in their own community but also in their relations with anyone they meet.

The *Siri na pacce/pesse* culture teaches the Bugis people to create harmony in life to prevent shame (Indyayanti et al., 2019). But when the ideals represented in *Siri na pacce/pesse* are not followed, that is, when there are insults, hostility, and acts that degrade one's dignity or self-worth, then *Siri* is said to be violated. The result of this is usually a question of life and death, since to the Bugis, it is preferable to die than to lose honor or *Siri*. The introduction of *Siri* in social life is directly related to other traditional cultural values that are deeply embedded in the Bugis society, i.e., *sipakatau*, *sipakainge*, and *sipakalebbi* (Huzain et al., 2016; Salim et al., 2018; Khaeruddin, 2022). The outcome of interviews on these three core values of *Siri na pacce/pesse* is as follows:

Sipakatau translates to mutual respect. This philosophy is based on the notion that all human beings are not the same. Thus, an individual possesses both rights and duties that should be appreciated and honored (Rahim, 2019; Haslinda and Latief, 2022). According to this philosophy, Bugis people, individually and collectively, respect human dignity and honor in their social relations. It is a duty of Bugis people to maintain the values of *sipakatau*, not only in the family but also in the broader social community.

The informants stated that the values of *sipakatau* in the family are reflected in the attitudes of respect to all the family members, both younger and older. *Sipakatau* is also manifested in social life, such as the way an employer treats his or her workers in a fair and human way. *Sipakatau* therefore translates to treating each other as human beings or respecting the humanity of one another. It is also a platform that promotes the respect of dignity and self-worth of others. One can protect his or her *Siri* by respecting others and make sure that the social relations are organized in a proper and peaceful manner.

The data collected from the informants reveal that the values of character, justice, and social responsibility are behind the idea of *sipakatau*. Every Bugis

person must uphold these values as a way of living and integrity, by which they are defined. The implications of the Bugis commitment to treat others humanely are character, justice, and social values. This is not the duty of fellow Bugis people but of all human beings regardless of their location.

According to the interview data, the practice of *sipakatau* in family life involves children who are devout and respectful to their parents. It also encompasses the Bugis spirit of being open to meet anyone irrespective of social status, ethnicity, tribe, or religion and the fair treatment accorded by the superiors to their subordinates. Moreover, Bugis people are open to remind or correct each other, both within the Bugis community (among themselves) and outside the community (toward non-Bugis).

Then there is *sipakainge*, which means reminding or advising each other. The idea of *sipakainge* is based on the fact that humans are forgetful creatures (Rahim, 2019; Haslinda and Latief, 2022). Here we may observe the Bugis philosophy of community life and kinship. The culture of *sipakainge* can be seen in everyday life in the form of neighborly relations, such as reminding each other of the need to keep the environment clean. *Sipakainge* is also applied in the academic setting, where lecturers remind students to submit assignments on time, study hard, etc. In the *Siri'* culture, *sipakainge* is a social process that ensures the preservation of norms and the upholding of honor values (Hidayat, 2021). By reminding each other, the community as a whole maintains *Siri'*, so that each member acts in accordance with accepted norms of dignity.

Environmental cleanliness is a social responsibility, and everyone in the society has a role to play in ensuring that the environment is healthy and clean. Likewise, in the academic world, the success of a student cannot be achieved without the contribution and the role of the lecturer. Thus, when a social space is contaminated, Bugis people traditionally feel shame as a group; the infringement of *Siri'* is not only the fault of the person who contaminated the space, but also of the neighbors who did not remind or correct them. Similarly in the academic world, failure of a student is also perceived as failure of the lecturer.

Therefore, *sipakainge* is necessary in Bugis culture to prevent *Siri'*, as the informant stated:

This culture reminds people of good things to avoid doing things that can be considered mappakasiri-siri' (actions that bring shame). Siri' in Bugis culture is synonymous with self-worth, dignity, good name, reputation, and the honor of self or family- all of which must be preserved and maintained

in everyday life.

In the Bugis language, *sipakalebbi* translates to honoring, respecting, or giving esteem. The idea of *sipakalebbi*-mutual honoring- comes about due to the realization that human beings are noble creatures that God honors irrespective of their differences in belief. Regardless of religion or ethnicity, all humans are descendants of Adam who is honored by God (Rahim, 2019; Haslinda and Latief, 2022). *Sipakalebbi* is an idea that promotes equality. This knowledge makes Bugis people respect and value each other. Therefore, *sipakalebbi* is directly connected with shame and empathy, as in the case of *sipakalebbi*, the dignity of people and society is maintained.

Sipakalebbi translates to honoring or giving respect to each other. It is a show of respect and recognition of the accomplishments or good acts of a person. When applied to *Siri'*, rewarding an individual who has done something honorable reinforces the principles of honor in society and encourages others to do the same (Hidayat, 2021). *Sipakalebbi* is expressed in daily life by means of greetings, politeness, and respect of differences. Children are taught to respect their parents and elders in the family set up. As an informant explained:

The Bugis people have communication norms that focus on propriety in speech. An example is that a person is rude when he or she refers to another person as 'you' (iko). It is regarded as rude; hence, one is supposed to call people kindly with kita (idi'). Sipakalebbi is observable in social life where Bugis people are very hospitable and respectful to their guests.

Sipakalebbi has a very strong relevance to Islamic teachings as mentioned in Surah An-Nisa, verse 86:

"And when you are greeted, respond with a better greeting or at least similarly. Surely Allah is a vigilant Reckoner of all things."

The teachings of Islam highly uphold an attitude of respect towards anyone.

According to the interviews with informants, the interaction of *Siri'* in *sipakatau*, *sipakainge*, and *sipakalebbi* can be explained as follows:

"Developing and sustaining honor, where sipakatau makes sure that all people are treated with dignity and respect as human beings. This is the initial step towards protecting Siri'. Sipakainge serves as a reminder to always follow the rules of honor, to keep people on the right track.

Sipakalebbi rewards those who effectively maintain or reestablish *Siri*, thus reinforcing positive values in the community.”

“Preventing and resolving conflict, in which the practice of *sipakatau* reduces the possibility of conflict since all feel valued and respected. *Sipakainge* is significant in averting activities that can contravene *Siri* by giving advice and reminders. By the act of giving appreciation, *Sipakalebbi* promotes peaceful and honorable conflict resolution, strengthening social ties within the community.”

“Restoring *Siri*, in which case when the *Siri* of a person is offended, *sipakatau* makes sure that the process of recovery is done in a respectful manner to all the parties involved. *Sipakainge* offers the moral support and guidance required to heal *Siri*. *Sipakalebbi* then recognizes and respects these healing actions, and makes sure that personal and collective dignity is reinstated and preserved.”

In this way, the *Siri* culture, along with *sipakatau*, *sipakainge*, and *sipakalebbi*, constitutes a complete system of values in the Bugis-Makassar society. The three interrelate to protect honor, avoid war, and rebuild dignity, thus creating a solid base of social harmony and personal integrity in the society.

MORAL EMOTIONS AS REFLECTION OF HONOR IN SIRI'

The *Siri* culture, comprising three fundamental values, namely, *sipakatau*, *sipakainge*, and *sipakalebbi*, is a vital component of Bugis life in all spheres of their life (Hadawiah, 2025). This culture is thus established as a norm that all Bugis individuals should observe in their conduct and their internal affairs with other Bugis individuals, and their relations with other people who are not Bugis. By placing it in this manner, the *Siri* culture becomes a norm that appeals to moral emotions that help one make the right moral choices. Why is it a standard? Since all actions or choices that a Bugis individual has to make are based on the *Siri* culture with the three principles of *sipakatau*, *sipakainge*, and *sipakalebbi* as the basis. Is it good for me to do this? Is it a noble thing that I should do this? Will it be a disgrace to do so? These values are the main origin of moral emotions of the Bugis in making their actions and decisions (Mustikasari & Rahayu, 2023)- decisions about oneself, about the family, and about the Bugis community (internally), but also about the society (not only the Bugis).

The moral emotions that are evident in *sipakatau*, *sipakainge*, and *sipakalebbi* are not just shame, guilt, and embarrassment, but also pride. Naturally, the main force is a personal sense of pride as a Bugis, but this pride should be expressed in life in a tangible form by maintaining honor, in the right and

dignified forms (Singh & Bhushan, 2025). Honor as a Bugis places them in a position to keep good relations with fellow Bugis and non-Bugis, to guarantee continuity of humanitarian values, and to uphold truth-at-whatever-cost. The Bugis can do anything as long as it is in the name of truth. In this case, their Bugis pride is tested in reality. The moral emotions that are represented in the *Siri'* culture are reflected in *sipakatau*, which humanizes individuals by the principles of self-respect and respect to others; *sipakainge*, which is mutual reminders among humans; and *sipakalebbi*, which is the honoring and giving appreciation to others, especially their accomplishments. How does the dialectic among these three values function, with moral emotions serving as the foundation that determines a person's actions or decisions?

In *sipakalebbi*, the prevailing moral feeling is pride--or rather, true pride. This is what both Bugis and non-Bugis ought to appreciate and be proud of any major successes that they have acquired in life. On the inside, it reinforces the pride of being Bugis by the achievements in life. Success here is not simply perceived as winning competitions or contests, but in the real sense of true pride, where one is appreciated because of what he or she has achieved. This pride even starts with the identity of being a member of the ethnic group called the Bugis. According to Syamsul Rijal As (Subakti, 2014), the Bugis is one of the largest ethnic groups in South Sulawesi Province. This people is categorized as belonging to the Deutero-Malay peoples, and the name Bugis is derived out of To Ugi, which means Bugis people. Pride in being Bugis has been there since their ancient glory in great kingdoms, their great seafaring and migratory skills- even as early as the mid-17th and 18th centuries. This pride has been historically constructed and documented in the communal life of the Bugis people. These accomplishments strengthen pride as an internal aspect of Bugis identity. This pride is not limited to that, as the worth of *sipakalebbi* encourages the Bugis to seek success, and the successes acquired in life at that time become the foundation of the pride in being Bugis. The pride of historical achievements is a source of future generations of Bugis descendants to also achieve success in life-lives that must be empowered by meaningful achievements-so that they can proudly and loudly proclaim themselves, Proud to be Bugis.

The two fundamental values in *Siri'* culture, i.e., *sipakatau* and *sipakainge*, then support the achievements that the Bugis must achieve. *Sipakatau* is the basic principle that all human beings have in their relations with others. Out of the consciousness of this fundamental human principle, *sipakainge* is achievable. This implies that self-respect is the starting point of care and respect towards others. The realization of self-humanity makes one open up to the experiences

of other people with the understanding that we are all human beings. Mutual respect is observed among human beings. *Sipakatau* and *sipakainge* motivate people to do their best in life-*sipakalebbi* (Abdulloh & Sulo, 2018).

The presence of moral emotions in *Siri'* culture is observable in the way the Bugis establish *Siri'* as the main source of morality, in which the main values of *Siri'* are shame and dignity (Agustina et al., 2024). The value of shame is the attempts of the Bugis to prevent the actions that do not correspond to their cultural values. When a Bugis person does something disgraceful or breaks the customary norms, he or she is classified as a person who has no shame. When an individual is declared to have no shame, he or she loses his or her dignity. Where is this shame, in this case, shame, guilt, or embarrassment? It may be placed in *sipakatau* and *sipakainge*. The sense of shame that comes with the failure to live up to the moral standards set by culture can manifest in a positive and negative way. Shame, guilt, and even embarrassment can be caused by the shame of not becoming a good human being or not being able to make others good. Shame comes about when one feels helpless and incapable of placing oneself as a good Bugis person. Guilt arises when a person believes that he or she has not done enough, thus, what is good and ought to happen does not happen (Andani & Yuwono, 2024).

In the meantime, embarrassment is evident when the failure to be a good Bugis person, that is, to do what is morally right, not only affects the individual himself, but also the honor of his family, and more generally, the Bugis people as a whole. It is not surprising, then, that studies of Bugis customary law (Nawawi, 2015; Rahmatiar et al., 2021) explicitly distinguish four basic types of *Siri'*: *Siri' rapak Siri'*, which is about personal dignity; *Siri' mappakasiri'*, which is about work ethic, which is philosophically stated as: "*narekko degage Siri'mu inrengko Siri'*," meaning "If you have no shame, borrow it to someone who does." Similarly, when one already possesses shame, he must not squander it, or disgrace himself, which is said: "*narekko engka Siri'mu, aja' mumapaka' Siri'*." Then there is *Siri' tappela Siri' (teddeng Siri')*, the sting of shame when one does not keep agreements or promises. Finally, *Siri' mate Siri'* is bound to faith: when a person has lost his sense of shame altogether, i.e. has lost faith, he is reduced to the rank of a living corpse.

According to the above explanation, the three types of moral shame, namely, shame, guilt, and embarrassment, are all entrenched in the culture. The moral emotions of guilt to unbearable shame are experienced when Bugis individuals are negligent or unable to perform their duties and responsibilities in the right way. The shame is a result of guilt--when one fails to work hard enough to live up to expectations; of feeling powerless; and finally of being punished with a

profound sense of humiliation that culturally is a condition of living but not really living, due to failure to perform his or her duties as a good Bugis person. The pride of being Bugis comes with a set of expectations that one has to meet in his or her life, and the moral standards that are used towards other Bugis and all other human beings. When one can no longer bear or represent the pride of being Bugis, then one can still live, but without the identity or honor of being known as Bugis.

CONCLUSION

A phenomenological approach to culture creates a platform of knowing *Siri'* in the consciousness of cultural actors- not just in behavior or social structure. This implies that although the social norm of *Siri'* influences behavior (social structure), the subjective interpretation of *Siri'* influences individual consciousness. *Siri' na Pacce/Pesse*, whose main principles are *sipakatau*, *sipakainge*, and *sipakalebbi*, is a holistic value system that builds the moral and social structure of the Bugis society. Shame, guilt, embarrassment, and pride are moral emotions that are central to maintaining honor, integrity, and social harmony and are the basis of ethical decision-making by individuals in their cultural context. *Siri'* is not just a sense of shame, but an existential norm that holds people socially and spiritually together; therefore, any breach of *Siri'* has grave implications of identity and social survival. The study of *Siri'* culture has so far been largely dominated by anthropological and sociological studies. Thus, a phenomenological cultural approach is a research breakthrough, which enables the study of culture in a new light. This opens up space for other approaches, such as psychic psychology, gender studies, local philosophy, and ethics, in order to enrich the treasury of knowledge.

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THE CATHOLIC GEN-Z ON VIRTUAL EUCHARIST WITHIN THE ARCHDIOCESE OF PONTIANAK

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ABSTRACT

Since the expiration of the Community Activities Restrictions Enforcement on 13 December 2022, The Catholic Church has also resumed in-person (offline) Eucharistic celebrations. Virtual Eucharistic celebrations continue in select parishes, particularly within the Archdiocese of Pontianak. This study examines how Catholic Generation Z (Gen-Z) individuals— a cohort inherently familiar with the virtual world—respond to virtual versus in-person Eucharistic celebrations. From the perspective of liturgical theology, the Eucharist should ideally be celebrated in person unless circumstances necessitate a virtual format. This study employs a quantitative approach with an online questionnaire sent via WhatsApp to 250 Catholic Generation Z respondents in several parishes. The results show that although offline Mass was rated as spiritually better, practical conditions made online Masses also preferred by the majority of respondents. This research provides insights for the Catholic Church in the Archdiocese of Pontianak in formulating pastoral approaches that better suit the spiritual and practical needs of Generation Z in the context of multicultural society of Pontianak.

Keywords: Catholic Generation Z; Virtual Eucharist; Archdiocese of Pontianak.

INTRODUCTION

Generation Z has the characteristics of glorifying freedom and personalization, depending on fast information, learning to innovate, and hyper technology (Kamil, 2018). Generation Z consumes much more of the internet than previous generations (Ali et al., 2020). Generation Z uses more than 20% of their spending to use telecommunications media such as financing internet data packages. They were born and live in a digital situation (Rastati, 2018). There are six main behaviours of Generation Z in Indonesia, namely: 1) Generation Z is the internetholic generation, a generation that uses the internet from an early age because they have lived since the internet developed; 2) Generation Z feels that with curiosity and tech-savvy, they can be successful in their careers; 3) Generation Z cares about the global situation, especially about social and environmental issues; 4) Generation Z's communication patterns tend to be visual rather than narration; 5) As consumers, Generation Z is critical. They are more emotional than functional; 6) Generation Z is also a consumer who prefers trends over discounts (Ali, 2022).

Generation Z, as a cohort highly familiar with social media, can also gain understanding or appreciation of the religious world through these platforms. In the context of Indonesian Catholicism, Widodo's research identifies social media accounts or channels utilized by both Church hierarchy and laity that serve as effective tools for catechesis (Widodo, 2022). Similarly, Doo's study in Central Papua indicates that young people can enhance their spiritual lives through information technology (Doo, 2024). This situation warrants further investigation, as the digital realm can engender impacts akin to virtual religion.

Campbell asserts that virtual religion has become a tangible reality in the present era. He further explains that digital religion represents a concept integrating technology and digital culture to produce religious practices. This fusion also yields broader understandings of the essence of reality and the wider world (Campbell & Bellar, 2022). Virtual and physical spaces form an integrated whole, albeit operating in parallel. This theory is advanced by Amnon and Birenboim in their research on young people using mobile phones or communication media, positing that virtual and physical spaces can coalesce into a unified realm that fosters various levels of rational efficacy (Amnon & Birenboim, 2024).

This study gains particular intrigue when examining virtual religion in the context of the Eucharist as specifically experienced by Generation Z. In particular, virtual Eucharistic celebrations, which continue to the present day, merit focused analysis. In March 2020, in Vatican News, Pope Francis held the Eucharistic celebration for the first time in the form of live streaming

using YouTube as the medium due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The Catholic Church greatly appreciates advances in technology, especially technology in communications. Pope Paul VI, in *Inter Mirifica*, on December 4, 1963, argued that information technology is a good work and an amazing invention of human intelligence. This intelligence is a blessing and a gift from God in article 1 (Konsili Vatikan II, 1965). The Church has the right to use communication media to broadcast the message of salvation and to provide teaching on how humans can use the media properly in *Inter Mirifica*, article 3. All members of the Church are called to be able to make effective use of social communication media in various kinds of apostolic works in *Inter Mirifica*, article 13 (Konsili Vatikan II, 1965). Social communication media, digital artificial intelligence, and cyber networks bring changes in social, economic, political, and cultural connectivity from face-to-face to screen. The perspective on human interaction actually exists when it takes place virtual and wireless (Zis et al., 2021).

This work seeks to examine Generation Z's perspectives on experiencing the Eucharist in virtual formats. Specifically, the research is conducted within the Archdiocese of Pontianak, which encompasses a substantial Catholic population, including a significant proportion of Generation Z individuals. Notably, the Archdiocese hosts several Catholic higher education institutions, one of which specializes in the training of catechists. This context presents a compelling opportunity to investigate the impacts and understandings of virtual Masses among these groups. The study also explores the theological dimensions of the Eucharist to inform appropriate responses to virtual liturgies. The primary informants comprise university students, particularly those from Catholic institutions and those undergoing formation as catechists.

THE MEANING OF EUCHARIST FOR THE CATHOLICS.

The Eucharistic decree is the will of Jesus Christ himself (Martasudjita, 2008). The Eucharist becomes an expression of faith or a manifestation of faith in an order of worship to God. Basically, humans have *potential obedientialis*, a longing that exists within humans (Martasudjita, 2012a). This longing is *desiderium naturale* which means natural desire. The human longing is to be open to the Creator. The Eucharist is the highest sacrament because in it Christ the Lord Himself is presented, offered, and eaten, and through it, the Church always lives and evolves. The Eucharistic Sacrifice is a memory of the death and resurrection of the Lord. The Sacrifice of the Cross has been perpetuated throughout all ages as the pinnacle of all Christian worship and life. This sacrifice of the Cross becomes the source that signifies and produces the unity of the people of God and completes the building up of the Body of

Christ (Paulus II, Codex Iuris Canonici, 1983 canon 897).

The Eucharist is held as a common celebration and is attended by many people who actively participate. Every Eucharist is by its very nature official and public in Sacrosanctum Consilium, article 27 (Konsili Vatikan II, 1963). As a celebration, the presence of leaders and people must be real at the place where the Eucharist is held. The presence of the people has the meaning of togetherness. One of the main dimensions of the Catholic faith is the communal dimension where the manifestation of faith is carried out together. The Eucharist is the peak Sacrament of togetherness (Martasudjita, 2003). The Eucharist in its implementation requires the participation of the people. Participation is also a means that complements the Eucharist. The people are required to be involved in various roles, especially as liturgical officers. So in accordance with the provisions of Saint Benedict, the reason should be in harmony with sound or words (*mens concordet voci*) (Martasudjita, 2012). Through communion, people are considered to participate fully in the event of Christ's redemption which is remembered in the Eucharistic Prayer and received in the form of the Body and Blood of Christ Himself (Martasudjita, 2005). Theologically the Church in the sense of communion is the temple of God itself. Jesus only founded the Church in that sense (Suryanugraha, 2004). Nevertheless, the Church as a special building for worship originates from the ideals of the people who want the Holy Communion to be held specifically. So the church as a building is a place for sacramental encounters (Martasudjita, 2011).

THE GEN-Z AS INTERNET GENERATION

Generation Z is indeed an internet generation that spends a lot of time in cyberspace. Very few of them take advantage of technological advances in the field of information and communication to deepen their knowledge of religion and spirituality. Their curiosity about religion and spirituality is very low. Entertainment is the most preferred theme by the majority of Generation Z. Table 1 shows how Generation Z utilizes information technology in their daily lives. It also shows the data of the extent of their reliance on gadgets in everyday activities.

The data indicate that Generation Z exhibits a strong affinity for utilizing social media platforms. Many among them possess more than one gadget, employing these platforms primarily for entertainment or information acquisition. This aligns with research by Hidayah and Anshar (2025), who found that Generation Z generally uses social media to obtain information pertinent to education, careers, and personal needs. Corroborating this, Devi

et al. (2024) reported that Generation Z leverages social media to seek content related to health, education, entertainment, and religion.

Table 1.
Age, education, electronic devices, duration of internet access, and themes

No.	Theme	Responses	Number	Percent
1.	Age.	14-16 years	7	2.8 %
		17-23 years	232	92.8 %
		24-27 years	11	4.4 %
2.	The current level of education.	S2	1	0.4 %
		D4/S1	224	89.6 %
		SMA/SMK	20	8.0 %
		SMP	5	2.0 %
3.	The number of gadgets owned.	1	157	62.8 %
		2	82	32.8 %
		3	10	4.0 %
		>3	1	0.4 %
4.	Duration to access the internet.	0-4 hours per day	41	16.4 %
		5-9 hours per day	114	45.6 %
		10-14 hours per day	62	24.8 %
		15-19 hours per day	22	8.8 %
		20-24 hours per day	11	4.4 %
5.	Most liked theme.	Entertainment	94	37.6 %
		Communication, information	34	13.6 %
		Science, technology	27	10.8 %
		Sports, automotive	19	7.6 %
		Education, teaching	15	6.0 %
		Religion, spirituality	15	6.0 %
		Horror, mystic	12	4.8 %
		Social politics	7	2.8 %
		Health, medicine	5	2.0 %
		Economics, finance	5	2.0 %
Other themes	17	6.8 %		

A notable finding is the limited utilization of social media by this cohort for engaging with religious content. In this regard, virtual masses represent a religious practice conducted in a virtual environment via live streaming or recorded broadcasts, constituting religious content. This study further examines Generation Z's perceptions of virtual masses within their daily lives. Specifically, the initial data analysis investigates whether virtual masses constitute content they actively follow amid their social media usage. A key

limitation of these data is the insufficient in-depth exploration of the specific religious content that has attracted or been accessed by Generation Z.

Table 2.
Virtual space and online communication

No.	Theme	Responses	Number	Percent
1.	Virtual space is real space.	Yes	111	44.4 %
		No	90	36.0 %
		Unsure	49	19.6 %
2.	Online relationships can replace offline relationships.	Yes	163	65.2 %
		No	71	28.4 %
		Unsure	16	6.4 %

Table 2 indicates that the majority of Generation Z perceives virtual space as a tangible reality. The relationships formed in the online world are capable of substituting for authentic, real-world connections. These two statements aim to explore Generation Z's paradigm regarding virtual environments and the relational dynamics within them. Hornsby (1991) argues that in the digital era, technology offers distinct forms of relationships and relational situations. Other studies reveal that virtual connections can influence an individual's life and perceptions in the digital realm. Turkle (1997) posits that identity emerges from the objects one observes and engages with; thus, virtual space—as an observed and inhabited object—enables more pluralistic and flexible identities. The findings in the table above indirectly confirm these theories. A potential implication is that Generation Z may view Virtual Eucharist as a viable substitute for physical Eucharist.

THE INCONSISTENCY OF GEN-Z TO PARTICIPATE EUCHARIST

The work suggests that Catholic Generation Z individuals have the desire to affirm their identity as Catholics who have already participated in receiving Holy Communion. Table 3 examines their situation in attending Eucharistic celebrations, both online and offline. However, the data shows that there is an inconsistency of Generation Z Catholics in changing from offline participation to online participation in Eucharistic celebrations. Generation Z has been known as the digital generation. They have gadgets. They can access everything online easily. Their participation in the Eucharist from before the Covid-19 pandemic broke out until when the Covid-19 pandemic broke out has decreased. Even though during the Covid-19 pandemic, the Eucharistic celebration was carried out online. This is completely contrary to

the researchers' assumption that Catholic Generation Z participation in the online Eucharist would increase. Of course, there must be other factors that influence the decline in Catholic Generation Z participation in the Eucharist from offline to online.

Table 3.
Catholicism

No.	Theme	Responses	Number	Percent
1.	Duration of being a Catholic.	< 5 years	16	6.4 %
		5-10 years	8	3.2 %
		11-16 years	12	4.8 %
		17-23 years	201	80.4 %
		24-28 years	13	5.2 %
2.	Participation in Holy Communion.	Yes	247	98.8 %
		Not yet	3	1.2 %
3.	Frequency of participation in the Eucharist before the Covid-19 pandemic.	Once a week	149	59.6 %
		> Once a week	52	20.8 %
		Once in two weeks	4	1.6 %
		Once a month	2	0.8 %
		Uncertain	43	17.2 %
4.	The Eucharist before the Covid-19 pandemic.	Weekly	145	58.0 %
		Daily	3	1.2 %
		Daily and weekly	36	14.4 %
		Uncertain	66	26.4 %
5.	Frequency of participation in the Eucharist during the Covid-19 pandemic.	Once a week	145	58.0 %
		> Once a week	15	6.0 %
		Once in two weeks	7	2.8 %
		Once a month	3	1.2 %
		Uncertain	80	32.0 %
6.	The Eucharist during the Covid-19 pandemic.	Weekly	149	59.6 %
		Daily	4	1.6 %
		Daily and weekly	15	6.0 %
		Uncertain	82	32.8 %
7.	Participation in the Eucharist during the Covid-19 pandemic.	Decreased	127	50.8 %
		Mediocre	69	27.6 %
		Increased	26	10.4 %
		Very decreased	22	8.8 %
		Very increased	6	2.4 %

Wibowo and Fauzi (2024) note that some parishioners prefer offline Masses because they experience greater reverence and tranquillity. Jehaman and

Firmanto (2021) further explain that parishioners' limited understanding of online Eucharist discourages their participation in virtual Masses. The Church's response to the COVID-19 situation should affirm that the Eucharist remains validly celebrated, serving as a manifestation of the Church's presence for its isolated members.

Table 4 reveals compelling findings: the majority of respondents assert that in-person or offline Masses (Eucharistic celebrations) are far superior, owing to a more tangible sense of God's presence, the direct reception of Holy Communion, the profound fellowship experienced in face-to-face encounters, the more sacred symbolism and atmosphere, and the ability to participate directly in the Eucharist. Most respondents maintain that virtual Eucharistic celebrations cannot substitute for face-to-face ones. A minority, however, contend that virtual Eucharist can serve as a viable alternative.

Table 4.
Online Eucharist and offline Eucharist

No.	Theme	Responses	Number	Percent
1.	Comparison between offline Eucharist and online Eucharist.	Offline is better than online	221	88.4 %
		Online is as good as offline	20	8.0 %
		Online is better than offline	9	3.6 %
2.	The advantages of offline Eucharist.	God's presence	93	37.2 %
		The Holy Communion	54	21.6 %
		Encounter with people	42	16.8 %
		Sacred symbols and atmosphere	33	13.2 %
		Direct participation	28	10.2 %
3.	The advantages of online Eucharist.	The efficiency of time, effort, and cost	93	37.2 %
		Silence, serenity	84	33.6 %
		God's presence	31	12.4 %
		The sacred atmosphere at home	24	9.6 %
		The salvation effect can be felt	18	7.2 %
4.	Online Eucharistic celebrations can replace offline Eucharistic celebrations.	Yes	99	39.6 %
		No	122	48.8 %
		Unsure	29	11.6 %

The primary advantages of virtual Eucharist, as identified by the majority, include: (1) efficiency in time, energy, and cost; and (2) enhanced silence and tranquillity. Nevertheless, regarding the perception of God's presence, far

more respondents report experiencing it in offline Eucharist than in online formats. In this regard, respondents understand true Eucharist to occur only in direct, physically enabling circumstances.

Appiah-Kubi posits that the dimension of “*transubstantiatio*” constitutes the real change of bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ (Appiah-Kubi, 2021). This dimension serves as a sign of God’s direct presence in the Eucharistic celebration. Lebenek maintains that, according to Catholic doctrine, the Eucharist essentially occurs in a real, immediate context, for two primary reasons: first, the tangible experience of Christ’s presence in the Body and Blood through direct Communion; and second, the authentic community formed through physical encounter (Lebenek, 2014). Nevertheless, Lebenek personally advocates openness to virtual Eucharist, viewing it as a viable option for those unable to participate in a direct celebration. This perspective aligns with Sihombing et al. (2023), who recommend that virtual Eucharist be maintained, particularly for the elderly or the sick who cannot attend in person.

EUCCHARISTIC PASTORAL PRACTICES AS AN ALTERNATIVE

Online Mass, which is also a government suggestion, has become a new experience in worship during the Covid-19 pandemic. However, many things do not meet the elements of the Eucharist optimally (Situmorang, 2020). *First*, the sacramental dimension, Mass will only be valid if led by a valid leader (a priest who is ordained in the Catholic rite), carried out by liturgical rites in the Catholic Church, and provided with valid material and form, namely bread and wine. However, in practice, apart from the absence of the people who were directly present, the sacramental communion of the people through the reception of Holy Communion did not occur. *Second*, the spiritual dimension, according to the Council of Trent, there are three ways of receiving Holy Communion namely, sacramentally, spiritually, and both directly. In the Covid-19 situation receiving holy communion is implemented only spiritually so that the union between the people and Christ continues. *Third*, the communal dimension, the communion between the priest and the people in a live-streaming Mass situation still occurs, although not sacramentally. People can still form domestic churches by building fellowship with their families. Mark 5:25-34, which tells the story of a woman who suffered from bleeding and experienced healing by touching Jesus’ robe because of her strong belief, can be an analogy for online Masses, which, although there is a distance between the people and the sacramental actions, online Masses are still valid (Viktorahadi & Busro, 2021).

Virtual Masses also have a spiritual impact on people who celebrate them with strong faith (Cornelius, 2022). The Catholic Church decided on a virtual Mass as an alternative during the Covid-19 pandemic. In his research, Sule stated that 89% of 169 people were dissatisfied with the online mass policy, especially because they could not receive communion in person. This situation can lead to a degradation of understanding and appreciation of the efficacy of the sacrament as a means and sign of salvation in the Church. Online Masses cannot answer the spiritual needs of the people (Sule, 2021). because naturally, the Mass is a physical presence (*in persona*). Catholics are concerned about the Catholic Church's policy regarding holding online Masses (Viktorahadi, 2021). The celebration of the Eucharist as a perfect sacramental act, especially in the part of the union between Christ and the people in holy communion, cannot come about in online or live-streaming Masses.

In general, the Generation Z individuals in the Archdiocese of Pontianak, West Kalimantan, are also digital generation or internet generation. They have spent most of their time accessing cyberspace. Their attachment or interest in the virtual world is what makes them think that the virtual world is part of the real world. They can no longer differentiate between the virtual world and the real world, so they assume that relationships in the virtual world can replace relationships in the real world. In the context of religiosity, they still feel confused and doubtful about whether the online worship can replace the offline one. Basically they know that the offline Eucharistic celebrations still have more advantages than the online ones. They have opined that there are five main reasons why the offline Eucharist is better. They are God's presence, The Holy Communion, encounter with people, sacred symbols and atmosphere, and direct participation. Conversely, they have captured the benefits of online Eucharist in just three practical ways. They are time, physical energy and cost effectiveness. In terms of time, they do not need much time to prepare to attend the Eucharistic celebration. In terms of physical energy, they only need to move from room to room in the same house so they don't need to expend much physical energy. In terms of costs, they do not incur any transportation costs for traveling from home to the church location. They don't need to bother thinking about transportation costs which are quite expensive for their financial condition.

The dilemma between spiritual and practical issues faced by generation Z Catholics needs to be addressed with appropriate pastoral approach. In fact, these two issues are not contradictory to each other because each issue requires a different pastoral approach. Spiritual problems need to be addressed with a theological pastoral approach, while practical problems

need to be addressed with a practical pastoral approach. Theological pastoral approach related to teaching and living the faith. In this approach, the Catholic Church needs to take action in the form of cultivating the faith of young people. Practical pastoral approach is concerned with solving practical problems such as social and economic problems. These two approaches are actually inseparable because they can influence each other. As there are two different approaches, there are two kinds of pastoral action, namely pastoral action from a theological perspective and pastoral action from a practical perspective. Theological pastoral actions are useful to help generation Z Catholics to increasingly believe in their faith in the real presence of Jesus in the celebration of the Eucharist, while practical pastoral action is useful to help Generation Z Catholics overcome practical problems related to living out their faith.

In the context of spiritual problems of Generation Z Catholics in the Pontianak Archdiocese, some theological pastoral actions that need to be taken by Catholic Church. First, teaching them the truth of faith about the uniqueness of God's real presence in offline Eucharistic celebrations which are completely different from online ones. The communal dimension of the Catholic faith is a key aspect where believers practice their faith together. The Eucharist is the highest point of the Sacrament of community (Martasudjita, 2003). Participating in the Eucharist in person and celebrating it collectively will enhance its perfection. Second, opening their insights into the meaning of the Eucharist as a banquet. The Eucharist as a banquet must be attended by the invitees in person in the banquet hall. In this world, there has never been a banquet held online. Third, elucidating to them that the Catholic Church is a community of believers. The encounter between believers is a fundamental requirement in the celebration of the Eucharist. According to Martasudjita (2005), by taking part in communion, individuals are seen as actively engaging in Christ's act of redemption as depicted in the Eucharistic Prayer and received in the physical form of Christ's Body and Blood. Acknowledgment of the presence of Christ's body and blood is also evident in His reception during the act of communion. Forth, emphasizing to them that direct involvement and participation as readers of Scripture, psalm singers, choir members, altar servers and others in the celebration of the Eucharist is inseparable aspects of God's work of salvation. The participation of the faithful in liturgical celebrations is mentioned in Sacrosanctum Concilium No. 30 (Konsili Vatikan II, 1963). There should be a conversation between the priest and the congregation during the acclamation, antiphon, and the beauty of the eucharist found in the actions of both.

In the context of practical problems of Generation Z Catholics in the Pontianak Archdiocese, some practical pastoral actions need to be taken by Catholic Church. First, discussing with them about the characteristics of offline relationships such as personal touch, emotional atmosphere, involvement and others that are not present in online relationships so that offline relationships cannot be simply replaced by online relationships. Second, informing them that participating in an online Eucharistic celebration can only be justified if they are experiencing an urgent situation that prevents them from attending the Eucharistic celebration in Church such as Covid-19 pandemic. Eucharistic celebrations broadcasted live online are only for those who are unable to attend due to physical limitations and health issues. Third, giving them a comprehension that participating in offline Eucharistic celebrations can help them focus more on the mystery of God's presence and they will not be distracted by offers of pleasure in cyberspace. Forth, motivating them to be willing to take part in the sacrifice of Jesus by sacrificing their time, energy, and costs to attend the Eucharistic celebration in the Church. Helping each other by giving rides to Church is also part of the sacrifice.

CONCLUSION

Generation Z in the Archdiocese of Pontianak, West Kalimantan, possesses a direct understanding of the meaning of the Eucharist. They participate in online Eucharistic celebrations solely due to practical necessities. This reveals a disparity between their spiritual comprehension—that they require the Eucharist in person—and the practical circumstances compelling virtual participation. They face a tension between spiritual and practical elements. On one side, in terms of spirituality they have a mature faith. They have believed and felt the presence of God in the celebration of the Eucharistic sacrament. They feel the concrete presence of God when they receive and eat Holy Communion. For this reason, they firmly argue that online Eucharistic celebrations spiritually cannot replace offline Eucharistic celebrations. But on the other hand, from a practical point of view, they have experienced the benefits of online Eucharistic celebrations. Time, energy and cost effectiveness can be achieved in online Eucharistic celebrations. Online Eucharistic Celebration really helps them to reduce expenses for transportation which is quite expensive for them. Means of transportation in their place is also still relatively rare.

However, in a digital situation, they experience many temptations. When entering the digital world, what they are looking for online shows are those that are not related to religion and spirituality. Thus, their biggest challenge

during online Eucharistic celebrations is that they prefer to seek entertainment rather than attend mass. This is what causes a decrease in attendance and participation at online masses. Under these conditions, it is very important for them to learn that the Eucharist is closely related to sacrifice. The church needs to emphasize to Generation Z the meaning of sacrifice in the Eucharist, including the sacrifice of time, energy and costs. The sacrifice must be made based on self-awareness and sincerity. To follow up on this research, the researchers propose a research theme on the appreciation of Generation Z on the meaning of sacrifice in the celebration of the Eucharist. This research aims of course to see how Generation Z is able to sacrifice themselves completely for the celebration of the Eucharist.

In general, this study provides two contributions. The first contribution is to reveal the reality of the problems faced by Generation Z Catholics in the Pontianak Archdiocese. They experience hesitation in determining their attitude towards the problems they are facing. The second contribution is to offer solutions to the problems faced by Generation Z Catholics in the Pontianak Archdiocese in the form of theological and practical pastoral actions. The limitation of this study is that the scope of the study only covers Generation Z Catholics in the Pontianak Archdiocese, so the conclusions and proposed pastoral actions of the study may not necessarily apply elsewhere. This study exclusively employed a descriptive quantitative method, which has the limitation of not incorporating direct perspectives, such as those obtained through interviews. Consequently, the research lacks depth in exploring the arguments or information provided by the informants. Researchers only determine the form of theological and practical pastoral actions without determining how these actions are realized.

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JEMAAH ISLAMIYAH'S COLLECTIVE MEMORIES IN POSO: NEGOTIATED BODIES AND SHIFTED SOCIAL SPACES

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ABSTRACT

This article traces the fragile and unfinished journeys of former Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) members as they attempt to re-enter the social fabric of Poso, Central Sulawesi. Through an anthropological lens, this study follows how their bodies bear the memory of conflict, how shifting social spaces reconfigure belonging, and how the disbandment of JI in 2024 unsettles older certainties while opening new dilemmas. Field observation from 2023 to 2025 was carried out through regular conversations, shared daily routines, and careful observation of how ex-militants negotiate presence and absence in communal life. The findings reveal that reintegration is not a straightforward passage from exclusion to acceptance, but a crossroads where ambiguities, fractures, and competing life orientations coexist. Rather than a linear process, it is lived as a series of negotiations—between stigma and recognition, faith and everyday survival, silence and speech. By situating these narratives within the anthropology of post-conflict regions, this article underscores the symbolic, interpretive, and relational dimensions of rebuilding social life, and calls attention to how the legacies of religious extremism are entangled with the embodied and spatial practices of return.

Keywords: Reintegration; Body; Social Space, Jemaah Islamiyah; Post-Conflict, Poso

INTRODUCTION

The history of Poso lingers like a wound on the Indonesian landscape, its scars etched in both memory and geography. What began in 1998 as clashes between Christians and Muslims soon spiralled into overlapping conflicts of tribe, ethnicity, and politics. Villages burned, churches and mosques were razed, and neighbours turned against one another in a spiral of killings that displaced thousands. By the early 2000s, Poso had become a name synonymous with fear, a place where communal coexistence collapsed into a vortex of violence (Rusdianto, 2019). The trauma of those years continues to circulate in stories of loss and survival, shaping not only how communities remember but how they live.

This vacuum of authority and trust allowed jihadist groups to take root. Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), with its disciplined structures and transnational ties, framed the conflict as part of a wider jihad, embedding itself in fractured geographies and fragile communities (Fealy & Borgue, 2005; Schulze, 2017). Poso became more than a battlefield: it was remembered as a laboratory for jihad, where recruitment, training, and ideological testing converged (Satria & Sjah, 2025). As Nurish (2022) notes, massacres such as that at *Walisongo Pesantren* became rallying points, transforming local fear and resentment into ideological fuel. Stories of revenge, identity, and threat circulated widely, narrowing the possibilities for reconciliation (Dwyer, 2015; McRae, 2013). Nurish (2019) has argued that extremism cannot be treated as a lingering drama but as a project that must be dismantled at its roots if Indonesia is to move forward, particularly in its eastern provinces.

Yet even as the guns quieted after the Malino Declaration, the memory of violence persisted as a kind of cultural sediment. Assmann & Czaplicka (1995) reminds us that cultural memory preserves the store of knowledge from which groups derive their sense of unity and peculiarity. In Poso, these memories are not neutral: they define who belongs and who does not, who is “us” and who remains an “other.” Funkenstein (1989) adds that no memory, even the most intimate, can be detached from society; it is mediated by symbols, institutions, and collective consciousness. For Poso, this means that reintegration is haunted not only by state security agendas but by ‘the everyday inscriptions of memory in markets, schools, mosques, and neighbourhoods divided along religious lines (Mashuri et al., 2024)’.

Against this backdrop, the disbandment of JI in August 2024 was hailed as a national counterterrorism success. But disbandment is not erasure. As Ismail (2025) argues, the ideological legacies of JI remain embedded in *pesantren*, schools, and imagined solidarities of Islamic association (*ukhuwah Islamiyah*),

educating thousands of students and ensuring continuity across generations. In Poso, where JI's presence was once formative, disbandment did not dissolve embodied memories of violence or erase the traces of militant geographies. Rather, it unsettled them, forcing former militants to renegotiate their identities in communities where their bodies, reputations, and pasts remain visible.

Here, the anthropology of the body becomes crucial. Lock (1993) reminds us that the body is not a universal biological constant but a site of social inscription, historical memory, and political struggle. Former militants in Poso carry bodies marked by training, imprisonment, and torture — bodies that signify both stigma and survival. As Mahmood shows, religious identity is not only belief but embodied reality, enacted through repeated bodily acts that cultivate memory, desire, and agency (Mahmood, 2001, 2005, 2012). In Poso, the beard, the niqab, or the scars of conflict are not inert signs; they are living reminders of a jihadist past that complicates the possibility of ordinary life.

At the same time, space itself is contested. Lefebvre (2009) and Bourdieu (2018) teach us that space is never neutral: it is produced through power, ideology, and capital. In post-conflict Poso, neighbourhoods remain segregated along religious lines, and counterterrorism operations have reconfigured everyday geographies through surveillance, checkpoints, and suspicion (Dresser et al., 2025; Haripin et al., 2024). These spaces of exclusion and marginalization are precisely where former militants attempt to reinsert themselves — as farmers, traders, teachers — crafting new forms of visibility and silence.

Finally, reintegration must be understood through the lens of liminality. Turner described liminality as the in-between stage of transformation, where old identities are shed but new ones are not yet secure (Turner, 1967, 1987). For ex-JI members, reintegration is not a linear “return” but a precarious passage — neither militants nor fully accepted civilians, suspended between stigma and belonging. Winkler & Kristensen (2022) remind us that such thresholds are both precarious and creative: spaces where conflict and ambiguity can generate new possibilities of order.

Amidst the traces of collective trauma, the disbandment of JI thus marks a new milestone in the recharacterization of former militants in Poso. Yet it raises pressing anthropological questions: Where do the bodies of these men and women return? How do shifting social spaces shape their everyday negotiations of identity? What happens to bodies once touched by violence when they attempt to inhabit communities that may never fully accommodate them? This study seeks to address these questions, situating reintegration not

as a finished state project but as an open-ended negotiation of body, space, and liminality in Poso's fragile post-conflict landscape.

Indeed, this anthropological study is based on empirical data collected through research and fieldwork (Žikić, 2007). Alongside this, the researcher also draws on secondary sources, including literature studies (books, journal articles, research reports, and investigations) and other relevant documents that provide additional support for the analysis. The petium is examined using an Interpretative Model (Franke, 1984; Geertz, 1983) in combination with a descriptive analysis approach. Data collection includes semi-structured, informal interviews with different actors and there were at least ten respondents identified as having relevant knowledge and authority on the subject.

ANTHROPOLOGICAL LANDSCAPE ON JAMAAH ISLAMIAH

Anthropology of the Body

The body, in anthropology, is never only a biological organ. It is at once flesh, faith, and form: a living archive where memory, ritual, and social exchange are inscribed. Foucault reminds us that bodies are not neutral matter but surfaces where discipline settles, where power writes itself into gestures, postures, and habits of obedience (Castro-Gómez et al., 2023; Dudrick, 2005; Foucault, 1975; Pylypa, 1998). Through discipline, the body becomes a citizen, moulded into productivity and docility. Yet to reduce the body to an object of control is to overlook its symbolic vitality — its capacity to carry meaning, to embody belief, to serve as a cultural artifact within religious and social life.

This double life of the body — as disciplined and as symbolic — is illuminated in Veena Das's *Life and Words*. Writing of the Partition riots of 1947 and the anti-Sikh violence of 1984, she shows how women's bodies became the ground upon which history was inscribed (Das, 2007). The pain of injury and humiliation could not be captured by statistics alone; it was felt and remembered in flesh, silence, and gesture. Through Wittgenstein's notion of "language games," Das reads the body as a grammar of suffering, a way violence seeps into the ordinary and continues to live there (Cook, 2000; Das, 1998).

Judith Butler takes this further, asking us to see the body as something that materializes only through norms that govern its recognition. In *Bodies That Matter*, she argues that bodies are shaped not once but continually, through rules, laws, and religious codes that dictate which lives appear intelligible (Butler, 2020). The body, then, is never private; it exists in relation, bound within webs of intersubjectivity.

Scheper-Hughes & Lock (1987) offer a map for holding these insights together. Their “Three Bodies” — the individual body of lived experience, the social body as a metaphor for society, and the body politic where institutions exert control — provide a layered framework for reading embodiment. This triad helps us see how bodies mediate between personal pain, communal belonging, and political regulation. In this way, the body emerges not simply as a passive surface but as a threshold: where memory, violence, and power collide, and where the possibility of reintegration must be negotiated.

Social Space

In anthropology, space is never empty. It does not simply sit as a backdrop to human life, waiting to be filled. Space breathes; it gathers and disperses, holding within it networks of interaction, intercultural exchange, ideology, and ritual. What appears physical — a street corner, a market, a mosque — is also social, political, and religious. It is a stage where bodies move and where meanings are constantly made and remade.

Henri Lefebvre reminds us that space is not neutral terrain but a production — shaped by symbols, values, and ideologies that circulate within society (Lefebvre, 2009). For him, space is the outcome of collective agreements and struggles, a texture woven by the state, by capital, by memory. Every built environment carries traces of these forces: a mosque funded by merchants, a school erected by missionaries, a field once fought over in communal violence. None are passive, for each is inscribed with power and shaped by histories of belonging and exclusion.

Pierre Bourdieu offers another layer to this understanding. While Lefebvre emphasizes the production of space, Bourdieu asks us to see its structuring logic. Social space, for him, is abstract yet concrete in its effects — formed through the distribution of capital: economic, cultural, and symbolic (Bourdieu, 2018). These forms of capital generate sub-spaces, arenas where individuals and groups struggle for recognition, prestige, and authority. Distinctions emerge, hierarchies harden, and positions within society are negotiated through the unequal play of these resources.

To dwell in a space, then, is to dwell within these invisible architectures of power. A village square may look communal, but who speaks there, who leads prayer, who claims legitimacy — these depend on accumulated capital. Space is always stratified, always contested. It is a map not just of geography but of social possibility, where inclusion and exclusion are enacted in ways both subtle and overt.

Liminality and Reintegration

Liminality speaks of thresholds — those in-between spaces where identities waver, unsettled between what has been and what has yet to come. Turner (1967) describes the liminal stage as a suspension of ordinary structures, a time when the old self has been loosened but the new self is not yet secured. In this interval, people inhabit a condition of betwixt and between, carrying fragments of past identities while groping toward uncertain futures (Turner, 1987; Wels et al., 2011).

This threshold is marked by instability. Rules lose their grip, hierarchies dissolve, and familiar scripts of belonging no longer hold. Yet within this disorientation lies possibility. For Turner, liminality is not simply void but fertile ground: it opens space for solidarity, for new ties of fraternity, for the creative improvisations of life unmoored from its usual constraints (Bigger, 2009). In ritual as in community, the dismantling of norms can bring forth unexpected forms of spontaneity, reshaping how people live with one another and imagine who they might become.

Still, liminality cannot endure forever. It is a passage, not a dwelling place. Its inherent instability demands resolution: the energies it releases must crystallize into some form of new social order, however fragile. As Blackstock (2024) reminds us, the liminal stage is both generative and precarious — it contains the seeds of transformation but also the risk of fragmentation. Reintegration, then, is the closing of this passage: the moment when identities reassemble, and when the creative turbulence of liminality is absorbed into the structures of a renewed, if altered, society. It is what Turner (1987) called a liminal passage — neither one thing nor another, elastic and dialogical, a constant reworking of identity in fragile everyday spaces.

Together, the three approaches — body, space, and liminality — serve as analytical companions in tracing the return of former Jemaah Islamiyah members after the group's disbandment. Their bodies, marked by beards, headscarves, and particular forms of dress, become living archives of memory that continue to speak within the community. These embodied signs circulate through social spaces in Poso — mosques, markets, neighbourhoods — where belonging is contested and recognition is never fixed but constantly negotiated. At the same time, their journey is liminal: a threshold state of being neither fully outside nor fully reintegrated, suspended between past identities and uncertain futures. Seen together, these lenses reveal reintegration not as a linear outcome but as a fragile, embodied, and spatially situated process of repositioning within the shifting fabric of post-conflict Poso.

JEMAAH ISLAMİYAH DISBANDMENT

Despite its formal dissolution on June 30, 2024, JI's ideological influence is likely to endure among segments of Indonesian society (Ismail, 2025). *Hizbut Tahrir* Indonesia (HTI), *Jamaah Ansharut Daulah* (JAD), *Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia* (MMI), and smaller circles all have been banned in previous years, yet the disbandment of Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) carried a different resonance. For more than three decades, JI had inscribed itself into Indonesia's militant landscape, weaving together *pesantren*, da'wah, and armed training. Its decision to declare loyalty to the Republic of Indonesia signalled not only the end of a clandestine organization but also the unsettling of identities long anchored in allegiance and secrecy.

In August 2024, JI's Poso branch formally declared its disbandment, following symbolic announcements issued from Jakarta down to sub-district levels in Central Sulawesi. The ceremony was staged with visible choreography: state agencies such as National Counterterrorism Agency (BNPT) and Indonesian Special Counterterrorism Task Force (Densus 88 AT Polri) stood alongside religious figures and community leaders, watching as former JI cadres publicly renounced their ties. At the heart of the event was a statement read aloud by the group, preserved in its textual form:

“We, Al-Jamaah Al-Islamiyah (former), the people of Central Sulawesi and its surroundings, declare: (1) Support or we hear and we obey (*samina wa ato'na*) or the dissolution of Al-Jamaah Al-Islamiyah from our senior religious leaders (*masyayikh*), in Bogor, June 30, 2024; (2) Ready to return to the embrace of the Republic of Indonesia and actively participate, moving away from the understanding of excessive extreme attitude (*tatharruf*) and groups; (3) Appreciate the applicable laws in accordance with the regulations in force in the Republic of Indonesia and, with commitment, consistently implement the policy of logical consequences” (TBNews, 2024).

The language was deliberate: loyalty, obedience, participation, law. It was a performance of reconciliation meant to reassure both the state and local communities that JI, at least as an organization, was no more.

Yet the disbandment was far from simple closure. Khoirunnisa & Priyanto (2025) argue it was largely symbolic, celebrated as a counterterrorism success while silencing victims' voices and leaving unaddressed the remnants of violence. Ismail (2025) highlights that Densus 88 AT Polri has identified over 100 active schools linked to JI across Java, Sumatra, Sulawesi, and West Nusa Tenggara, collectively educating around 18,000 students. This extensive

network ensures that JI's ideological influence persists, presenting significant ongoing challenges for counterterrorism initiatives. As Ismail (2025) contends, while dissolution may prevent cadres from joining global jihad fronts, it cannot extinguish the spirit of jihad nurtured by the imagined solidarities of Islamic association (*ukhuwah Islamiyah*).

In Poso, these ambiguities resonate even more deeply. The region remains a symbolic and practical stronghold in JI's history, where training, recruitment, and ideological testing converged during and after the communal conflict (Satria & Sjah, 2025). The transformation of Poso from a site of communal violence into what Satria & Sjah (2025) describe as a "laboratory for jihad" illustrates how extremist groups appropriated post-conflict environments to advance broader militant agendas. Former militants returning to this terrain now face the delicate task of reinserting themselves into communities that still bear the imprint of those histories.

Adnan Aarsal, a charismatic and deeply respected religious leader in Poso, became pivotal in legitimizing the disbandment. Known for his influence during the conflict and later in peacebuilding, his endorsement enabled followers to revoke oaths of allegiance and align themselves with the state (Warta Sulteng, 2024). National figures such as Para Wijayanto and Abu Fatih echoed similar reasoning, acknowledging that imprisonment, suffering, and fatigue had made continuation untenable (Tempo, 2024).

Still, beneath the staged declarations, uncertainties persisted. Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict (2023) noted that underground teachings and informal indoctrination networks continued, even as *pesantren* leaders publicly pledged loyalty to the Republic. The government sought to close the door to JI's resurgence, wary of new divisions, women and children being drawn into militant subcultures, and the potential for sectarian conflict to reignite.

What becomes clear is that disbandment is not a single event but an unfolding process. Former leaders and followers alike must find strategies to socially survive this collapse — some embracing reconciliation, others retreating into quiet networks, and many navigating between memory and reformulation. After thirty years of da'wah, *pesantren*-building, and clandestine militancy, JI's collapse did not erase its imprint. Instead, it produced a liminal moment: a threshold where trauma, memory, and new negotiations intertwine, reshaping how communities imagine belonging, particularly for the most vulnerable — women, children, and those left to live in the shadow of its legacy. As one former incarcerated individual involved in the Poso case reflected in our conversation, the disbandment was not so much a voluntary end as part of the state's agenda-setting; for him, regeneration would continue in other forms,

sustaining the movement's spirit even if its structure has dissolved.

THE BODY AS A SITE OF MEMORY

The discourse of Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) in Poso cannot be read in the same register as that of JI in Java. In Eastern Indonesia, Poso became both a target and a fertile ground for JI's ideas, a place where its networks found resonance and promise. The story begins earlier, with the arrival of migrants under the New Order's transmigration program in the 1970s. Designed to relieve population pressures on Java and secure food self-sufficiency, transmigration succeeded in its developmental goals but also carried unintended consequences. Across the archipelago, new settlements often unsettled old balances, giving rise to communal frictions that would later ignite into conflict — in Ambon, in Kalimantan, and, most fatefully, in Poso.

As Ali-Fauzi (2018) notes, violence in Poso unfolded in two distinct but entangled episodes. The first, between 1998 and 2002, was a communal war between Muslims and Christians, a conflict that reconfigured everyday life in villages and towns. The second, from 2002 to 2007, was marked by targeted acts of terrorism by jihadist groups against Christian communities. Together, these episodes created a layered landscape of violence in which local grievances merged with transnational jihadist agendas.

The demographics of Poso made this convergence possible. The district's population of over 250,000 (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2024) is a mosaic of ethnic and tribal groups: Pamona, Lage, and Kaili in the coastal areas; Napu, Besoa, and Bada in the highlands; alongside Javanese, Bugis, and migrants from Gorontalo. Historically, these communities had coexisted with a degree of openness, sharing livelihoods in farming and fishing. But after 1998, suspicion seeped into daily interactions. Lines of difference hardened, particularly between Muslims and Christians, and violence redefined the ordinary rhythms of coexistence.

Into this charged atmosphere stepped JI. Their presence acted as both match and fuel: organized, ideologically driven, and ready to seize upon the instability. Poso became not just a battlefield but a hub, anchoring JI's broader mission of the Third *Mantiqi* — the eastern command zone that stretched across Mindanao, Sabah, East Kalimantan, and Sulawesi. For JI, the Christian–Muslim conflict provided the ideal terrain to advance the long-standing dream of an Islamic state, attracting fighters including former Darul Islam members who re-entered the struggle under JI's banner. At its height between 1997 and 2002, JI's relationship with al-Qaeda further internationalized this local war,

tying the hills and rivers of Poso to a global project of jihad (Jones, 2005).

Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) once operated through a transnational structure that extended well beyond Indonesia. *Mantiqi* I, based in Malaysia and Singapore, oversaw fundraising; *Mantiqi* II organized jihad in Java, Sumatra, and other Indonesian islands; *Mantiqi* III directed operations in the Philippines, Kalimantan, and Sulawesi; while *Mantiqi* IV managed fundraising networks in Australia (Karnavian, 2015; Nasrum, 2016). This layered hierarchy reveals the sophistication of JI's organizational design, linking local acts of violence with global currents of capital and ideology. Against this backdrop, the declaration of disbandment in Central Sulawesi in August 2024 raised urgent questions: how would reintegration unfold in a region where memories of violence remain vivid, and where the collective silence surrounding the past still lingers?

International Crisis Group (2007) documented in painful detail the pattern of JI's involvement in the Poso conflict. Their acts ranged from targeted killings to bombings, robberies, and attempted assassinations — violence that seeped into the everyday and transformed markets, churches, and roads into fragile spaces of fear:

Table 1
Jemaah Islamiyah's Attack During Poso Conflict

No.	Date	Incidents
1.	November 2003	The murder of the treasurer of the Central Sulawesi Protestant Church and his driver
2.	May 2004	The murder of Palu prosecutor Fery Silalahi by a motorcyclist
3.	July 2004	The murder of a Christian army officer's wife
4.	July 2004	The murder of Protestant pastor Susianti Tinulele
5.	November 2004	The beheading of village head Carminalis Ndele
6.	November 2004	The bombing at Poso's central market, which killed six people
7.	December 2004	The bombing at Imanuel Church in Palu
8.	April 2005	The armed robbery of approximately Rp 500 million in Poso regional government salaries
9.	May 2005	The bombing at Tentena's central market, which killed 22 people

10.	August 2005	The murder of Budianto and Sugito, suspected police informants
11.	October 2005	The murder of Agus Sulaeman, a police officer
12.	October 2005	The beheading of three Christian high school students
13.	December 2005	The bombing of a pork market in Palu, which killed seven people
14.	January 2006	The attempted assassination of the Poso Police Chief by a motorcyclist
15.	2001 Month?	The murder of a Balinese journalist
16.	2004 Month?	Armed robbery against a cigarette company truck and the shooting of its driver

Source: Results of data processing compiled from various sources by the authors.

Today, at least 180 former JI militants in Poso have formally declared their disbandment and pledged loyalty to Pancasila and the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia (Kompas, 2024). Religious leader Adnan Arsal has been pivotal in encouraging their acceptance back into society, framing reintegration as not only symbolic but also functional: a way for reputations to be restored and for former militants to participate once more in community life. Reintegration, however, is negotiated not in declarations alone but in the minutiae of everyday existence. Dress, for instance, remains an embodied marker of continuity and change: veils, burqas, and other attire associated with JI's teachings continue to circulate in Poso, signaling both religious devotion and the enduring imprint of an organizational identity that persists even after formal dissolution.

The disbandment of JI cannot erase the memories inscribed on the bodies of those who lived through Poso's violence. As Lock (1993) reminds us, "the body is not a universal biological constant but a site of social inscription, historical memory, and political struggle." In the context of Poso, bodies of ex-militants and communities alike have been cultivated through militant training, carceral torture, and the embodied memories of conflict. They are at once disciplined and resistant, docile in some settings yet forceful carriers of unresolved narratives.

One former JI commander, imprisoned for his role in the conflict, described torture during his incarceration that left him medically declared infertile — a verdict later unsettled when he fathered children after release. His body thus becomes an archive of contradiction: scarred by institutional violence

yet resistant to its determinations. He also recalled meeting the sole survivor of one of his attacks, claiming she had since converted to Islam and donned the niqab. For him, this encounter was remembered as vindication, violence reframed as da'wah. But these memories, carried in and through his body, remain unsettling for the wider community: what he narrates as divine purpose, others recall as unhealed wounds.

His refusal to be interviewed by foreign, particularly white, researchers, also demonstrates how bodies remain entangled in broader hierarchies of representation. In his view, the Western researcher embodied colonial histories and global counterterrorism agendas. Here the body illustrates Lock's observation (1993) that 'the body mediates all reflection and action upon the world'. His gestures of refusal remind us that the body is not simply private matter but a medium through which historical struggle and political dissent are enacted.

Placed alongside her husband's story, the transformation of a former JI commander's wife — once veiled in niqab, now moving through Poso's marketplace unveiled like other Muslim women — illustrates how reintegration unfolds as an embodied negotiation of appearance, gesture, and meaning. Within JI, the niqab was more than fabric: it functioned as a marker of female identity, aligning with Salafi teachings that framed it as obligation, a symbolic wall that separated insiders from the wider community. To remove it is to dismantle that wall, to reconfigure the body as a communicative surface that signals openness and the will to inhabit neutral space with others (Alfredson & Cungu, 2008; Korobkin, 1992). In this metamorphosis, the body becomes both archive and experiment — carrying the stigma of jihad while testing new possibilities of ordinariness. As Lock (1993) observes, "the body, imbued with social meaning, is now historically situated, and becomes not only a signifier of belonging and order, but also an active forum for the expression of dissent and loss." In Poso, these bodily negotiations make visible the paradox of reintegration: bodies that remain reminders of conflict yet also strive toward the fragile work of becoming civilian.

Although large-scale violence in Poso has waned, the memories of conflict and the narratives once propagated by JI continue to complicate reconciliation (Satria & Sjah, 2025). In this fragile terrain, widows of former commanders gather to support one another in raising children, sustaining livelihoods, and navigating education. Men, too, perform this quiet labour of reintegration: helping each other socialize, work, and care for families. These practices suggest a shift in embodiment — from bodies once defined as "fighters" to bodies that now strive for ordinariness. Yet the "jihadi body" remains inscribed in

memory, both their own and the community's, making reintegration as much about the imagination of others as about their own transformation.

Here, Saba Mahmood's work offers a powerful lens. She reminds us that religious identity is not only a matter of belief and reason but also a material and embodied reality, inhabited and experienced through the body, affect, and sensibility (Mahmood, 2012). In Poso, the hijab, niqab, beard, or other attire associated with JI cannot be read as simple declarations of piety. They are material practices through which identity is performed, remembered, and reworked. Their alteration — removal, reshaping, softening — marks a conscious act of agency, a way of reconstituting the self in relation to others (Mahmood, 2005).

Yet Mahmood also pushes us to complicate our assumptions about agency. Repeated bodily acts train one's memory, desire, and intellect to behave according to established standards of conduct (Mahmood, 2001). In this sense, the niqab or beard once worn by JI members was not merely symbolic, but part of a disciplined practice that cultivated memory and desire toward jihadist ideals. The decision to remove or alter these signs does not necessarily erase discipline, but reorients it toward other forms of belonging. As Mahmood (2001) notes, agency is not only entailed in those acts that result in change but also those that aim toward continuity, stasis, and stability. Reintegration, then, is not simply a rupture with the past; it is also a continuity of bodily discipline, now redirected toward sustaining family life, building trust, and negotiating ordinariness in the everyday.

The body thus becomes what Mahmood (2012) calls the site where the precariousness of religious identity is both experienced and contested. In Poso, this precariousness is lived in ordinary gestures: in a widow's decision to unveil, in the shared labour of raising children, in men's quiet work of caring for families once fractured by conflict. These bodies carry scars of violence and memories of jihad, yet they also enact new modes of agency — not only through change, but through the fragile continuity of living as ordinary citizens once more. What matters are the cultural memories that sustain community boundaries (Assmann & Czaplicka, 1995), the embodied negotiations of everyday life (Mahmood, 2001, 2005, 2012), and the liminal crossroads where former militants and communities alike search for new ways of inhabiting a shared space.

BETWEEN EXCLUSION AND RESISTANCE

The 180 former members of Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) in Poso are not merely

numbers on a security register; they inhabit spaces, relationships, and imaginations within the community. They are religious teachers, traders, farmers, livestock breeders. Outwardly, their profiles are often indistinguishable from the wider population. They move through the same markets, cultivate the same fields, and share the same rhythms of everyday life. Yet what sets them apart lies less in their occupations than in their orientation to the state and its legitimacy. JI's vision of an Islamic state continues to linger as an ideological horizon, shaping how some of these men and women inhabit social space. Publicly, many appear reintegrated; privately, some still carry jihadist worldviews, tactically managing disclosure as a way of maintaining presence within Poso's social fabric. In this sense, reintegration is not a simple homecoming but a negotiation of visibility and silence.

On the afternoon of May 27, 2025, under Poso's sweltering heat, we entered the modest home of Junaidi (a pseudonym), a former JI commander once convicted for his involvement in the beheading of three non-Muslim high school students in 2005 — an event etched into communal memory as one of the cruellest markers of the conflict. For JI at the time, it had been a point of pride; for the community, it remains an open wound. Cultural memory, as Assmann & Czaplicka (1995) argues, preserves the store of knowledge from which a group derives its awareness of unity and peculiarity. In Poso, this means the memory of violence does not simply fade with organizational disbandment but remains inscribed in communal consciousness, marking former JI members simultaneously as insiders and as “the opposite” against which others define themselves (Assmann & Czaplicka, 1995).

Junaidi, a transmigrant from Yogyakarta, greeted us quietly with his wife. Once celebrated for his militancy, he now tills his land, drawing on agricultural skills honed during transmigration. His life story sits at the threshold of resistance and return: leaving the JI network before its disbandment in 2024, he framed his decision in terms of family — particularly the influence of his wife, whose presence anchored his reintegration and reshaped his sense of belonging.

His wife, Hartiningsih (a pseudonym), embodies another spatial negotiation. A Bugis woman, middle-class and economically successful, she runs a shop in Poso's bustling market — a space where identities are displayed and reputations built. Known for their resilience in trade, Bugis women often carry families through hardship, and Hartiningsih was no exception. Before marrying Junaidi, she had raised six children as a widow, sustaining her household through commerce. Her entry into JI's orbit was not ideological but relational, mediated through marriage. Initially, she had not worn the hijab and identified herself as a modern Muslim woman. But the Christian-Muslim

conflict in Poso unsettled her sense of self. Witnessing division, she sought refuge in a more visible religious identity, eventually reshaping her appearance and practices in line with Islamic norms.

The memory of violence in Poso is inscribed not only in collective recollection but also in the geography of everyday spaces. As Ali-Fauzi (2018) records, “these include snipers who killed 13 Christians in Poso and Morowali in October 2003; a minibus explosion in front of the Poso market that resulted in six deaths in November 2004; a bomb explosion in front of the Tentena market on May 28, 2005, that killed 23 people; the mutilation of three schoolgirls in October 2005; a bomb explosion in the Palu market on December 31, 2005, that caused the death of 8 people; and two bomb explosions, which killed a man and a woman in 2006.” Such acts transformed markets, schools, and roads into haunted sites, reshaping how people moved, gathered, and remembered. Here, collective memory becomes normative: the narratives of past violence provide criteria, implicit and explicit, by which communities authorize, criticize, or justify contemporary actions (Knapp, 1989).

Post-conflict Poso itself remains spatially divided along religious lines, where Muslims and Christians inhabit different geographical zones, schools, and neighbourhoods (Mashuri et al., 2024). Segregated residential patterns persist: most Muslims in the capital, most Christians in the southern areas (Mashuri et al., 2024). This polarization, born of displacement, created vulnerabilities for groups like JI to embed themselves in fractured spaces, but also opportunities for peacebuilding through education (Mashuri et al., 2024). The religious diversity of Poso, once the basis of coexistence, was restructured through conflict: Christians exiled to the beach shore, Muslims consolidating inland, and militant groups embedding themselves in these fault-lines of belonging and exclusion.

Counterterrorism measures have further reconfigured this spatial order. Dresser et al. (2025) argue that counter-terrorism training and vigilance campaigns, while designed to enhance safety, often embed suspicion and surveillance into everyday life, producing unintended consequences: fostering exclusion, marginalization, and fear among communities most frequently targeted. Rather than building trust, such vigilance campaigns may deepen social divisions, cultivate environments of fear, and stigmatise minority identities in public space (Dresser et al., 2025). These dynamics were visible in Poso, where workplaces, schools, religious institutions, and neighbourhoods became saturated with the spatialisation of counter-terrorism.

During the height of military operations between 2016–2020, local communities reported displacement and hardship. Many residents evacuated their farms;

those who remained faced accusations of being terrorist accomplices. As Haripin et al. (2024) observe, ‘instead of uplifting the social and economic condition of the local community, the territorial operation that was conducted by the military further marginalised the people living in the operation area.’ This left deep marks in the landscape of trust, where the boundary between state protection and state suspicion became blurred.

In shifting from exclusion to participation, Junaidi’s household illustrates how reintegration is both enabled and constrained by these spatial configurations. Suspicion lingers, but so too does the possibility of reclaiming space through everyday acts — running a market stall, tending land, sharing meals with neighbours. Former militants and their families, once denied access to communal life, are gradually re-entering educational, economic, and social spaces. As Assmann & Czaplicka (1995) reminds us, cultural memory works through identificatory determination — in positive forms of “we are this” or negative forms of “that is our opposite.” In Poso, former JI members embody both, standing as reminders of violence yet also testing the fragile possibility of coexistence. Reintegration in Poso thus unfolds not in a vacuum but within landscapes of divided geographies, surveillance, and cultural memory, where solidarity projects emerge against the backdrop of haunted markets and roads that still whisper of conflict.

REINTEGRATION AS LOCAL PEACE INITIATIVE

The state regards JI primarily as a “deradicalization target” — a category to be managed, monitored, and disciplined. Yet at the community level, the picture is more complicated. Villages, mosques, and neighbourhoods remain caught in a quiet dilemma: should former JI militants be embraced as neighbours returning home, or kept at a wary distance as lingering reminders of conflict? Within this tense atmosphere, the trajectories of some 180 former members diverge. A number have retreated from public life, living in muted withdrawal, while others cautiously attempt to reclaim their religious identities in more moderate forms — for instance, by participating in Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) or Muhammadiyah, where the language of piety is anchored less in militancy and more in community service. As Pettinger (2020) observes, “pre-emptive counter-terrorism regimes cannot escape their reliance upon the intensely subjective separation of ‘good’ from ‘bad’, and of suspicion of the Other.” In Poso, this logic lingers in everyday encounters, where suspicion and recognition coexist uneasily.

For many, reintegration resembles what Turner (1967) called a liminal condition: a space of being in-between — no longer militants, but not yet

fully ordinary citizens. Their lives unfold at a crossroads, suspended between identities that have not fully dissolved and new ones that have yet to take shape. Reintegration is precisely this struggle: the act of inhabiting a threshold while being acted upon by both state surveillance and communal memory. Some find belonging through mosque communities that encourage reinterpretations of faith, others through farming cooperatives or small businesses, and still others through embedding themselves in moderate circles. Each path reflects a negotiation with stigma, a search for continuity in lives marked by rupture.

Not all former JI members in Poso were drawn into militancy by the communal war itself; some framed their past jihad as resistance to wider structures of social injustice. Terrorism is not simply a descriptive category but a technology of governance, born out of colonial logics, which entrenches exceptional measures as normal responses to political violence (Khan, 2024). For them, jihad was less about sectarian strife than about confronting a system they saw as corrupt or *toghut*. This rationale — fluid, adaptive, and resistant — lingers even after the formal disbandment of JI, showing how ideology persists beyond organizations. Reintegration, therefore, is not merely dismantling cells but also grappling with embodied memories of injustice. As Maringira (2025) argues, ex-combatants rarely transition fully into civilian life because their military identities remain embodied, active in both personal and political realms. In Poso, this means ex-JI members occupy an uneasy threshold: disciplined as “targets,” yet carrying embodied pasts as resources for resistance and remembrance.

From field observations, the most difficult hurdle for reintegration is not theological but economic. Before disbandment, JI maintained internal business bases under emirs to sustain income and cohesion. Once dismantled, many were cut adrift, stripped of that institutional economy. Survival now depends on improvisation: roadside stalls, farming, trade in herbal goods. Some carve out what might be called a sub-subaltern space in the social structure — modest enterprises that allow them to re-enter public life without drawing attention to their pasts. As Kaleem (2022) notes, “when surveillance becomes associated with safeguarding and vulnerability, the monitoring of conducts does not end with professional duties; people carry over the logic of risk into their personal interactions as well.” The ex-JI entrepreneur is therefore both shopkeeper and suspect, woven into daily life yet watched from its margins.

Junaidi and his wife exemplify this paradox. Once commanders in JI, they now run a small business in herbal products and health equipment. Their shift from ideological leadership to entrepreneurship illustrates how reintegration unfolds not through abstract policy but through the quiet labour of farming,

trading, exchanging goods — creating fragile spaces where dialogue with neighbours can begin again. Yet, as Maringira (2025) reminds us, “the burden of ex-combatants’ transition into civilian life is left to the ex-combatants and the communities through which they transit.” Reintegration here is not gifted by policy but negotiated through households, kinship ties, and markets.

Still, tension persists. As former members told us, the disbandment of JI did not erase the dream of an Islamic state; it only reshaped its terrain. Some continue to see social and economic injustice as grounds for jihad. “JI’s ability to mobilise around unresolved grievances in Poso demonstrates the enduring risk of extremist resurgence in post-conflict environments” (Satria & Sjah, 2025). Community memory sets symbolic boundaries: deciding who may return, and who remains an outsider. Cultural memory, as Assmann & Czaplicka (1995) suggests, holds “fixed points” of fateful events, preserved through rituals and narratives. These memories, both intimate and collective, authorize moral judgments about who belongs, and under what terms.

The state, meanwhile, continues to view reintegration through a securitized lens. Ajil (2025) conceptualizes counterterrorism as a spatialized biopolitical dispositive, where counter-terror power flows through institutions and everyday spaces, embedding itself in bodies and geographies. In Poso, this takes the form of checkpoints, patrols, and programs branded as deradicalization, which, while meant to provide safety, often reinforce suspicion. As Dresser et al. (2025) observe, counterterror vigilance campaigns risk deepening social divisions, cultivating fear, and stigmatizing minority identities in public space. Rather than trust, they produce fragmentation.

Even initiatives framed as benevolent — scholarships for children of convicted militants, some sent to universities or aviation academies — remain double-edged. They acknowledge material needs but risk reinforcing the sense that reintegration is a state-managed spectacle, rather than a community-driven process. Local figures like Adnan Arsyal stress that what former militants need most is economic opportunity and education rooted in everyday life, not the glare of securitized projects.

Ultimately, the question is not whether ex-JI militants can be “deradicalized” but how reintegration is imagined, by whom, and at what cost. Funkenstein (1989) reminds us that memory is never private but mediated by symbols and institutions. In Poso, local peace initiatives and neighbourhood reconciliation often stand in tension with state-authored counterterror narratives. The result is a liminal space where ex-militants and communities negotiate belonging amid overlapping yet competing frameworks of memory. Winkler & Kristensen (2022) describe such moments of transition as being “betwixt

and between” — suspended states where the old order has dissolved but the new has not yet taken root. Reintegration in Poso inhabits precisely this space: precarious yet creative, haunted by the past yet opening toward fragile solidarities of everyday life.

CONCLUSION

The finding of this study shows that disbandment of Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) in Poso demonstrates ideological and cultural networks that do not vanish with the dissolution of formal organizations. As our fieldwork shows, the legacy of JI is not only organizational but embodied, spatial, and remembered. Its traces persist in bodies marked by training and imprisonment, in spaces once haunted by checkpoints and segregated neighbourhoods, and in memories that continue to define who belongs and who remains outside the circle of community. Disbandment may have signalled a new milestone in Indonesia’s counterterrorism narrative, but for those who lived the conflict, it is less an end than a turning point. What shapes the trajectories of former militants is not merely the absence of JI’s command structure but the presence of relationships: family ties, community acceptance, the ability to forge livelihoods and new meanings. These are the forces that determine whether one “returns home” as a neighbour, or drifts toward the margins as an outsider. Reintegration in Poso is therefore a negotiation, suspended between exclusion and acceptance, memory and forgetting.

However, we need to study further analysis on this case to problematize disbandment, which describes beyond state narratives of success. The lesson of Poso is that state-led counterterrorism alone cannot secure this future. The reintegration of former JI members in Poso thus reflects more than a policy achievement; it is an unfinished anthropology of return. Bodies, spaces, and memories are continuously reconfigured, and peace itself is made and unmade in these negotiations. The “way home” is not simply a return, but a fragile and ongoing process of severing old ties while reweaving the threads of harmony in a landscape where trauma still lingers and futures remain contested.

The social and cultural process of reintegration of former JI is not linear but cyclical, a recycling of embodiment. Bodies once inscribed with the discipline of jihad are now reshaped within other social networks among former JI members—as ordinary citizens, sometimes as preachers, or as figures of suspicion. Lock (1993) reminds us that the body is a site where memory, politics, and identity intersect; in Poso, these former jihadi bodies carry both the symbolic margins of past militancy and the fragile hope of new belonging. Even within the remnants of prison networks, what once functioned as cells

of militant resistance now contain the possibility of reweaving social trust. The transformation of one former commander — now trusted by both Muslim and Christian communities to mediate dialogue — is emblematic of how ruptured identities can become resources for peace.

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**MEMANG LAMPUNG:
Discursive Relations of Islam and Local Culture
Within The Bark Manuscript No. 2476**

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ABSTRACT

Studies on Islam in Lampung have thus far provided limited insight into the nature of the relationship between Islam and local culture during the early period of its introduction. This study aims to examine that relationship as represented in Memang (ritual chants) from Lampung. This research employs a qualitative design using a philological approach. The primary data source consists of the transcription and transliteration of a bark-paper manuscript from the Lampung Museum, inventory number 2476. The data are analyzed through the theoretical framework of Islam as a discursive tradition, as articulated by Talal Asad. The findings indicate that Bark Manuscript No. 2476 contains four Memang texts that reflect a discursive relationship between Islam and Lampung culture. This relationship is manifested through five key indicators: (1) the positioning of Islam as a source of sacred legitimacy; (2) the integration of Islamic discourse into local ritual language; (3) the continuity and rearticulation of local cosmology; (4) the construction of a semantic hierarchy within the structure of the Memang texts; and (5) the performativity of ritual language as an operational expression of Islamic discourse. This study concludes that the configuration of Memang texts in Lampung reflects a discursive mode of interaction between Islam and local culture, in which local religious practices operate within Islam as a discursive tradition.

Keywords: Islam; Local Culture; Lampung Memang; Discursive Tradition; Talal Asad.

INTRODUCTION

Scholarly studies on the relationship between Islam and local culture in Indonesia have commonly categorized local Islamic expressions into three broad patterns: syncretic Islam, acculturative Islam, and collaborative Islam. The syncretic pattern is prominently reflected in the works of scholars such as Geertz (1981), Mulder (1997), Beatty (1996: 271-88), Simuh (2003), and Hutomo (2001), who emphasize the blending of Islamic elements with pre-Islamic beliefs and ritual practices. In contrast, the acculturative pattern of Islam is articulated in the studies of Hefner (1985), Woodward (1999), Muhaimin (2002), Budiwanti (2000), and Hilmi (2001) Prasetyo (1994), Headley (1997), Nakamura (1983), Mulkan (2000), Radam (2001), and Bartholomew (2001), which highlight processes of cultural negotiation whereby Islamic norms are integrated into existing local symbolic systems without entirely displacing them.

A third pattern, referred to as collaborative Islam, is proposed in Nur Syam's study *Tradisi Islam Pesisiran* (2005). Rather than constituting a distinct category, collaborative Islam can be understood as a mode of interaction situated within the continuum between syncretic and acculturative Islam. It denotes a form of Islam–local culture relationship shaped through ongoing discursive and practical negotiations between social agents—particularly local elites—and the wider community. This pattern underscores a continuous dialectical process in which Islamic meanings are not merely adopted or adapted but are actively rearticulated within local cultural frameworks.

Upon closer examination, the typologies of syncretic Islam, acculturative Islam, and collaborative Islam each entail unresolved conceptual problems. These categories tend to imply a blending of Islam with local traditions, thereby positioning Islamic practices in Indonesia as forms of religiosity that deviate from doctrinal purity and are implicitly characterized as heterodox. Consequently, the labeling of Indonesian Islam as syncretic, acculturative, or collaborative effectively displaces local Islamic practices from the domain of Islamic orthodoxy and situates them within a framework of heterodoxy. Although Nur Syam's notion of collaborative Islam seeks to mitigate this problem by emphasizing interaction rather than fusion, it does not eliminate the perception of locality as an external element that compromises Islamic normativity within Indonesian Muslim religious practices.

The academic debate on the relationship between Islam and local culture, as shown in these three patterns, shows that Islamic practice in Indonesia has always been in a space of negotiation between the norms of Islamic teachings and the local socio-cultural context. The syncretic, acculturative,

and collaborative patterns not only serve as a classification tool but also reflect the way scholars understand the historical and cultural dynamics of Islam in the archipelago. However, the diversity of these findings also indicates a model that is fully able to explain the complexity of social Islamic practices in different regions. Therefore, the study of Lampung Islam, especially through the tradition of *Memang*, is important to enrich the discourse. Islam Lampung offers a distinctive empirical terrain, where ritual language, local cosmology, and normative references of Islam are intertwined in the religious practices of the community, thus opening up space for a more contextual reading of Islamic dialectics and local culture.

From a historical perspective, Islam has long operated as a normative religious tradition within indigenous Lampung society. Hilman Hadikusuma observes that the Lampung ethnic community had become acquainted with Islam and began rearticulating their existing belief systems within an Islamic framework as early as the fifteenth century CE (Hadikusuma, 1985: 41). Nevertheless, scholarly attention to the discursive processes through which Islamic norms and local cultural practices were negotiated during this formative period remains limited. This gap is particularly significant given that, before Islam's presence, Lampung society was already shaped by Hindu teachings and deity-centered cosmologies (Hadikusuma, 1985: 161). As a result, the establishment of Islam in the region did not simply replace earlier traditions but unfolded through a discursive engagement in which Islamic concepts, ritual languages, and forms of authority were continuously interpreted and re-embedded within local cultural idioms. This study addresses this lacuna by examining the early dialectical configurations of Islam and Lampung culture as manifested in ritual texts, thereby situating Lampung Islam within Islam's broader discursive tradition.

Scholarly studies on Islam in Lampung have largely been conducted through historical and cultural approaches. Within the historical framework, these studies have produced three major perspectives concerning the origins of Islam's arrival in Lampung: first, the view that traces the introduction of Islam to the Pagaruyung region; second, the perspective that associates it with Palembang; and third, the argument that links the spread of Islam in Lampung to Banten (Hadikusuma, 1985:41; Bukri et al., 1977: 7). Such historically oriented accounts can be found in the works of Hadikusuma (1985: 36), Bukri (1977: 7), Syahputra (2007), Juliadi et al. (2005), Hakiki (2020), and Wijayati (2011).

Meanwhile, studies of Islam in Lampung employing a cultural approach have primarily focused on identifying and interpreting Islamic values embedded

within Lampung traditions. Research in this vein has been conducted by Yusuf (2016), Zarkasi (2007, 2020), and Setiawan (2019), who examine Islamic values within *Piil Pesenggiri*, the ethical philosophy of indigenous Lampung society. Similarly, Isnaeni and Hakiki (2016) explore the presence of Islamic values in Lampung Pepadun customary marriage practices. In addition, numerous other studies have concentrated on Islamic values articulated in various Lampung traditions, including the works of Ambara (2020) and Kurniawan (2018). Nevertheless, these studies have not yet offered a sustained analysis of the discursive relationship between Islam and Lampung culture during the early phase of Islamization in the region.

As with the process of Islamization in other parts of the Indonesian archipelago, the successful dissemination of Islam in Lampung was supported by a conciliatory and accommodative mode of engagement between Islamic teachings and the local traditions through which those teachings were articulated. In this regard, esoteric dimensions of Islam constitute an important epistemological key. Put differently, the form of Islam that initially took root in Indonesia was largely characterized by Sufistic or mystical orientations. As noted by Braginsky, this was because the Sufi ethos resonated closely with the prevailing religious mentality of Indonesian societies (Braginsky, 1993: XI). Moreover, M. C. Ricklefs's study of Islamization in Java demonstrates that the process was fundamentally inaugurated through what he terms a "mystic synthesis" between Islam and the existing mystical traditions of the North Coast polities. This synthesis subsequently provided a crucial gateway for the more extensive and institutionalized spread of Islam (Musadad, 2016).

Traces of mystical synthesis as evidence of Islamization in the Indonesian archipelago can be observed in mantra traditions, namely sacred invocations believed to possess magical and supernatural efficacy and employed as ritual means to facilitate the attainment of particular goals (Saputra, 2007: 9). Etymological inquiry suggests that the term *mantra* derives from the Sanskrit *mantra*, referring to sacred utterances found in the Vedic scriptures and associated with magical practices, particularly those oriented toward benevolent purposes (Humaeni, 2004: 58). Another perspective argues that the term *mantra* originates from the Javanese language, emphasizing the creative power and mental force of human cognition as a means of protection against malevolent disturbances (Hartata, 2010: 38; Saddono et al., 2016).

Within both traditions, the poetic sequences of words that constitute mantras are understood to possess symbolic, spiritual, or supernatural efficacy (Saputra, 2007: 95-96; Sudjiman, 1990: 51). On this basis, Bronisław Malinowski argues that the mantra represents the most crucial element of magic. For Malinowski,

the mantra embodies the esoteric dimension of magic, inseparably embedded within magical ritual and accessible only to the practitioner. Among indigenous societies, magical knowledge is often synonymous with knowledge of mantras, and analyses of magical action consistently reveal that ritual practices revolve around the utterance of mantras. Magical formulas, or mantras, thus constitute the core of magical performance (Humaeni, 2004: 59).

Mantras, as one of the most archaic forms of oral cultural production, holistically represent social reality, encompassing multiple dimensions of life, including belief systems, social structures, and human responses to natural phenomena and suffering (Malinowski, 1948: 67). Accordingly, mantras do not function merely as esoteric strings of words but rather as manifestations of a community's value orientations and worldview in confronting the uncertainties of reality (Geertz, 1976: 142). In practice, mantras thus reflect how human actors organize and mobilize spiritual forces to intervene in the physical realm, whether for purposes of protection, healing, or the invocation of prosperity (Malinowski, 1948: 72).

Within the context of plural belief systems, the structure and substance of mantras often reflect processes of profound cultural assimilation, in which multiple civilizational layers engage in dialectical interaction without necessarily negating one another (Woodward, 1989: 150). This assimilative dynamic becomes apparent when elements of local or pre-Islamic belief—such as the personification of natural forces and divine entities—are articulated alongside monotheistic theological concepts, resulting in distinctive forms of spiritual hybridity (Woodward, 1989: 153). In the context of the Indonesian archipelago, mantras function as dynamic spaces of identity negotiation, wherein religious values introduced at a later stage are absorbed, reinterpreted, and embedded within local wisdom, thereby forming a coherent and functional religious system for the communities that sustain them.

Traces of mystical synthesis resulting from conciliatory and reconciliatory engagements between Islam and local traditions can also be found in Lampung mantras. Within the cultural repertoire of Lampung society, mantras are known as *Memang*. The presence of *Memang* constitutes an integral component of the Lampung belief system (Hadikusuma, 1985: 161-162). In everyday life, *Memang* functions as a medium through which individuals seek to engage with supernatural forces believed to assist in the realization of particular aims. Accordingly, *Memang* is commonly recited as part of specific ritual practices or incorporated into daily devotional utterances intended to establish proximity to these perceived supernatural powers. In addition, *Memang* is also employed to acquire forms of ritual potency believed to facilitate the smooth conduct of

one's life.

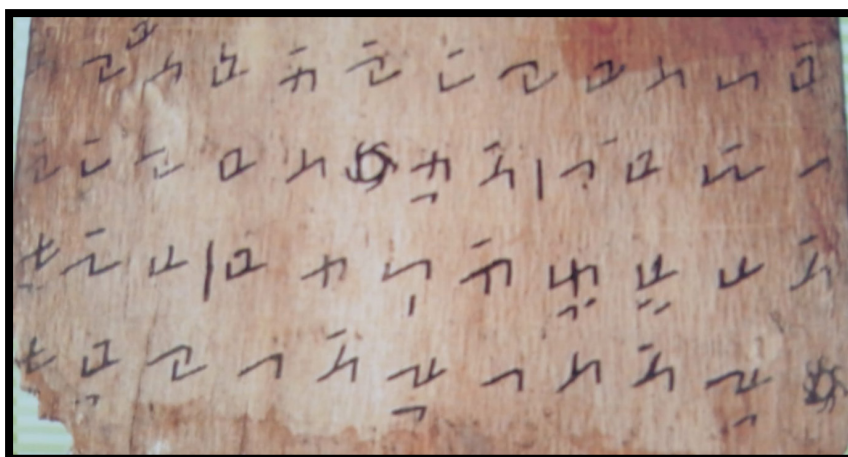
This article explores the relationship between Islam and local culture at the textual and semantic levels as reflected in Lampung mantra manuscripts. It is based on qualitative research employing a philological approach. The primary data derive from the transcriptions and transliterations produced by Zuraida Kherustika et al. (2009) and published by the Lampung Provincial State Museum "Ruwai Jurai." In several instances, limited textual reconstruction has been undertaken where certain readings appear semantically or linguistically problematic. These reconstructions are conducted with reference to the structural features of the Lampung language and the religious context of the text. All reconstructions remain tentative and are presented explicitly to ensure analytical transparency.

This article further focuses on the *Memang* contained in Bark Manuscript No. 2476 and analyzes the patterns of relationship between Islam and Lampung culture as articulated in the text. The analytical process is guided by Talal Asad's theory of Islam as a discursive tradition, which conceptualizes Islam as a living tradition sustained through historically transmitted practices, forms of authority, and disciplinary frameworks enacted within specific social contexts (Asad, 1986: 14-15). Such a discursive tradition not only produces meaning but also regulates the conditions under which particular practices are recognized as legitimate or regarded as deviant within an Islamic horizon. This theoretical framework enables a more contextualized reading of *Memang* practices in Bark Manuscript No. 2476, which have often been interpreted reductively as instances of syncretism or as residual elements of pre-Islamic belief.

MEMANG IN BARK MANUSCRIPT NO. 2476

Memang is the term employed by the indigenous Lampung community to denote ritual incantations or mantras. The persistence of *Memang* reflects the long-standing presence of ritual knowledge within Lampung society, comparable to analogous practices found in other regional cultures. Such practices have been transmitted across generations and are deeply embedded within the Lampung cosmological imagination. Historical traces of *Memang* are preserved in the Lampung written tradition, particularly in ancient manuscripts inscribed on bark media. These manuscripts, now housed in the Lampung Museum, provide material evidence of the continuity of *Memang* as an integral component of indigenous Lampung systems of knowledge, ritual practice, and cosmological understanding.

The manuscript examined in this study is preserved in the Lampung Museum collection under inventory number 2476. The codex is written on *halim* bark and measures 15 cm in length, 9.6 cm in width, and approximately 1.2 cm in thickness. It consists of nineteen leaves, arranged on two sides: Side A and Side B. Side A comprises seven leaves, while Side B consists of twelve leaves. The manuscript is generally in fair condition; however, damage is evident on leaves 11 and 12, resulting in partial loss of legibility. The text is inscribed in the ancient Lampung script (*Had*) (Kherustika, 2009: 2-3).



Picture. Photograph of Bark Manuscript No. 2476

Side A contains three *Memang*, namely a *Memang* for protection (*keselamatan*), a *Memang* for warding off evil spirits (*penolak setan*), and a *Memang* for repelling slander (*penangkal fitnah*). The *Memang* for protection appears on pages 1, 2, and 3 of the manuscript and constitutes a single, continuous incantation. The text of this *Memang* reads as follows:

O Allohumma wujuti ma, ya Bumi ya Siti usung khajeki
 Ya jagat usung bakhekat. Ya jagat pratala ngabar panca baya.
 Sukma luhur ruh ilapi ratu ni nyawa, ya manan ya manan ya santa
 Ya Dahiyan ya Burhan ya Ghopuron, warna-warna sekaliyan berupa
 Ya Nabi Rasululloh, Allohumma Nagara Deli, Mekah, Madinah
 Neda selamat Tuhanku Alloh. Jahi Alloh kahiri¹ Allohu ta'ala,
 Ya Nabi Muhammad mintak tulung Tuhanku Alloh wal malaikatih wa
 Rasulih birahmatika ya Arhamar Rahimin (Kherustika et al. 2009: 5-7).

¹ read as “kahiri” in Kerustina et al. (2009, p. 7). Referring to Islamic tradition, it is likely to be read as “khoiri.”

Translation:

O Allah, the source of all existence. O earth, O soil, bring forth sustenance.

O universe, bestow blessing. O cosmic realm, dispel all forms of harm. Noble soul, indwelling spirit (*rūḥ idāfi*), sovereign over all life.

O Most Generous, O Most Generous, O Most Holy Lord.

O Supreme Judge, O Bestower of Proof, O Most Forgiving, you are the creator of all forms and manifestations that exist in this world.

O Prophet, the Messenger of God. O Allah, by virtue of the sanctity of the lands of Deli, Mecca, and Medina, I seek protection from You, my Lord Allah.

O Prophet Muhammad, I seek assistance from my Lord Allah, as well as from His angels and His messengers. By Your mercy, O Most Compassionate of the compassionate.

This *Memang* functions as a ritual incantation for protection and the invocation of sustenance. It consists of a sequence of supplications and invocations addressed to God, the cosmos, and religious figures. The text opens by identifying Allah as the source of existence and being, followed by the invocation of the earth and *jagat pratala* as integral components of the cosmic order. The incantation further refers to spiritual elements of the human person—such as the soul (*sukma*), spirit (*rūḥ*), and life force (*nyawa*)—and incorporates divine attributes that emphasize generosity and forgiveness. Subsequently, the text invokes the Prophet Muhammad alongside sacred Islamic cities such as Mecca and Medina, articulating a plea for protection addressed to God. In its concluding section, the *Memang* expresses a request for assistance from Allah, His angels, and His messengers, with the ultimate aim of attaining divine mercy and protection.

The second *Memang* is located on page 4 of the manuscript. The text of this incantation is as follows:

Cakhita sihibul karima, Tikhon tikhon masakhon, nur ligang namamu bumi, nur gaya namamu langit, nur hikhang nama bulan, nur nur hurip nama mu angin, nur ni Muhammad Adam Rosululloh. nata sarka sari sasi anwil sian bursa jasa khon bumi tidanga (Kherustika et al. 2009: 10).

Translation:

(This is) The account of the possessor of glory. O unseen entity (Tikhon), submit and be obedient. Vast light is your name, O earth; great light is your name, O sky; radiant light is your name, O moon; living light is

your name, O wind. The light of Muhammad, Adam, the Messenger of God, orders the cosmos and the essence of the moon. That breath is real; become the firm earth, boundless and enduring.

This *Memang* text constitutes a “*putihan*” mantra, functioning as a form of “*pagar bumi*” (earth-bound protective barrier or spiritual safeguarding) or warding off evil spirits. Such mantras are widely attested in Nusantara Sufi traditions and reflect a harmonious synthesis between Islamic–Sufi cosmology and the local wisdom of Sumatran societies, particularly those of Lampung and its surrounding regions. The invocation of the term “*Tikhon*” as an unseen entity (demonic being) at the opening of the mantra forms part of a ritualized procedure of spiritual purification and boundary-setting, intended to clear the metaphysical pathway so that the sacred intention articulated in the subsequent lines remains uncontaminated by supernatural interference. This invocation does not imply alliance or communion with demonic forces; rather, it serves to affirm the ontological hierarchy in which humans, as descendants of Adam and bearers of the *Nur Muhammad*, are positioned above both natural elements and demonic entities.

The third *Memang* is located on pages 4 and 5 of the manuscript. The text of this incantation is as follows:

Minyak khatuni segala ya khatu bakha isini alam, pala sekhoba hatuni taala, amakho buwang hiba, taalalulloh tawagh, nang ning bawas, siyang di kulen mula-mula jadi hatu lawek, hatu kima si pakha huku tawagh (Kherustika et al. 2009: 11-12).

Translation:

The oil, sovereign over all things, is the ruler (essence) of all that fills the cosmos. This liquid is none other than the sovereign force derived from the Highest. By divine command, remove misfortune and all that brings sorrow. By the exaltation of Allah, become neutral and purified; enter a state of inner calm and stillness. Cleanse the remaining traces of misfortune, illuminating the inner self in accordance with your primordial origin as the Queen of the Sea, Queen Kima, sovereign of all rulers. Neutralize and purify.

This *Memang* constitutes a *Panawar* formula structured around two distinct spiritual dimensions: Islam and the indigenous wisdom of the Lampung community. The Islamic element is evidenced by the term “*Pala sekhoba*”, a loan from the Arabic phrase “*fa laa syarooba*”, which is interpreted as “this

liquid does not exist.” Additional Islamic references include the terms “*amaro*” (command), “*Ta’ala*”, and “*Taalalulloh*”, collectively reflecting the integration of Islamic religious discourse within the Lampung spiritual framework.

Meanwhile, side B of the manuscript no. 2476, which consists of 12 pages, can only be read for 10 pages. Pages 11 and 12 are no longer readable. It contains one mantra, namely (Kherustika et al. 2009):

O Ibu Bapa Ibu Pertiwi buka kancing Muhammad keluar penutup bumi.
Batara Guru Tuha Batara Guru Muda Batara Rahma Batara Bassa muku lapak (p. 17).²

*Khadu wawangkun ulahni Alloh hahghobeti kikasi a gho ngala ni Alloh nyak hambani Alloh.*³

Pangikhan Halas sikam mena jadi nabi Halas ngawangku bumi tanoh sikin duwa (p. 18)⁴ *hambani Alloh.*

Anakni nabi Suliman maka diwi Sangkebut diwi Aminah diwi Amunah diwi sang hening nyak hamba kilu suka kilu khejeki.

Puteri Keling anakni diwa Langkati nga lan di kayin.

Diwa Langkati ngalan tukhun nukhun ka sengiek bawang bangkek luhni puteri Keling kayu sengek punya sanya jalani puteri keeling balapu ke sengiek hal takani puteri keeling puteri papotokh keling sengiek.

Yeh ni puteri keeling sapa hik lidah nginjam bumi khadu sukani Alloh sapa hik lidah khik nyak nunggu bumi sa.

Ruhi kana lumu bumi ruhi, dung nyawa mu langik ruhi dung nyawa mu ayakh nyawa ni adam tutep nyawa pak di kutup Alloh sapa nyengiek.

Nabi Sim. Nabi Halas.

Batara Wasenu, Batara Barahmana, Batara Kuni (p. 24).⁵ *Sayih malikuni taparaku lana huwa kala Adam jangardis sejatan di cuba* (p. 16-25).

Translation:

O Mother and Father, O Mother Earth, undo the buttons of Muhammad, unveil the veil of the earth.

Batara Guru Tua, Batara Guru Muda, Batara Brahma, Batara Vassa, who stretches across the world.

It has been brought into existence by the will of Allah, granted and cherished, (it is) a creation of Allah; I am a servant of Allah. Prince Halas, when he was elevated to become Prophet Halas,

² Referring to Hindu tradition, the possibility reading is *Batara Brahma* and *Batara Vassu* which means *Batara Brahma* and *Batara Vassu*

³ Read as “a gho ngala ni Alloh”. Referring to the Lampung language pattern, it is likely that the reading is “*aghung ulahni Alloh*” which means ... adik oleh Alloh.

⁴ It is written as “*sikin duwa*”. However according to the Lampung dictionary, it is more likely to be written as “*sikinduwa*”, which means “we”.

⁵ Written as “*Batara Wasenu, Batara Barahmana, Batara Kuni*”. Referring to Hindu tradition, it is likely to be read as “*Batara Wisnu, Batara Brahma, Batara Agni*”.

Who guards and protects the earth and the land, we are Allah's servants. The child of Prophet Solomon, namely Dewi Sangkebut, Dewi Aminah, Dewi Amunah, Dewi Sang Hening, I, the servant, ask for sustenance.

The Keling princess, child of Dewa Langkati, who holds authority in the heavenly realms.

Dewa Langkati himself descended to confront *sengiek bawang bangkek* (a festering and destructive disease). The tears of Princess Keling became wood (a medicinal remedy) to counter this disease, truly and manifestly enacted. She, Princess Keling, sweeps away [strikes] towards the afflicted.

All power belongs to Princess Keling, the princess who severs/eradicates the Keling disease.

The water (power) of Princess Keling—whoever's tongue draws upon the power of the earth; it is by Allah's will. Whoever speaks with me indeed protects this earth.

O spirits bound to the earth, O spirits whose souls resound in the sky, O spirits whose echoes resound in the water, the life of Adam (the patient) is enclosed (protected) at the four poles of Allah against anyone who harms.

(In the name of) Prophet Sim, Prophet Halas, Batara Vishnu, Batara Brahma, Batara Kuni. O Sheikh Malikut, we seek blessing (*tabarruk*) through Him (Allah) as in the time of Adam. (Thus, all) mighty weapons shall not prevail when tested.

The foregoing text indicates that this *Memang* functions as a healing *Panawar* (*tambar*) mantra. Its primary purpose is to treat a specific physical ailment, referred to as *sengiek bawang bangkek*, a disease characterized by inflammation and putrefaction. Thus, this mantra is not merely a general prayer but constitutes a spiritual prescription for skin diseases or chronic infections.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ISLAM AND LOCAL CULTURE IN MEMANG

Studies on the relationship between Islam and local cultures in the Nusantara region generally indicate that the process of Islamization more often occurs through symbolic integration and the transformation of meaning within cultural practices—including oral traditions and rituals—rather than through the radical rupture of existing traditions. This aligns with Clifford Geertz's perspective, which posits that religion functions as a system of symbols always interpreted through the lens of local culture, such that religious expressions are never entirely detached from their local context (Geertz, 1976: 4-7). Within this framework, Lampung can indeed be understood as a ritual text

representing the dialectic between Islam and local culture at both the semantic and symbolic levels.

Within the framework of Talal Asad's thought, the existence of *Memang* Lampung can be understood as part of the discursive tradition of Islam—a field of practice and discourse in which Islamic meanings are produced, transmitted, and interpreted through diverse cultural forms (Asad, 1986:14-15). From this perspective, the mantra is not merely regarded as a residue of pre-Islamic tradition but as a symbolic space where the encounter of meanings between Islam and local culture occurs. Islam manifests in *Memang* Lampung not as a normative system detached from context, but as a discourse articulated through ritual language, local cosmology, and symbolic structures embedded in Lampung society. As Asad emphasizes, the Islamic discursive tradition allows for diversity of expression as long as it remains connected to historically transmitted core Islamic concepts (Asad, 1986: 16-17). Accordingly, the mantra texts on bark manuscripts should not be read as vague syncretism but as a local articulation of Islamic discourse operating at both semantic and symbolic levels. From this perspective, the dialectic between Islam and local culture in *Memang* Lampung unfolds as a continuous process of meaning-making, in which Islamic symbols are recontextualized within local ritual language without losing their foundational theological reference.

Within this discursive framework, the mantra, or *Memang*, as found in bark manuscript number 2476, is understood as a representation of the discursive encounter between Islamic discourse and the local ritual traditions of Lampung. The mantra text demonstrates how Islamic concepts are introduced through pre-established ritual language, which remains influenced by Hindu and Buddhist traditions. This encounter is dialogical and integrative, whereby the Islamic elements do not erase the local ritual structure but instead impart a new layer of religious meaning. This understanding aligns with Paul Ricoeur's perspective, which conceives the text as an autonomous entity that constructs a *world of the text*—a meaningful domain that can be analyzed through its semantic and symbolic structures (Ricoeur, 2016: 142-147). Through this approach, the *Memang* Lampung text is read as a space of religious meaning articulation, recorded and preserved within the manuscript.

The understanding of *Memang* as a space for the discursive encounter between Islam and local culture can be elaborated through five main indicators, namely: First, Islam as a Source of Sacred Legitimacy. One of the primary themes in the *Memang* Lampung text is the presence of Islam as a source of sacred legitimacy. This is evident through the inclusion of key terms from Islamic teachings. A reading of the *Memang* in the bark manuscript no. 2476 reveals

at least fourteen Islamic keywords strategically placed within the text. These fourteen terms are: *Alloh, Ya Dahiyan, Ya Burhan, Ya Ghofuron, Ya Manan, Ya Nabi, Ya Rasululloh, Malaikat, Ya Arhamar Rahimin, Adam, Nabi Sulaiman, Jahi Alloh, Khoiri Alloh, and Birohmatika* (Kherustika et al., 2009). This pattern aligns with the findings of Pigeaud and Zoetmulder, who demonstrated that in Javanese mantras and prayers, Islamic elements were frequently employed as markers of religious legitimacy without displacing pre-existing ritual structures (Pigeaud, 1967: 12-15; Zoetmulder, 1991: 32-35).

Furthermore, in the *Memang Lampung* text, lines such as “*Allohumma,*” “*buka kancing Muhammad,*” “*ulahni Allah,*” “*Sukani Allah,*” “*Allohumma,*” and “*birohmatika ya Arhamar Rahimin*” indicate that Islamic symbols function as a sacred foundation legitimizing ritual action. In this context, Islam does not appear as a normative system strictly regulating practice, but rather as a source of religious meaning that enhances the performative power of the mantra language. Such a pattern of symbolic Islamization is also emphasized by M. C. Ricklefs, who views cultural Islamization in the Nusantara as a gradual and adaptive process (Ricklefs, 2006: 7-9).

The phrases in the manuscript indicate that Islam functions as a source of transcendent authority, forming the central basis of ritual legitimacy. The repetition of expressions such as *Allohumma, ulahni Alloh,* and *nyak hambani Alloh* underscores that the entire ritual process is situated under the will of Allah. Within Asad’s framework, such affirmations are not merely verbal symbols but constitute part of a discursive discipline that delineates the boundaries of Islamic practice (Asad, 1986: 16). Consequently, although these mantras employ the Lampung language and local cosmological symbols, their normative orientation remains grounded in *tauhid* and the acknowledgment of divine authority.

Second, the Integration of Local Ritual Language. The incorporation of Islamic symbols into local ritual language is a phenomenon widely documented in studies of philology and oral traditions in the Nusantara. Zoetmulder notes that ritual texts often exhibit a mixture of Arabic, Sanskrit, and local language terms within a coherent textual structure (Zoetmulder 1991: 41). In *Memang Lampung*, phrases such as *ulahni Allah* and *hambani Allah* demonstrate that Islamic concepts of divinity are expressed through the grammar and idiom of the local language.

In addition to the two phrases mentioned above, the phrase *ruh ilapi*, referring to *ruh idhofi*, is also found. This phrase represents a spiritual concept in Sufism and local mysticism, denoting the “primordial soul” or the essential life force within humans, which serves as the source of life and the highest

spiritual consciousness. This soul is also frequently described as the “true teacher,” the “pure primordial essence,” or the “true prince within the self.” It is understood as a direct emanation from Allah, governing other souls and guiding the evolution of the spirit toward perfection (*al-Kamilah*). The *Ruh Idhofi* is believed to have existed before the creation of human beings (Faizin, 2018: 147). This supports Azyumardi Azra’s argument that Islamization in the Nusantara occurred through a process of localization, in which Islamic teachings took root within local culture without necessitating drastic changes to language or symbolic structures (Azra, 2002: 23-26). Consequently, Islam manifested in *Memang* Lampung operates as a religious meaning expressed through the medium of the local language.

The Arabic language that appears in these mantras shows a significant process of vernacularization. Words such as “Allohumma” are not used in standard Arabic grammatical structures, but rather as a sacred language that has performative power. Talal Asad emphasizes that religious language works primarily through practice and repetition, not solely through semantic clarity (Asad, 1993: 37-38). Therefore, the use of vernacular Arabic in *Memang* Lampung cannot be understood as a linguistic error, but rather as a form of internalization of Islamic authority into local ritual practices. Arabic functions as a medium of spiritual legitimacy and the formation of piety, not as a tool for formal textual communication.

Third, the Continuity and Rearticulation of Local Cosmology. Overall, the *Memang* text under study preserves local cosmology as an indigenous body of knowledge. Its depiction is not positioned in opposition to Islam but rather serves as a symbolic space in which Islamic teachings are articulated. The continuity of local cosmology is reflected in the mention of entities such as Mother Earth (*Ibu Pertiwi*), Tikhon-Tikhon, Batara Guru, Batara Brahma, Batara Vassu, Batara Vishnu, and Dewa Langkati. Anthropological studies of religion indicate that pre-Islamic worldviews were rarely entirely erased upon the arrival of Islam; instead, they underwent processes of reinterpretation (Koentjaraningrat, 1992: 89-92). This phenomenon aligns with Mark Woodward’s findings in his study of Javanese Islam, which show that local symbols and cosmology continue to play a crucial role in shaping the religious expressions of Muslim communities (Woodward, 1989: 56-60). Thus, the dialectic between Islam and local culture in *Memang* Lampung demonstrates the continuity of cosmological traditions reinterpreted within a new religious framework.

The presence of local cosmological figures such as Batara Guru, Batara Brahma, Batara Vassu, Batara Vishnu, and Dewa Langkati is often cited as evidence

for labeling *Memang* Lampung as a syncretic practice. However, Talal Asad critiques syncretism approaches that assume the existence of a “pure” religion separate from the historical practices of its adherents. In the mantras of Bark Manuscript No. 2476, these local figures are never positioned as autonomous powers rivaling God; rather, they are consistently subordinated under the will of Allah, as reflected in expressions such as *khadu wawangkun ulahni Alloh* and *khadu sukani Alloh*. This pattern demonstrates that Islamic orthodoxy does not always manifest through formal law or written theology but also operates through the regulation of symbolic relations within ritual practice (Woodward, 1989: 29).

Moreover, in the context of healing, the *Memang* Lampung mantras also demonstrate how the body and illness are understood within a religious framework. Disease is not reduced merely to a biological disorder but is interpreted as a cosmological and existential trial. This is particularly evident in the phrase *kala Adam jangardis sejatan di cuba*, which positions the patient in the role of Adam, the first human tested by God. Within Talal Asad’s framework, the interpretation of suffering as a trial forms part of the process through which the religious subject is constituted, involving the discipline of the body and the production of meaning (Woodward, 1989: 69-70). Consequently, the mantra functions not only as a means of healing but also as a mechanism for internalizing the ethics of submission and piety.

Fourth, the Semantic Hierarchy of the *Memang* Text. The study of *Memang* Lampung also indicates that the structure of ritual texts often establishes a specific hierarchy of meaning. Divine entities are generally positioned as the central source of legitimacy, while other entities function as cosmological intermediaries (Pigeaud, 1967: 18). This pattern is evident in *Memang* Lampung, where Allah and the Islamic prophets occupy the highest semantic positions, whereas local entities operate as agents facilitating ritual actions. This hierarchy is textual and symbolic rather than social. Consequently, the analysis of textual structure is crucial for understanding the system of religious meaning embedded in the mantra, as emphasized in Paul Ricoeur’s hermeneutical approach (Ricoeur, 2016: 145-147).

The *Memang* Lampung text demonstrates that the religious elements it contains are not arranged randomly but rather constitute a layered semantic hierarchy. This hierarchy can be discerned through the order of mention, the direction of supplication, and the symbolic function of each element within the mantra. From the perspective of the anthropology of religion, such a semantic structure reveals how a ritual practice internally organizes its religious meaning, allowing it to be read as a coherent discursive system

rather than merely a loosely assembled collection of symbols (Geertz, 1973: 89-95).

The highest semantic layer in the *Memang* text is consistently occupied by Islamic divinity, represented through references such as *Alloh*, *Allohumma*, *Allohu ta'ala*, as well as explicit petitions for mercy, safety, and protection directed toward God. At this level, Allah functions as the primary source of legitimacy for the entire operative power of the mantra. There is no indication that other cosmological elements are positioned as equal or autonomous forces. This structure aligns with Talal Asad's view that a practice can be understood as part of Islam insofar as it operates within a normative horizon referencing divine authority, even when expressed through local forms (Asad, 1993: 205-210).

Beneath the layer of divinity lies a stratum of prophetic and Islamic religious authority, manifested through references to "Prophet Muhammad," "the apostles," "angels," as well as symbolic allusions to "Mecca" and "Medina." Semantically, this layer functions as an intermediary between God and humans. The prophets and angels are not positioned as independent sources of power but rather as components of the Islamic cosmic order that channel human supplications to Allah. This pattern underscores that the *Memang* text operates within an Islamic discursive framework, recognizing a structured religious authority, rather than within a fluid belief system lacking normative reference (Asad, 1993: 214-218).

The subsequent layer comprises local and cosmic cosmology, encompassing references to the earth, the universe (*jagat*), *pratala*, *sukma*, *ruh*, the human soul, as well as cosmological figures such as "Batara Vishnu," "Batara Brahma," "Batara Agni," "Dewa Langkati," and "Puteri Keling." The presence of these elements indicates the continuity of pre-Islamic cosmology preserved within ritual language. However, semantically, these elements do not occupy the highest positions but remain subordinated to the authority of Islamic divinity. In this context, local cosmology functions as a symbolic language for understanding the world and the human body, rather than as an alternative theological system. Such patterns are common in Nusantara religious traditions, where older symbols are reinterpreted and repositioned within new frameworks of meaning (Syam, 2005: 67-75).

The lowest semantic layer concerns the human subject and their practical needs, marked by self-references such as *nyak hamba* and petitions related to safety, health, sustenance, and protection. Humans are positioned as weak and dependent, rather than as controllers of cosmic forces. In this context, the mantra does not function as a means of domination over nature but rather as

a medium for acknowledging human limitations before the divine order. Such a semantic structure indicates that *Memang* guides ritual subjects toward a particular ethical stance, namely dependence upon and submission to God, as is customary within Islamic religious practice (Asad, 1993: 125-130).

Overall, the semantic hierarchy in the *Memang* Lampung text demonstrates that Islamic and local cultural elements do not occupy equivalent positions but are arranged in a stratified manner. Islam—through *tauhid*, prophetic authority, and supplication—constitutes the central source of meaning and legitimacy, while local cosmology functions as a medium of symbolic expression. This structure indicates that *Memang* Lampung is not merely a “mixed” practice but a ritual discourse with an internally coherent system of meaning and a relatively stable religious logic. By reading this semantic hierarchy, the *Memang* practice can be understood as part of the dynamics of local Islam without being reduced to categories of syncretism or mere acculturation (Syam, 2005: 92-98).

Fifth, the Performativity of Ritual Language as an Expression of Operational Islamic Discourse. Studies on ritual language emphasize that mantras and prayers do not merely represent meaning but also function as symbolic acts believed to possess effective power. Austin and Tambiah argue that ritual language operates performatively, that is, it “does” something through its utterance. In *Memang* Lampung, this performative function is reinforced by the use of Islamic symbols, which confer sacred legitimacy upon ritual actions. The deployment of Islamic symbols in this performative context aligns with Andrew Beatty’s observations that local religious practices often integrate Islamic symbols with the logic of indigenous rituals, resulting in a form of contextualized religiosity (Beatty, 1999: 103-105).

The utterances in *Memang* do not merely “depict” religious reality but actively bring it into being, actualize it, and operationalize Islamic beliefs within the local context. Within the framework of speech-act and performativity theory, a religious utterance functions not by virtue of its propositional truth but because it is spoken under appropriate conditions, authority, and context, thereby producing religious effects recognized by the community (Austin, 1962: 94-101).

In *Memang* Lampung, the performativity of language is clearly demonstrated through the use of invocative forms such as *Allohumma, ya Allah*, and the mention of the Prophet Muhammad’s name. These utterances are not merely recited prayers but constitute linguistic acts that directly position the ritual practitioner in relation to God. By invoking the names of Allah and the Prophet, the speaker of *Memang* is not explaining Islamic theology but

actively “doing” Islam through practice. This aligns with Talal Asad’s view that Islam, as a discursive tradition, lives through historically disciplined practices—including ways of speaking, praying, and petitioning—rather than solely through written doctrine (Asad, 1993: 205-210).

The performativity of ritual language in *Memang* is also evident in the structure of direct and repetitive petitions. The repetition of God’s name, divine attributes, and formulas for invoking protection demonstrates that the efficacy of the mantra does not depend on linguistic creativity but on adherence to utterances considered religiously legitimate. In this context, ritual language functions as a mechanism for disciplining the subject, shaping the speaker to address God in a specific manner. Such practices illustrate how Islamic discourse operates operationally through language, forming an ethical relationship between humans and God (Asad, 1993: 218-223).

Furthermore, the ritual language of *Memang* integrates local vocabulary and Islamic terms within a single sequence of performative utterances. References to cosmological elements such as the earth, the universe (*jagat*), and the soul are never presented in isolation but are always embedded within petitions directed to Allah. Performatively, the local language does not serve as a source of religious authority but as a medium for articulating lived experience oriented toward God. Thus, the ritual language of *Memang* demonstrates that Islamic discourse does not require linguistic uniformity but demands alignment in the orientation of meaning and ethical purpose (Keane, 2007: 67-72).

From this perspective, the performativity of *Memang* Lampung ritual language can be understood as a form of operationalizing Islamic discourse at the practical level. Islam does not appear as an abstract theological system, but rather as a series of linguistic actions that are repeated, transmitted, and validated by the community. Ritual language serves as the primary medium through which Islam is enacted, negotiated, and maintained within the local cultural context. This approach allows *Memang* to be read not as a deviation from Islam, but as one of how Islam has been historically and contextually practiced (Asad, 2003: 222-226).

Thus, the analysis of the performativity of ritual language indicates that *Memang* Lampung constitutes a religious practice operating within the discourse of Islam through linguistic action. Mantric language not only conveys religious meanings but also generates the religious condition itself, namely, the human dependence on God, the acknowledgment of prophetic authority, and the ethical orientation toward salvation. It is in this capacity that ritual language functions as a bridge between Islamic teachings and the lived experience of the Lampung community, while also serving as evidence

of how Islam operates concretely in local practice (Syam, 2005: 88-94).

Building on the analysis above, the relationship between Islam and local culture in *Memang* Lampung cannot be understood as an opposition between “Islam” and “tradition,” but rather as a productive interaction that shapes Islam as a lived practice. Islam does not erase local cosmology but disciplines it through the orientation of tawḥīd and divine legitimacy, while local culture provides the language, symbols, and cosmological structures that make the meaningful practice of Islam possible in the life of the Lampung community. From Talal Asad’s perspective, *Memang* Lampung represents an expression of Islam as a discursive tradition—Islam that is lived through practice, rather than solely through normative texts.

CONCLUSION

Based on the study above, this research concludes that the *Memang* Lampung tradition constitutes a religious practice operating within the framework of local Islam as a discursive tradition. The structure of the mantric texts reveals a semantic hierarchy that positions God, the Prophet Muhammad, and the orientation toward the request for salvation as the centers of religious legitimacy, while elements of cosmology and local cultural symbols function as a medium for articulating the lived experiences of the community. *Memang* ritual language operates performatively to enact the relationship between humans and God and to shape the ethical orientation of ritual subjects. These findings underscore that *Memang* cannot be reduced to mere syncretism, but must be understood as a form of Islamic praxis historically and contextually enacted within the Lampung community.

Furthermore, this study recommends that future research on Islam and local culture should not be limited to typologies of relations such as syncretism, acculturation, or collaboration, but should also develop analyses that trace discursive mechanisms, the performativity of language, and the authority of religious practices. Subsequent studies are also encouraged to integrate philological examinations of local manuscripts with approaches from the anthropology of religion and discourse analysis, thereby enabling a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of local Islam. Through such an approach, the study of Nusantara ritual traditions can make a more significant contribution to the development of Indonesian Islamic studies and to understanding the diversity of Muslim religious practices.

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POLITICAL SYSTEM INFLUENCES WITHIN THE INDONESIAN ISLAMIC DA'WAH INSTITUTE (LDII) AND THE EGYPTIAN MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD (IM)

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the dynamic interactions between religious movements and state authorities by comparing two distinct Islamic organizations: the Indonesian Islamic Da'wah Institute (Lembaga Dakwah Islam Indonesia, LDII) in Indonesia and the Muslim Brotherhood (Ikhwanul Muslimin, IM) in Egypt. Both organizations, rooted in Islamic principles, have forged complex relationships with their respective states, yet their paths reflect divergent approaches shaped by unique national contexts. LDII, operating within Indonesia's pluralistic democracy, which Pancasila underpins, has strategically adapted to national norms. Despite past controversies, LDII has embraced a pragmatic approach, emphasizing Quran and Hadith-based teachings, actively participating in socio-economic initiatives, formalizing its organizational structure, and collaborating with government programs. This demonstrates a flexible alignment with Indonesia's emphasis on national unity and religious moderation. In stark contrast, Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood, once a dominant political force, faced an existential threat following the 2013 military coup. Forced into exile, the IM has largely maintained an ideologically rigid stance in opposition to the state. By analyzing these two cases, this study highlights how contextual factors, ranging from political systems and state ideologies to historical trajectories and internal organizational dynamics, profoundly shape the strategies employed by religious movements to survive and thrive within state-religion frameworks.

Keywords: Political System Influences; Indonesian Islamic Da'wah Institute (LDII); Muslim Brotherhood (IM)

INTRODUCTION

This article examines the response of two Islamic groups, the Indonesian Islamic Da'wah Institute (*Lembaga Dakwah Islam Indonesia*-LDII) in Indonesia and the Muslim Brotherhood (*Ikhwanul Muslimin*-IM) in Egypt, to the dynamics

of the relationship between religious movements and state power. Although both are based on Islamic principles, their national political contexts differ, shaping their approaches in distinct ways. LDII, which functions under the Pancasila democratic system in Indonesia, is highly adaptive (Muhammadiyah, 2015). Although LDII was once viewed as a deviant sect (Masud, 2009), it has legitimized its presence by adopting a cooperative strategy: accepting the state ideology, refraining from participation in practical politics, and actively engaging in social and educational life. By harmonizing its Islamic teachings with national and pluralistic values, LDII has established itself as a state partner in ensuring social stability (Rokhim et al., 2025). Conversely, the Muslim Brotherhood has been harshly suppressed after the 2013 military coup in Egypt (Mustonen, 2024; Ardovini, 2022; Hamzawy, 2018). The Muslim Brotherhood, once a significant political force, became a disorganized and marginalized organization that operated in exile and faced a dilemma between preserving its ideological values and taking practical steps. It failed to adjust to a repressive power structure, lost political space, and declined considerably (Abou El Zalaf 2023; Yaghi & Ranko, 2022). This comparison demonstrates that the sustainability of Islamic movements is highly dependent on their capacity to read and react to the national political environment.

The adaptation of Islamic movements in their interactions with the state has been extensively examined. For instance, Resource Mobilization Theory (RMT) by McCarthy and Zald (1977) highlights the role of movements in mobilizing organizational resources, such as networks, funding, and ideological cohesion, to address political pressures. Then, Political Opportunity Structure (POS) by McAdam (1996) emphasizes how differences in political environments (such as democratic Indonesia and authoritarian Egypt) shape movement strategies, including collaboration and resistance. In the case of the Muslim Brotherhood, researchers such as Wickham (2013) and Tadros (2012) have demonstrated that the group was forced to alternate between opposition and survival strategies by successive Egyptian regimes, including the introduction of community-based welfare programs. Prior research on LDII has focused on its contribution to Islamic education and moral reform, avoiding overt political activism (Ichwan, 2006). However, few studies have systematically compared these two movements, particularly in the context of how differing national environments, Pancasila democracy in Indonesia versus a secular-authoritarian regime in Egypt, shape their religio-political strategies.

This study addresses a research gap by comparing LDII and the Muslim Brotherhood with respect to adaptive strategies. By formulating three questions: How do LDII and the Muslim Brotherhood adapt to different political

contexts? Why do political structures and ideological legacies lead to different paths? What are the strategic consequences of seeking state legitimacy versus facing political repression? By answering these three questions, it is hoped that this will contribute to an understanding of how Islamic organizations apply these strategies in carrying out their movements. This discussion is expected to enrich the existing discourse on these two organizations. In addition, this research employed a comparative qualitative design using case studies of LDII and the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt to examine their adaptive strategies in the religion-state relationship. The comparative method was selected to explore the varying trends in each organization's response to political pressures, given the pluralist environment of Indonesia and the authoritarian environment of Egypt.

To reinforce the above view, this study is based on three basic assumptions. First, the authors argue that the sustainability of a religious organization does not depend on dogmatism but rather on a mature strategy for observing and interpreting a country's political conditions. Second, differences in the political landscape across countries significantly influence strategy determination. Therefore, cross-country comparisons are essential to reveal as an addition to academic discourse. Third, the choice of strategy in religious organizations is undoubtedly closely related to the implications for their sustainability. Therefore, the authors consider that discussion and debate on the consequences adopted by these two organizations is crucial. Thus, in the future, these strategies can be replicated by external organizations that have or experience similar conditions.

THE EVOLUTION OF LDII FROM THE NEW ORDER TO THE REFORM ERA

The Indonesian Islamic Da'wah Institute (LDII), which has its origins in the *Darul Hadith* movement, is highly adaptable to political changes in Indonesia during the New Order and Reform periods. Under the New Order, LDII was suspected by the state because of its puritan Salafi orientation and closed internal organization (Ichwan, 2006). Nevertheless, LDII did not adopt a confrontational approach as other Islamist organizations did; instead, it pursued a pragmatic survival strategy by focusing on religious education, moral development, and allegiance to the Pancasila ideology (Machmudi, 2008). The depoliticization policy of the New Order forced LDII to distance itself from political activism and to focus on socio-religious roles (Hefner, 2011). Entering the Reform era, LDII capitalized on opportunities arising from decentralization and political openness without engaging in partisan politics.

Its commitment to Pancasila and support for government programs, such as religious moderation and interfaith dialogue, have strengthened its position as a state-recognized Islamic organization accepted within Indonesia's pluralistic society (Azra, 2006).

This adaptation reflects a process of institutional isomorphism, in which LDII aligns itself with state discourses and structures to maintain its existence within a democratic system. Pancasila functions both as a constraint and a strategic opportunity: it limits aspirations for the formalization of sharia, yet provides space for building legitimacy. Particularly during President Jokowi's administration, LDII's non-confrontational approach and its focus on social service have enabled the organization to effectively utilize Indonesia's relatively inclusive Political Opportunity Structure (McAdam et al., 2001). Consequently, LDII has not only succeeded in avoiding repression but has also grown rapidly to become one of the most prominent Islamic organizations in Indonesia. LDII develops its organizational resilience on three interconnected pillars: moral-based religious education, non-political da'wah, and strategic cooperation with the state.

Political pressure during the New Order era led LDII to concentrate on building a system of *Pesantren* (Islamic boarding schools) that focused on memorizing the Quran (*tahfiz*), moral behavior (*akhlaq*), and mastering hadith as a symbolic defense against state repression (Ichwan, 2006; Machmudi, 2008). This approach was developed in the post-Reform period, when the story of religious moderation was incorporated into the policy of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, and LDII became an instrument of social stability during political changes (Fealy, 2016). LDII never engages in electoral politics or confrontational ideology in the area of da'wah. By replacing the discourse of sharia struggle with Pancasila internalization and nationalism training grounded in tolerance and civic responsibility, LDII has been able to protect itself against radical infiltration and gain state legitimacy (Azra, 2006; Menchik, 2016). According to Bush (2015), this strategy leads to a kind of quiet politics, which is a successful strategy that expands the cultural influence of LDII at the grassroots without directly confronting the state authority (Hefner, 2011).

LDII's partnership with the state indicates its advanced adaptation to the political opportunity structure. LDII is able to align itself with government agendas through institutional isomorphism and through resource mobilization strategies (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983); it is able to access resources and enhance its institutional networks. The three pillars are a strong base of the resilience, growth, and influence of LDII in the dynamic political and social environment of Indonesia (McCarthy & Zald, 1977). They further demonstrate their

resilience and relevance in the contemporary era through the implementation of a triadic strategy: moderate education, intelligent depoliticization, and pragmatic collaboration. In the health sector, LDII has actively partnered with the Ministry of Health, establishing thousands of halal vaccination sites and deploying religiously trained volunteers during the COVID-19 pandemic, while also managing Integrated Health Service Posts (*Posyandu*), which are incorporated into Community Health Centers (*Puskesmas*) for stunting prevention and elderly care (DPW LDII, 2023, 2024, 2025; IKP, 2024).

This combined strategy has changed the image of LDII. This group was initially seen with suspicion by the New Order regime as a strategic state partner in social governance. This approach to faith-based social services, rather than confrontational politics, has enabled LDII to escape state repression, grow substantially, with internal membership reportedly reaching over 30 million by 2024 (DKPP RI, 2023), and to shape public policy through cooperative action. This trend demonstrates the effectiveness of a religious movement model that is sensitive to the political environment in Indonesia. This system embraces those who cooperate and excludes those who challenge (Hefner, 2011).

THE IM: FROM THE COLONIAL ERA TO THE POST-2011 REVOLUTION

The Muslim Brotherhood (IM) began as a religious and social movement, but since its establishment in 1928 by Hassan al-Banna, it has become Egypt's most powerful Islamic political party. This change was influenced by the colonial context, the secularization of the state, and the movement's desire to create an Islamic state through gradual reform. Nevertheless, the course of the organization has always been influenced by the changing Political Opportunity Structure (POS) in Egypt (Al-Awadi, 2004). During Nasser's era, the Brotherhood faced brutal repression, forcing it to operate underground. Under Sadat's regime, the movement was granted limited space, allowing it to expand its influence within civil society, though only temporarily (Zollner, 2009). Under Mubarak, the Brotherhood occupied a semi-legal position. It was permitted to participate in elections, yet constantly monitored and suppressed whenever its growing power threatened the regime's stability (Wickham, 2002).

The high point of the Muslim Brotherhood was following the Arab Spring of 2011 (Brown, 2016), when it emerged as the winner of the elections and installed Mohamed Morsi as the president. Nevertheless, it was unable to control the political transition and internal crises, which resulted in the

2013 military coup (Lynch, 2012). The authoritarian Sisi regime ruthlessly disbanded the Brotherhood, declared it a terrorist group, seized its property, and pushed the movement into the shadows. This was followed by internal fragmentation, as there were intense arguments between those who believed in peaceful reform and those who believed in armed resistance (Tadros, 2012). The historical path of the Brotherhood shows that its religious, social (Tadros, 2012), and political policies have always been determined by the extent to which the regime opened or closed the spaces of participation (Clark, 2004). The resilience of the group has been put to the test on numerous occasions by the cycles of opportunity and repression that have also created patterns of adaptation, resistance, and even disintegration in response to state pressure (Schwedler, 2011).

The period after the coup in 2013 was a pivotal moment in the history of the Muslim Brotherhood, which led to structural disintegration and radical change due to extreme state repression (Amnesty International, 2023). Thousands of activists were arrested, the property of IM was seized, and civil organizations related to the movement were frozen (Tadros, 2012). This pressure was so intense that it divided the Brotherhood into three different groups with different orientations: diplomatic action, peaceful resistance, and militant action. This disintegration indicates a profound existential crisis, showing that the Muslim Brotherhood has not only lost its political space but also experienced the breakdown of its social networks and the erosion of its collective identity as a movement (Kandil, 2014).

The trajectory of the Muslim Brotherhood presents a sharp contrast to the LDII's strategy in Indonesia (Hefner, 2011). The Brotherhood pursued political confrontation and centralized leadership, which made it vulnerable to repression, whereas LDII adopted a non-confrontational path and a more adaptive decentralized structure. These divergent outcomes were not only shaped by internal strategies but also by differing national contexts, as explained by McAdam et al.'s (2001) theory: Egypt's anti-Islamist military regime versus Indonesia's pluralistic, Pancasila-based system. The failure of IM and the success of LDII underscore the crucial role of the political opportunity structure in determining the fate of Islamic movements. Table 1 of the structural comparison explains this divergence.

Table. 1

Factor	Muslim Brotherhood	LDII
Political Strategy	Over-ambition for power (2012–2013)	Consistent depoliticization
State Relations	Confrontation (decrees vs. military)	Symbiosis (development partnership)
Organizational Structure	Centralized hierarchy (Supreme Guide / <i>Mursyid Am</i>)	Territorial decentralization
State Context	Anti-Islamist deep state	Inclusive Pancasila governance

Source: Author's comparative analysis based on McAdam et al. (2001) and Hefner (2011)

DIVERGENT ADAPTATION STRATEGIES TO THE POLITICAL CONTEXTS

The contrasting strategies that LDII and the Muslim Brotherhood have taken in their dealings with the state have yielded very different results in terms of organizational stability, state acceptance, and long-term operational sustainability. These findings illustrate the extent to which the political environment can influence the destiny of a religious organization through adaptation (Wunn & Grojnowski, 2018; Cheng & Brown, 2006). This profound difference is based on the national political backgrounds of the two nations. Democratic pluralism in Indonesia has given LDII the room to operate and develop without the state directly attacking it, and even to be officially recognized (Krismono et al., 2025).

Conversely, the authoritarianism that has dominated the political arena in Egypt has subjected the Muslim Brotherhood to a vicious cycle of resistance and repression that has, in most cases, resulted in bans and mass arrests of its members (Biagini & Ardovini, 2022). The apolitical, cooperative approach that focuses on religious education, social services, and the moral development of society has helped LDII establish organizational stability and growth. This non-confrontational strategy has enabled LDII to be accommodated by the state and society in the pluralistic democratic system in Indonesia. Conformity to Pancasila values has enabled LDII to achieve legitimacy without repression and to guarantee the sustainability of its religious outreach and institutional growth.

LDII demonstrates a high level of organizational stability and state acceptance through its cooperative and non-confrontational approach toward the government. As a legally registered religious organization under the Ministry of Religious Affairs, LDII can conduct its spiritual, educational, and social

activities freely and safely within the framework of national law (Machmudi, 2008). By deliberately avoiding political confrontation with the state, LDII has successfully escaped the forms of repression that frequently target politically oriented Islamist groups, thereby ensuring its institutional security and continuity (Azra, 2006). This strategic positioning has enabled LDII to pursue long-term organizational development, including the expansion of networks of mosques, Islamic boarding schools, formal educational institutions, and various social organizations without significant political interference, which in turn has strengthened its societal presence (Noor, 2020). Moreover, the organization's alignment with Pancasila values reinforces its legitimacy and allows LDII to contribute constructively within Indonesia's pluralistic democratic system. Overall, this experience illustrates that the effectiveness and sustainability of religious organizations are not necessarily determined by political influence, but rather by their capacity to adapt intelligently to state structures and prevailing social expectations.

Unlike LDII, which has experienced steady growth within Indonesia's pluralistic democratic system through an apolitical and cooperative approach, the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt faced a markedly different and ultimately tragic trajectory due to its confrontational political strategy in dealing with an authoritarian regime. Its active involvement in political power struggles triggered waves of brutal and systematic state repression, particularly following the 2013 coup, when the Egyptian government designated the Muslim Brotherhood as a terrorist organization, detained and prosecuted thousands of its members, and confiscated key organizational assets (Al-Anani, 2016). This repression led to the destruction of the Brotherhood's extensive network of charities, media outlets, and political institutions, effectively paralyzing its capacity to operate within both social and political spheres (Wickham, 2013).

At the same time, sustained authoritarian pressure generated severe internal fragmentation and strategic crises within the movement, as factions diverged over whether to pursue armed resistance, diplomatic engagement, or survival through exile (Brown & Hamzawy, 2019). Unlike LDII's non-confrontational orientation, the Brotherhood's political ambition to capture state power positioned it as a primary target of repression, forcing the organization into underground and exilic modes of existence. Overall, the experience of the Muslim Brotherhood illustrates that Islamic movements that fail to align their strategies with prevailing national political systems are vulnerable to both internal disintegration and systematic external destruction. The comparative outcomes of the differing approaches between LDII and the Muslim Brotherhood provide a clear picture of the impact of each group's strategy in

dealing with the state, as shown by Table 2.

Table. 2

Outcome	LDII	Muslim Brotherhood
Relationship with the State	Broadly accepted, legally recognized, and respected as a religious organization.	Banned, labeled a terrorist organization, and a primary target of state repression.
Organizational Stability	Very high; able to grow freely, expand its networks, and implement programs without major obstacles.	Very low; continuously suppressed, weakened, and suffering from severe internal fragmentation.
Long-Term Sustainability	Shows sustained growth with promising prospects for continued operation and contribution.	Forced to survive in exile or underground, facing major challenges to sustainability and relevance.

UNPACKING DIVERGENT PATH: POLITICAL STRUCTURE AND IDEOLOGICAL LEGACIES

The variation in approach between LDII in Indonesia and the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt is due to the interplay of three primary factors: domestic political institutions, state policies towards Islamic groups, and the ideological-historical heritage of each group. These three aspects influenced their ways of adjusting to the state. LDII took a collaborative and non-political course in a democratic setting, whereas the Brotherhood took a political confrontation in an authoritarian regime. These dynamics are critical to understand why two Islamic movements with similar objectives went in entirely different directions. The primary factor that affects the strategies of LDII and the Muslim Brotherhood is the differences in the political structure of Indonesia and Egypt. In the inclusive democracy of Indonesia, founded on Pancasila, LDII can legally operate and expand in a non-confrontational manner, concentrating on religious outreach (*dakwah*), education, and social programs (Muhammadiyah, 2015; Rokhim et al., 2025). Conversely, the Muslim Brotherhood has been subjected to inhuman suppression by the Egyptian authoritarian government, whose political participation was considered a threat to the stability of the military-secular ruling party. The open political system allowed LDII to become legitimate, whereas the closed system in Egypt made the Brotherhood act under pressure and the threat of being banned all the time.

The state policies towards Islamic organizations are a key determinant of the direction and adaptability of religious movements. In Indonesia, a pluralism-

based and accommodative strategy has enabled LDII to expand both legally and productively because of its emphasis on religious outreach, education, and social activities- instead of politics (Noor, 2020). In Egypt, meanwhile, structural persecution has been caused by repressive policies against the Muslim Brotherhood, which is perceived as an ideological and political threat, limiting the space of movement of the organization and compelling it to act in the shadows (Al-Anani, 2016). This demonstrates that the openness of a state to Islamic groups is a significant determinant of the sustainability and type of strategy embraced by religious organizations.

The adaptive strategies of LDII and the Muslim Brotherhood are based on historical and ideological factors. LDII expanded in the Indonesian reformist and quietist Islamic tradition, which focused on moral-spiritual growth and did not engage in direct politics (Machmudi, 2008). This orientation is consistent with the Indonesian culture of consensus and the Pancasila ideology, which enables LDII to integrate harmoniously and be accepted by the state. On the other hand, the Muslim Brotherhood was formed within the framework of colonialism and dictatorship in Egypt, with an ideological heritage of political Islamic struggle that requires complete involvement in state power (Lia, 2006). Its adherence to the application of sharia as a state system has rendered it a consistent opposition force against the military regime in Egypt, which has resulted in a cycle of resistance and repression.

The contrasting orientations of LDII and the Muslim Brotherhood reflect how historical roots and internal ideologies shape each organization's strategic engagement with the state and the surrounding political system. LDII is grounded in a reformist and quietist tradition that emphasizes moral, positioning itself in harmony with Indonesia's political culture, which prioritizes non-confrontation and pluralistic coexistence. This apolitical and adaptive stance has significantly enhanced LDII's legal recognition, organizational stability, and long-term sustainability within the national framework (Franklin, 2020). In contrast, the Muslim Brotherhood is founded upon a political Islamic ideology that explicitly pursues the establishment of an Islamic state, rooted in a historical trajectory of resistance against colonial rule and subsequent military authoritarianism. This legacy has shaped a confrontational political approach that places the organization in direct opposition to state power, resulting in recurrent cycles of repression, prohibition, and organizational marginalization (Harnisch & Mecham, 2019; Alexander, 2011). Taken together, these differences demonstrate that historical experiences and ideological foundations play a decisive role in determining how Islamic organizations respond strategically to state authority and political

constraints. The profound differences in strategies and outcomes between LDII and the Muslim Brotherhood can be summarized through the key factors that shape their respective adaptations, as indicated by Table 3.

Table. 3

Factor	LDII	Muslim Brotherhood
Political Structure	Operates within a pluralistic democratic system that provides space for non-political religious organizations.	Struggles and operates under an authoritarian military regime that suppresses independent political movements.
State Policy	Tolerated and even accommodated as a non-political religious group contributing to society.	Systematically repressed and labeled as a banned opposition movement and a terrorist organization.
Ideological Legacy	Has a quietist tradition, focusing on education, moral reform, and cultural adaptation to the Indonesian context.	Holds a strong commitment to political Islam, with a legacy of resistance against secular regimes

The comparison of LDII and the Muslim Brotherhood reveals that political structures, state policies, and internal ideology play a significant role in determining the success or failure of Islamic movements in their interaction with the state. This has enabled LDII to expand since it has been able to adjust to the democratic system in Indonesia. In contrast, the Muslim Brotherhood has been repressed by its confrontational approach in the authoritarian regime of Egypt. This research confirms that the adaptability of the Islamic movements to the political environment and their ideological orientation is a significant determinant of their sustainability.

Comparative analysis of the LDII (Hefner, 2011) and the Muslim Brotherhood (Al-Anani, 2016) reveals that the success or failure of Islamic movements is predetermined mainly by three key factors: the political system of the state, the attitude of the government to Islamic organizations, and the ideological heritage of the organization itself. The pluralistic democratic system of Indonesia, where LDII has been working in a non-confrontational manner that is consistent with Pancasila (Wickham, 2013), has enabled the latter to expand and become legitimate. Conversely, the IM in Egypt, which has a history of confrontational political Islam under an authoritarian regime, has remained repressed, banned, and internally fragmented (Lia, 2006).

Two important lessons can be learned from this case: first, the flexibility of strategy is much more valuable than ideological rigidity (Hefner, 2011); and

second, political involvement in an authoritarian environment can result in destruction, but a collaborative socio-religious approach can open the door to sustainability (Bush, 2015). In the case of governments, it is more effective to allow peaceful and constructive religious expression (Fealy, 2016), as in the case of LDII, rather than to repress it harshly, as in the case of the Muslim Brotherhood, which only pushes Islamic movements into the underground and possibly into radicalization (Machmudi, 2008).

STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS: STATE LEGITIMACY VS POLITICAL REPRESSION

The basic distinction between LDII and the Muslim Brotherhood is their attitude to the state: LDII is accommodative and non-confrontational, whereas the Muslim Brotherhood is confrontational and political. Even though both are Islamic-based movements that are active in Muslim-majority nations, their reactions to national political systems are a blend of contextual ideology and pragmatism. These divergent approaches have defined their identities, their survival, and their evolution in different socio-political environments. LDII has always been apolitical, avoiding practical political participation and concentrating on da'wah (religious outreach), religious education, and social services (Machmudi, 2008). This strategy is consistent with the ideals of Pancasila and Indonesian pluralism, which enables LDII to acquire legitimacy without causing conflict. This has helped LDII to stay stable internally, be accepted by the state and society, and develop in a safe environment in a dynamic political environment by avoiding political confrontation (Azra, 2006).

Conversely, the Muslim Brotherhood took an aggressive and confrontational political course, seeking to institute an Islamist form of governance via elections, mass mobilization, and political coercion (Wickham, 2013). Although this policy gave them temporary political power, it also initiated periods of war with the Egyptian authoritarian government. The Brotherhood became a significant target of state repression, especially following the 2013 coup, which led to its banning, mass arrests, and systematic undermining of its organizational framework (Direct confrontation, Al-Anani, 2016)—primary Comparison: Strategies and Consequences. The basic distinctions between the political strategies of LDII and the Muslim Brotherhood can be summarized in the following Table 4, which points out the main peculiarities of their strategies and relations with the state.

Table. 4

Aspect	LDII	Muslim Brotherhood
Political Attitude	Apolitical, actively avoiding conflict with the state	Highly political, directly confronting the regime
Relationship with the State	Cooperative, seeking state recognition and legitimacy	Adversarial, frequently facing repression and state persecution
Main Strategy	Religious preaching (da'wah), education, and community social service	Political Islam, governmental reform, and structural change

Table 4 shows that the presence of the state in responding to both religious movements through its legitimacy is a crucial point for the sustainability of an organization. LDII took a softer approach to gain security. They were also able to adapt to Pancasila as a meeting point for religious, social, and cultural plurality in Indonesia. In contrast, the Muslim Brotherhood presents a different face when dealing with the state. As a result, they face serious consequences from the ruling regime. This comparison of strategies leads to the conclusion that choosing the wrong plan or the inability of an organization to adapt to the political climate of a country will lead to destruction rather than strengthening the organization's strategic position (McAdam et al., 2001).

CONCLUSION

A profound comparative analysis of the Indonesian Islamic Da'wah Institute (LDII) in Indonesia and the Muslim Brotherhood (IM) in Egypt makes it clear that the national political environment is the most influential and decisive factor that determines the adaptive strategies, modes of operation, and eventually the destiny of religious organizations. The main results of this discussion indicate that the pluralistic democratic system in Indonesia allows LDII to flourish with an accommodative and non-confrontational strategy, which leads to legitimacy and stability. On the other hand, the authoritarian and repressive nature of the Egyptian environment compels the Muslim Brotherhood to engage in a vicious cycle of resistance and brutal state repression, which severely impairs the development of the movement and its internal unity. These opposite results are a strong indication of the profound impact of political systems on the dynamics of state-religion.

The Indonesian example is an ideal example of how democratic pluralism can be used to successfully give Islamic organizations the room to engage in

the life of the people legitimately without losing their religious identity. The success of LDII lies in its strategic and innovative alignment with Pancasila as the national ideology, and its consistent emphasis on grassroots Islamic education and delivery of concrete social services to the community. This is not only a way of protecting the organization against state intervention, but also helps the organization to develop a good community support. In comparison, in the highly restrictive political environment of Egypt, where dissent is not condoned, all efforts by the Muslim Brotherhood to participate in politics have led to repression and harsh state crackdowns. This not only causes severe internal fragmentation but also compels the movement to take different survival tactics- underground operations to exile resistance. This dramatic analogy clearly shows how two movements that share the same underlying ideals can evolve radically different traits, strategies, and results based on the national environment in which they are practiced.

Based on these results, a number of important research directions can be identified. First, comparative research might be extended to include similar organizations in Muslim-majority countries with radically different political systems. Cases in point include the study of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) of Turkey, the Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party (PAS) of Malaysia, and the Ennahda Movement of Tunisia, which all have distinct political contexts and dynamic state-religion relationships. Second, future studies may examine the impact of generational shifts in leadership and membership on the adaptive strategies of these organizations in changing political environments. Third, the transformation of traditional forms of Islamic activism by digital platforms and social media in both democratic and authoritarian regimes also needs to be analyzed. Lastly, the other crucial dimension is to take a closer look at the impact of the changes between democratic and authoritarian periods in the transitioning states on the long-term development, resilience, and adaptability of religious movements.

In the end, this comparative analysis contributes to our knowledge of modern Islamic movements in a significant way by showing that their formation and course cannot be disconnected from the political contexts in which they are taking place. The results are precise: religious organizations have an impressive adaptive capacity in their national environments, either through cooperation and integration within accommodative democratic systems or through resistance and survival strategies in repressive authoritarian regimes. Thus, future research should further examine these dynamics to develop a more detailed and comprehensive theoretical framework on the complex intersection of religion and politics in the Muslim world.

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**THE THEOLOGY OF DIVINE NAMES
AND ATTRIBUTES:
A Comparative Examination of Salafi and Ash'ari
Doctrines**

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ABSTRACT

*This study examines the theological debate between Salafi and Ash'ari traditions regarding the interpretation of *Asmā' wa Ṣifāt* (the Divine Names and Attributes). It explores its implications for identity construction and social dynamics within contemporary Muslim communities. The research employs a qualitative approach using controversy mapping and thematic analysis of narrative data derived from religious lectures, online discussions, and relevant scholarly texts representing both theological orientations. The findings demonstrate that the debate surrounding *Asmā' wa Ṣifāt* is not merely a doctrinal disagreement but reflects a multilayered contestation involving social, epistemological, and symbolic dimensions. The literalist interpretive tendency associated with Salafi thought, and the rational-theological approach emphasized within the Ash'ari tradition, contribute to the emergence of polarization, exclusivist patterns of *da'wah*, and the marginalization of moderate religious discourse in certain contexts. Moreover, the study reveals that religious interpretation functions as a social practice embedded in power relations, identity formation, and the construction of religious authority within the contemporary Muslim public sphere. By highlighting*

these dynamics, this research underscores the importance of interdisciplinary perspectives in understanding intra-religious theological disputes. It emphasizes the ethics of difference as an essential framework for managing diversity and reducing conflict within Muslim societies.

Keywords: *Asmā' wa Ṣifāt*; Salafi Theology; Ash'ari Theology; Islamic Kalam; Theological Debate; Religious Discourse

INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, theological debates among Sunni Muslims have re-emerged, particularly those concerning the doctrine of *Asmā' wa Ṣifāt* (the Divine Names and Attributes). Several contemporary studies indicate that these discussions are no longer confined to classical theological texts or academic settings but have expanded to include Islamic boarding schools, universities, urban religious study circles, and digital platforms. Empirical research in several Muslim communities shows that differing interpretations of divine attributes, especially regarding *tanzih* (divine transcendence), anthropomorphic expressions, and the legitimacy of *ta'wīl* (allegorical or contextual interpretation), have, in some contexts, contributed to intellectual polarization and social tension within religious communities (Khoirir, 2024). The proliferation of online religious discourse has further amplified these debates, enabling theological disagreements to circulate widely and sometimes intensify in public digital spaces. Each group establishes educational institutions to spread its beliefs, thereby deepening fragmentation and polarization within the Muslim community (Ismail et al., 2023). Within this discourse, the interpretive differences between Salafi and Ash'ari theological traditions have become particularly visible. Salafi scholars generally emphasize a textual approach in understanding divine attributes, adhering closely to the literal meanings of Qur'ānic and prophetic texts while avoiding speculative interpretation.

In contrast, the Ash'ari tradition allows the use of rational theological reasoning and controlled interpretive methods such as *ta'wīl*, particularly when literal interpretations might imply anthropomorphism. These methodological differences have often produced theological tensions that extend beyond doctrinal disagreement and influence patterns of religious authority, preaching practices, and communal identity among Muslims (Abdullah & Mohamed Osman, 2018). For instance, heated debates on social media and physical clashes in some communities show that theological tensions have spread to people's daily lives, especially in socializing, whether frontally or non-frontally (Kini, 2019). This debate goes beyond purely doctrinal issues; it

also influences how believers practice their faith, shape collective identities, and define religious authority within the broader religious public sphere (Tempo, 2024). Therefore, examining this controversy is essential for understanding the dynamics of contemporary Islamic thought and for identifying possible common ground amid the diversity of theological traditions.

The concept of *Asmā' wa Ṣifāt* itself occupies a central position within Islamic theology. It refers to the divine names and attributes mentioned in the Qur'ān and hadith, which are foundational to understanding the nature of God in Islamic belief (Hakim et al., 2024). Classical Muslim scholars developed various interpretive frameworks to reconcile the affirmation of divine attributes with the principle of God's absolute transcendence. Within this intellectual tradition, Salafi and Ash'ari theological orientations represent two influential approaches. The Salafi approach tends to affirm the attributes as stated in the revealed texts while refraining from describing their modality (*bilā kayf*). In contrast, the Ash'ari approach allows interpretive reasoning to safeguard God's transcendence when literal readings appear problematic (Suparman & Soga, 2024). These methodological distinctions have made the doctrine of *Asmā' wa Ṣifāt* a recurring point of theological discussion within Sunni Islam.

In the literature, several studies have categorized the debate between the Salafi and Ash'ari on *Asmā' wa Ṣifāt* into two opposing models: textual fundamentalism and moderate rationalism. Pramita (2023) regards this polarization as a legacy of the classical epistemological conflict between *bayani* (textual) and *burhani* (rational) reasoning, which shapes Muslim interpretations of sacred texts. Sunandar (2023) argues that the Salafi literalist approach tends to foster an exclusive narrative that is resistant to differing views. In contrast, the Ash'ariyyah seek to reconcile faith and reason through the Kalam theological method. A contemporary study by Oktiasari (2021) suggests that this debate has a direct effect on narratives of extremism, especially when Salafi literal interpretations are used to justify symbolic and even physical violence in the name of divinity. This evaluation shows that *Asmā' wa Ṣifāt* cannot be read simply as a theological debate but also has a praxis dimension that affects the social construction of Muslims. Therefore, it is important to use a multidisciplinary approach to dissect this issue, whether through classical textual studies, mapping of discourse conflicts, or sociological studies of religious knowledge.

Several shortcomings in previous studies on the relationship between Salafi and Ash'ariyyah groups require critical evaluation. First, most research focuses primarily on doctrinal issues and da'wah discourse, without thoroughly examining how these theological differences influence educational institutions and the social practices of Muslim communities (Hasbullah et al., 2022). Secondly,

some studies, such as Haykel (2022), have emphasized the importance of understanding ideological differences but have not discussed how these differences shape the exclusivity of educational institutions that reinforce social segregation between groups. Third, the existing literature has not examined how theological tensions in digital spaces, such as social media, contribute to the emergence of social polarization in Muslim communities, both culturally and relationally (Noor & Abur Hamdi, 2022). These gaps indicate that the impact of theology is not merely discursive, but also concrete in the socio-religious life of the *ummah*, an aspect that has not yet been comprehensively addressed in academic scholarship.

The findings of this study are similar to those of Marhamah & Abdullah (2020), who note tensions among schools of Islamic theology in Indonesia, particularly between purists and traditionalists. Other similarities can be seen in Sinani's (2022) research, which highlights the importance of inclusivity in interpretation and Islamic law to avoid extremism. Although numerous studies have examined Salafi and Ash'ariyyah theology, they largely remain confined to normative and doctrinal debates. This study argues that differing theological interpretations are not merely abstract disagreements but actively shape patterns of religious authority, community boundaries, and social relations within Muslim society. This evaluation underscores the urgent need to orient research toward a more practical dimension, namely, investigating how theological differences between Salafis and Ash'ariyyah shape the development of educational institutions, patterns of da'wah, and social interactions among Muslims at the community level. Therefore, this study seeks to fill this gap by adopting an approach that moves beyond purely theological analysis, integrating sociological and cultural perspectives to understand better the concrete impact of these intellectual debates on the everyday lives of contemporary Muslims.

This study argues that theological disagreements regarding *Asmā' wa Ṣifāt* should not be understood solely as abstract doctrinal debates. Rather, they function as social practices that influence the construction of religious authority, community identity, and patterns of interaction within the Muslim public sphere. By employing a controversy-mapping approach combined with thematic analysis, this research seeks to examine how the debate between Salafi and Ash'ari theological perspectives is articulated within contemporary discourse and how it contributes to broader social dynamics. Through this perspective, the study aims to provide a more comprehensive understanding of intra-Muslim theological controversies and their implications for religious discourse in contemporary society.

The controversy between the Salafi and Ash'ariyyah groups reflects ongoing

tensions in contemporary Muslim theological discourse, particularly concerning the interpretation of *Asmā' wa Ṣifāt*. While the Salafi group emphasizes a literal adherence to the Qur'an and hadith, the Ash'ariyyah adopt a rational approach that allows *ta'wīl*. These differences extend beyond theological debate and influence patterns of religious interaction, authority, and social relations within Muslim communities (Fernando et al., 2023). The phenomenon is significant because it reveals how competing truth claims may foster stereotyping, marginalization, and polarization, while also raising questions about the possibility of bridging interpretive differences within the framework of moderate Islamic education.

This study employs a descriptive qualitative design, using a controversy-mapping approach, to examine how the debate over *Asmā' wa Ṣifāt* is articulated and contested. The research focuses on narratives and interpretations expressed by both groups in lectures, study circles, online discussions, social media content, and relevant scholarly works (Qudsy, 2016). Primary data were obtained through observations of lectures, religious study sessions, and online discussions involving representatives of both groups. Secondary data were collected from academic journals, classical and contemporary works on Islamic theology, and relevant online media sources. Data were selected using purposive sampling, based on their relevance to the controversy surrounding *Asmā' wa Ṣifāt*. Data were selected purposively based on their relevance to the controversy and analyzed thematically to identify dominant patterns, interpretive conflicts, and points of convergence. By comparing perspectives across sources, this study seeks to demonstrate how theological differences contribute to broader processes of polarization within the *ummah* (the global Muslim community) and to situate these dynamics within their contemporary social and educational contexts.

HISTORICAL GENEALOGY OF THE ASMĀ' WA ṢIFĀT DEBATE

To deepen the discussion, the author should trace the historical genealogy of the debate on *Asmā' wa Ṣifāt* to its earliest theological roots. The controversy did not originate with the later labels “Salafi” and “Ash'ari,” but can be traced back to the formative period of Islamic theology in the 2nd–3rd centuries Hijri. Early disputes emerged in response to questions about divine transcendence (*tanzīh*) and anthropomorphic descriptions of God in the Qur'an and Hadith. Groups such as the Mu'tazila emphasized divine transcendence and rational interpretation, often interpreting attributes metaphorically to avoid implying resemblance to creation. In contrast, traditionalist scholars like Ahmad ibn Hanbal upheld affirming the attributes *bilā kayf* (without asking how) and without *ta'wīl*, marking one of the earliest structured responses to theological

speculation.

The crystallization of the debate further developed in the 4th century Hijri with the emergence of Ash'ariyah, founded by Abu al-Hasan al-Ash'ari. Initially influenced by Mu'tazilite thought, al-Ash'ari later adopted a mediating position: affirming the divine attributes while permitting *ta'wīl* when literal readings might imply anthropomorphism. This methodological difference between affirmation without modality and controlled rational interpretation laid the groundwork for what would later evolve into the modern Salafi–Ash'ari polarity. By situating the controversy within this broader historical trajectory, readers gain a clearer understanding that the debate is not merely contemporary polemics but part of a long-standing theological effort within Sunni Islam to reconcile revelation and reason.

Table 1.
Forms of Theological Controversy on *Asmā' wa Ṣifāt* between Salafi and Ash'ariyyah

Theological Concept	Scriptural Expression	Salafi Interpretation	Ash'ari Interpretation	Source
<i>Istiwa'</i> (Divine Establishment on the Throne)	إستوى على العرش	Affirmed literally as <i>'alā wa irtafa'</i> (God is above the Throne) while maintaining <i>bilā kayf</i> (without asking how).	Interpreted as <i>ist-awlā</i> (symbolizing divine authority or dominion).	https://quran.com/id/20
Divine Hands	بِيَدَيَّ (bi-yadayya) – “with My two hands”	Affirmed as a real attribute (<i>yad ḥaqiqiyyah</i>) befitting God's majesty without resemblance to creation.	Interpreted metaphorically as power (<i>qudrah</i>) or will.	https://quran.com/id/38?startingVerse=75
Divine Descent	ينزل ربنا إلى السماء الدنيا	Affirmed as a real descent appropriate to God's majesty (<i>nuzūl yalīqu bi-jalālihi</i>).	Interpreted as the manifestation of divine mercy or response to supplication.	الدرر السنية = الموسوعة الحديثية - شروح الأحاديث (dorar.net)
Seeing God	رؤية الله	Affirmed that believers will literally see God in the hereafter.	Often interpreted as spiritual perception or vision of the heart.	الدرر السنية = الموسوعة الحديثية - شروح الأحاديث (dorar.net)

Theological Concept	Scriptural Expression	Salafi Interpretation	Ash'ari Interpretation	Source
Face of God	وجه الله	Affirmed as one of God's attributes without describing its modality.	Interpreted as referring to the Divine Essence (<i>al-dhāt</i>).	https://quran.com/id/2?startingVerse=115
Divine Light	الله نور السماوات والأرض	Considered one of the divine attributes as stated in the text.	Interpreted metaphorically as divine guidance (<i>al-hudā</i>).	surah An-Nur - 1-64 - Quran.com

The theological controversy surrounding the interpretation of *Asmā' wa Ṣifāt* highlights the methodological differences that distinguish the Salafi and Ash'ari traditions. As illustrated in the table above, each group relies on distinct epistemological foundations in interpreting Qur'anic and prophetic texts. The Salafi approach emphasizes a literal understanding of revelation, adhering closely to the interpretive model of the first three generations of Muslims (*salaf al-ṣāliḥ*) and affirming divine attributes without questioning their modality (*bilā kayf*). In contrast, the Ash'ari tradition integrates textual evidence with rational reasoning, allowing interpretive methods such as *ta'wīl* and *tafwīd* to prevent anthropomorphic interpretations of the divine attributes (Nurjanah et al., 2022). These differing interpretive strategies demonstrate that the debate is rooted not merely in doctrinal disagreement but also in distinct epistemological orientations within Sunni theology.

Despite these methodological differences, both traditions share a common objective: preserving the transcendence and uniqueness of God while maintaining fidelity to the revealed texts (Hasibuan et al., 2020). However, the coexistence of these interpretive paradigms often generates confusion among segments of the broader Muslim community, particularly among lay believers who may lack sufficient theological training to grasp the complexity of the debate. In such circumstances, religious scholars play a central role in interpreting doctrine and guiding public understanding. Their authority in issuing religious opinions and preserving doctrinal coherence shapes how these theological perspectives are transmitted within educational institutions, religious discourse, and community life (Atabik, 2021). Consequently, the debate over *Asmā' wa Ṣifāt* not only reflects theological diversity but also illustrates how religious authority and knowledge production shape belief and practice in contemporary Muslim societies.

THE BASIS OF CONSIDERATION USED BY THE PARTIES

Table 2
The Basis of Consideration in the Debate on *Asmā' wa Ṣifāt*

Basis of Controversy	Salafi Perspective	Ash'ari Perspective
Textual Foundation	Salafi scholars emphasize a literal understanding of the Qur'ān and Hadith. Scriptural texts are interpreted according to their apparent meaning without resorting to <i>ta'wīl</i> , except when clear evidence indicates that the literal meaning is impossible. They apply the principles of <i>bilā kayf</i> (without asking how) and <i>bilā tashbīh</i> (without likening God to His creation), affirming the divine attributes as mentioned in the texts without describing their modality.	Ash'ari scholars emphasize the role of reason and rational theology in interpreting religious texts. They argue that scriptural interpretation should remain consistent with the principles of rationality while preserving divine transcendence. Consequently, they interpret certain attributes in ways that avoid <i>tashbīh</i> (anthropomorphism) and <i>tajsīm</i> (attributing physical form to God).
Theological Approach	Salafi theology emphasizes adherence to the interpretive methodology of the <i>salaf al-ṣāliḥ</i> (the first three generations of Muslims: The Companions, the Successors, and the Successors of the Successors). This generation is considered to possess the most authentic understanding of Islamic teachings, supported by prophetic traditions describing them as the best generations of the Muslim community (Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī).	The Ash'ari tradition prioritizes safeguarding the doctrine of <i>tawḥīd</i> (the absolute oneness of God). It emphasizes that God is entirely unlike His creation, as stated in Qur'ān 42:11: "There is nothing comparable to Him." This principle serves as the basis for avoiding literal interpretations that could imply anthropomorphism.
Interpretive Method	Salafi scholars generally reject the use of <i>ta'wīl</i> and limit the application of <i>tafwīd</i> (consigning the ultimate meaning to God). They argue that excessive interpretation may distort the original meaning of revelation and introduce speculative theology into matters of faith.	Ash'ari theologians employ <i>ta'wīl</i> to interpret scriptural expressions that appear anthropomorphic in order to preserve divine transcendence. They also apply <i>tafwīd</i> , delegating the ultimate meaning of certain attributes to God when human reason cannot fully comprehend them.

The theological understanding between the Salafis and the Ash'ariyyah reflects different approaches to understanding Islam's sacred texts. Salafis adhere to a literal reading of the Qur'ān and Hadith, accepting Allah's attributes according to their apparent meaning without seeking interpretation, guided by the principles of *bilā kayf* and *bilā tashbīh* (Muzakki, 2019). They reject symbolic or metaphorical

readings unless there is very clear evidence that shows that the literal meaning is impossible. Instead, the *Asy'ariyah* emphasizes the role of reason and logic in understanding religious texts, ensuring that interpretations of God's attributes align with rationality while avoiding likening God to His creatures or attributing physical forms to Him. When necessary, the *Ash'ariyyah* approach applies rational principles to interpret God's attributes symbolically, preserving His majesty and divinity without equating Him with His creation (Nurdin et al., 2022).

The different perspectives between Salafi and *Ash'ariyah* in understanding the attributes of God reflect two approaches that both seek to maintain the purity of the concept of Tawhid but have different epistemological foundations. Salafis argue that sacred texts such as the Qur'an and hadith should be understood literally in accordance with the understanding of the *Salafus Shalih*, because they believe that textual interpretation directly reflects the purest authority of faith and is free from erroneous interpretations (Rahman, 2012). Critically, this method can pose challenges in interpreting verses that are difficult to grasp literally, given the constraints of modern language and context. In contrast, the *Asy'ariyah* adopts a more adaptive approach, using *ta'wil* to explain God's attributes that might otherwise appear anthropomorphic. This approach is rooted in logic and metaphorical interpretation to avoid equating God with His creatures, as is the principle in QS. Ash-Shura (42:11). "They also utilize *tafwid* as a form of intellectual submission, leaving to God the meaning of things that the intellect cannot grasp". In a critical framework, this strategy offers flexibility in maintaining the consistency of tawhid, but can trigger differences in interpretation that are considered to undermine the uniformity of teachings by others (Jamil, 2013)

Critically, each approach presents both strengths and limitations. Salafis prioritize a straightforward, literal interpretation to prevent deviation, yet this approach can overlook the deeper, more nuanced meanings within the sacred texts (Hakim et al., 2025). In contrast, the *Asy'ariyah* perspective seeks to balance textual fidelity with rational reasoning, allowing for flexibility in contemporary contexts, though it may be perceived as leaving room for speculative interpretation (Adli, 2024). The ongoing dialogue between these two schools highlights the need for thorough theological discussion to grasp the true essence of tawhid while preserving the core principles of the faith (Hakim et al., 2025).

IMPLICATIONS OF BELIEF CONTROVERSY AND SOCIAL RELATIONS

The faith controversy between the Salafis and the Ash'ariyyah has several implications that affect social relations and the dynamics of the Muslim community. Here are three main trends that have emerged:

Table 3
Implications of Belief Controversy and Social Relations between Salafi and Ash'ariyyah

Type Controversy	Directly Occurring Tendencies	Social Impact	Source
Polarity and Fragmentation in Muslim Communities	Theological differences create polarization and fragmentation among Muslims. Communities are often divided based on their theological affiliations, leading to a lack of unity in addressing other shared concerns.	Disputes stemming from these differences can disrupt social relations, reduce communal solidarity, and in some cases escalate to open conflict where groups compete for influence.	https://kumparan.com/kumparannews/ketika-pengajian-ustaz-khalid-basalamah-dibubarkan/1 https://www.benarnews.org/indonesian/wahabi-09102015190337.html
Establishment of Strong Group Identity	Both Salafi and Ash'ariyyah groups reinforce their identity by emphasizing theological differences and maintaining the perceived purity of their teachings.	Strong group identities can lead to exclusivity, reduced receptivity to inter-group dialogue, and reinforced social barriers between Muslim communities.	https://muallimi-nenamtahun.net/berita/membentengi-aswaja-nu-dari-wahabi-salafi
Impact on Education and Da'wah	Each group spreads its teachings through educational institutions and da'wah activities, often critiquing the opposing group's views.	This can create an ideological battleground in religious education, influence young Muslims toward a particular theological stance, and reinforce intolerance of differences.	https://www.islamtimes.org/id/gallery/322831/1/mufti-perak-malaysia-haramkan-ajaran-wahabi

The dispute between Salafi and Ash'ariyyah theological orientations carries substantial social consequences for Muslim societies. It frequently gives rise to polarization and fragmentation, generating tensions that divide communities along lines of theological identification (Dewantri et al., 2023). This situation can weaken the sense of solidarity and hinder efforts to bring the ummah together

to address shared concerns (Airlangga PH et al., 2024). If these tensions are not carefully managed, they may escalate into open conflict, as has been observed in certain regions of the Islamic world. This condition shows that differences in theological understanding are not only an academic problem, but also have a real impact on social harmony (Anthony et al., 2021).

Polarization in the controversy between Salafi and Ash'ari theological approaches regarding the interpretation of *Asmā' wa Ṣifāt* is evident in theological labeling, the delegitimization of scholarly authority, and the segregation of religious-social spaces (Nursyahbani et al., 2025). The Salafi group, which adheres to the methodology of the first three generations and rejects (*ta'wīl*) of the divine attributes, often views the Ash'ariyyah's kalam-based approach as a deviation from the purity of creed (Saleh, 2010). Conversely, the Ash'ariyyah, rooted in the intellectual tradition of Abu al-Hasan al-Ash'ari, regard strict literalism as insufficient to address rational and philosophical challenges. This polarization is reflected in sermons, da'wah literature, and digital discourse, where mutual criticism and accusations of deviation frequently occur. As a result, mosques, educational institutions, and study circles often become segmented along theological lines, thereby increasingly shaping social interaction by ideological identity (Supena, 2024). Thus, polarization operates not only at the discursive level but also in the formation of firm social boundaries between "us" and "them" in everyday religious life.

This polarization contributes to tendencies toward extremism when exclusive truth claims develop into rigid attitudes that deny the legitimacy of other groups. In such contexts, methodological differences are framed as existential threats to the purity of tawhid rather than as legitimate diversity within the Sunni intellectual tradition (Haqqi & Shofaussamawati, 2023). If not managed through a moderation-oriented approach, the divide between textualist and rationalist paradigms can escalate into radical attitudes, including excessive accusations of unbelief (*takfir*), branding others as innovators (*bid'ah*), or even justifying repressive actions against opposing groups (Bakar & Sabri, 2025). Social media further accelerates this process by reinforcing echo chambers and amplifying confrontational narratives (Yusoff, 2023). Therefore, theological polarization surrounding *Asmā' wa Ṣifāt* has the potential to serve as an entry point to identity-based religious extremism, particularly when methodological differences are interpreted as existential conflicts rather than as part of the dynamic intellectual heritage of Islam.

The findings of this study indicate that the controversy over *Asmā' wa Ṣifāt* between Salafi and Ash'ariyyah groups is fundamentally rooted in differing epistemological paradigms rather than purely doctrinal contradictions. The

Salafi orientation, often associated with the interpretive legacy of scholars such as Ahmad ibn Hanbal, emphasizes textual fidelity by affirming divine attributes according to their apparent meanings while avoiding inquiries into modality (*bilā kayf*) or resemblance (*bilā tashbīh*) (Ātpek & Beránek, 2025). In contrast, the Ash'ariyyah tradition, systematized by Abu al-Hasan al-Ash'ari, permits controlled rational interpretation to safeguard divine transcendence from anthropomorphic implications (Ardae & Wan, 2019). Although both approaches aim to preserve tawhid, their divergent methodologies generate tensions that extend beyond theology into questions of authority, legitimacy, and orthodoxy.

Extremism manifests when these methodological differences are transformed into exclusive truth claims. Rather than recognizing interpretive plurality within Sunni theology, some discursive spaces frame alternative approaches as deviations, innovations, or theological errors. This dynamic fosters doctrinal absolutism, in which interpretive preference becomes a marker of authentic belief (Rusdin et al., 2025). Delegitimizing labels such as accusations of excessive rationalism or anthropomorphism function as symbolic tools of exclusion, narrowing the boundaries of acceptable theological discourse (Arifah et al., 2024). In this context, disagreement shifts from scholarly debate to identity-based confrontation, reinforcing rigid group boundaries within the Muslim community.

Institutional and digital mechanisms further exacerbate the escalation of extremism. Educational and da'wah institutions often transmit theology within a single interpretive framework, unintentionally cultivating intellectual insularity among followers (Masyura, 2021). Meanwhile, digital media platforms amplify polemical narratives by privileging emotionally charged, simplified content over nuanced theological explanations (Suri & Tanjung, 2025). Complex classical discussions about divine attributes are reduced to binary oppositions, encouraging polarization among audiences who may lack formal theological training (Abdullah & Ibrahim, 2011). As a result, theological disagreement becomes personalized, publicly contested, and socially intensified.

Socially, this dispute contributes to cognitive polarization, consolidation of exclusive group identities, and fragmentation within Muslim communities. Theological methodology becomes intertwined with communal belonging, influencing patterns of religious authority and shaping intergroup relations (Haerul et al., 2023). If unmanaged, such polarization risks weakening solidarity and fostering intolerance, particularly among younger generations exposed to confrontational religious discourse (Herdiana et al., 2025). However, the study also suggests that extremism is not inherent in either theological

tradition: rather, it emerges when interpretive diversity is reframed as an existential threat (Abdullah, 2015). A more dialogical and inclusive engagement with theological plurality may therefore serve as a constructive pathway toward reducing polarization while preserving the shared commitment to divine transcendence central to both traditions.

Previous studies tend to focus on political dynamics or legal discourse. In contrast, this research offers a socio-scientific mapping approach that emphasizes the relationship between theological interpretation and its social implications in education and community life. Indeed, applying a controversy-mapping framework enables a deeper, more systematic exploration of how epistemological tensions are expressed in public arenas, whether through spoken narratives, written texts, or symbolic and behavioral forms. By tracing these patterns, the study moves beyond surface-level doctrinal disagreements and uncovers the broader dynamics that shape how knowledge claims are constructed, defended, and contested in society. Accordingly, this research offers a meaningful contribution to the understanding of intra-Muslim disputes by framing them not merely as theological divergences but as contests over interpretation, legitimacy, and influence within the public sphere. Such insights are valuable for advancing contemporary Islamic studies, particularly approaches that prioritize contextual awareness and pay closer attention to the social relationships and power structures embedded in religious discourse.

As a follow-up to the findings and analyzes above, a conceptual strategy is needed to strengthen the moderation approach in Islamic education. Islamic educational institutions should formulate a theology curriculum that accommodates multiple interpretive traditions, integrating both text-oriented and reason-based approaches while highlighting the ethical principles of engaging with differences. Such a framework would encourage students to appreciate methodological plurality rather than viewing it as a source of division. From a pedagogical perspective, the controversy-mapping framework can be adapted into a reflective and analytical learning model within courses on creed (*'aqidah*) or Islamic intellectual history. By guiding students to examine how theological debates emerge, develop, and influence social realities, this approach fosters critical thinking and nurtures a more balanced and dialogical understanding of doctrinal diversity (Masduki et al., 2022)

Rather than assigning doctrinal authority to a single religious organization, a more constructive approach would be to facilitate inclusive scholarly dialogue among diverse theological representatives. The objective would not be to standardize interpretation, but to formulate shared ethical principles for managing disagreement in educational and community contexts. On the policy

level, rather than creating specialized training focused solely on *Asmā' wa Ṣifāt*, existing religious education frameworks could incorporate discussions on theological diversity and the ethics of disagreement. Such integration would better reflect the historical plurality within Sunni thought. Future research may expand on this study through interdisciplinary approaches, such as discourse analysis and digital ethnography, to explore how theological debates evolve in contemporary digital and educational spaces. In this way, managing difference can become a constructive element in fostering a more reflective and dialogical Islamic intellectual tradition.

CONCLUSION

This study found that the controversy between the Salafi and Ash'ariyyah groups over the concept of *Asmā' wa Ṣifāt* is not merely a matter of theological interpretation but also reflects complex social, epistemological, and political dynamics in contemporary Muslim society. The textual-literal orientation of the Salafi movement and the rational-theological framework of the Ash'ariyyah frequently fail to converge because each upholds its interpretive model as the most legitimate in understanding divine attributes. Consequently, theological disagreement extends beyond doctrinal debate, influencing social interactions, da'wah activities, and Islamic education, potentially reinforcing group exclusivism and ideological boundaries.

Furthermore, religious interpretation is deeply embedded within broader social contexts, where the production and defense of theological meaning are linked to authority, control over religious knowledge, and symbolic capital in the public sphere. Interpretive differences are therefore not purely theological, but also shaped by negotiations of power and legitimacy in Muslim societies. When these differences are not managed with an ethic of difference, they can escalate into identity conflicts and weaken *ukhuwah Islamiyah* (Islamic Brotherhood), particularly when ordinary believers are exposed to confrontational or polarizing rhetoric. Such disputes, however, can also be reframed as opportunities for dialogue and intellectual enrichment within the Islamic tradition.

Conceptually, this study highlights that interpretive dispute, including those between Salafi and Ash'ariyyah circles, should not be analyzed solely through doctrinal lenses but as social practices embedded in epistemological and sociological realities. Using a controversy-mapping framework and a descriptive qualitative approach oriented toward social and discourse analysis, this research demonstrates how religious interpretations shape group identities and influence everyday social practices, particularly in education and da'wah.

The study also contributes to interdisciplinary tafsir scholarship by integrating sociology of knowledge, public discourse theories, and religious education, providing a contextualized analytical model for understanding intra-Muslim conflicts.

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations that suggest directions for future research. The research scope was limited to text narratives and social media, leaving interpersonal and community dynamics underexplored. The role of religious institutions, such as *pesantren* and da'wah organizations, in mediating the controversy over *Asmā' wa Ṣifāt* was not fully examined. Additionally, the qualitative approach was not complemented by quantitative data, which could have strengthened the validity of the findings. Future studies should investigate how Islamic educational institutions negotiate theological differences through curricula and pedagogy, thereby offering more practical strategies to reduce intra-religious tensions and promote constructive dialogue within Muslim communities.

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