

Walisongo and the Notion of Abrasive Strategies in Countering Radicalism in Indonesia

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the role of Walisongo in addressing religious radicalism in Indonesia. Religious radicalism has emerged due to excessive internet consumption in today's technologically advanced world. Consequently, it necessitates serious efforts to tackle this issue, including exploring local knowledge to counteract religious radicalism behaviors. This qualitative study adopts a library research approach, incorporating diverse sources to explore theories and knowledge related to these phenomena. This study found the importance of implementing strategies that promote wise behavior and nonviolent approaches in reducing religious radicalism. These efforts primarily involve initiating a change in people's mindset toward Islam. The success of the strategy to reduce the level of radicalism can be carried out through regional management (geographical considerations), arts management or cultural engagement, health management (medical aspects), fostering noble behavior (*akhlāq al-karimah*), marriage alliances, and deepening religious knowledge.

Secara garis besar, tulisan ini menggambarkan peranan Walisongo dalam upaya mengatasi persoalan radikalisme beragama masyarakat nusantara. Dunia yang memasuki era teknologi tidak dapat diabaikan memunculkan fenomena mencuatnya radikalisme beragama akibat konsumsi internet berlebih. Diperlukan upaya serius menangani persoalan, termasuk kebutuhan mencari khazanah pengetahuan lokal dalam menghadapi perilaku masyarakat yang berlebih-lebihan dalam beragama. Kajian kualitatif dengan pendekatan pustaka dalam tulisan ini menggunakan sumber-sumber lokal dan pengetahuan Barat untuk menemukan sejumlah teori dan pengetahuan untuk dikaitkan dengan fenomena tersebut. Hasil dari kajian ini adalah dalam upaya pengurangan kadar

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radikalisme beragama dilakukan dengan contoh perilaku bijak dengan strategi abrasif tanpa adegan kekerasan. Upaya yang dilakukan dimulai dari merubah mindset masyarakat terhadap Islam. Keberhasilan strategi mengurangi kadar radikalisme terlaksana berkat enam saluran yaitu saluran geografis, kebudayaan, akhlāq al-karīmah, pengobatan masyarakat, pernikahan, serta penguasaan ilmu agama secara mendalam.

Keywords: abrasive; religious radicalism; Walisongo

Introduction

Religious radicalism and intolerance in Indonesia, as documented by *Badan Nasional Penanggulangan Terorisme (BNPT/* the National Counterterrorism Agency), has declined in recent years. According to the BNPT report, the level of potential radicalism has shifted from the medium category (55.2 %) to the deficient category (14%) (Putra, 2021). However, contrasting to this finding, a separate survey indicates that the younger generation tends to support the idea of the caliphate as a basic form of governance (Redaksi Jalan Damai, 2019). These two findings appear contradictory. Notably, the surge in radicalism, primarily attributed to increased internet usage during the pandemic, has made approximately 85 % of young people susceptible to radical ideologies (Mohammad, 2020). To address this issue, the government has implemented a policy to block content deemed as promoting terrorism (Rizkinaswara, 2021).

The handling of suspected terrorism cases by *Kepolisian Republik Indonesia (Polri/* the Indonesian National Police) has shown a direct correlation with the potential for radicalism. The recorded numbers have increased from 176 cases in 2017 to 396 cases in 2018, followed by 275 cases in 2019, 232 cases in 2020, and 370 cases in 2021 (Annur, 2022). In light of these observations, a crucial question arises; why does radicalism continue to thrive? And why does the government need to take substantial measures to combat this issue? The government's response has fallen short of expectations.

Walisongo, through their effort, presented the people of Indonesia with a unique approach that contributed to reducing the levels of radicalism. Their introduction to Islam was refined, employing a method that involved

understanding the characteristics of the target community, strategy planning, and setting behavioral examples within the community. In this way, the guardians acted as teachers and role models for community behavior. This method gradually transformed the character, perceptions, and assumptions of the people of Indonesia, making them more open to and accepting of change. The strategy implemented focused on the inner experiences of individuals rather than superficial aspects.

Reducing religious radicalism has been extensively studied from various theoretical, methodological, and perspective-based approaches. Numerous studies have focused on the management of Walisongo's *da'wah*, the symbolism associated with Walisongo's *da'wah*, the multicultural aspect of Walisongo's *da'wah*, preaching styles adopted by Walisongo, and more. Additionally, the research has been conducted on religious radicalism, examining the prominent figures involved, their supporters, followers, and other relevant aspects. However, existing studies generally need more specific explanations for effectively reducing religious radicalism.

More specific writings were written by Meyer discussing the narratives of *mualaf* (converting from other religion to Islam) Sunan Kalijaga (Seh Mlaya) concerning pre-Islamic discussions. Sunan Kalijaga's quest narratively holds together these two currents (the teachings of Syattariyah and al-Ghazali) and even gestures at the transcendence of their difference as Sunan Kalijaga's efforts, even as they fail, lead to his realization of guidance (Meyer, 2021).

Waston, in his research studied the teachings of peace taught in the Java tradition, especially those taught by Sunan Kalijaga, one of the Javanese Saints (Walisongo) in the 15th century that had mystic-philosophical teachings. His findings show that Sunan Kalijaga succeeded in using the proper choice of words to combine Islamic values and predominant cultural elements (e.g., Hinduism, Buddhism). This paper draws on the peaceful values of the Sunan Kalijaga's teachings in the hope of curbing the current extreme ideology that has recently increasingly flooded the public space (Waston, 2018).

Birsyada observed that the strengthening of Javanese people's beliefs increased after Walisongo adopted Islamic ideas and local culture (Birsyada,

2020). Moreover, Ali saw that the religious practices of the local Javanese community were more varied than those of local people from Sulawesi (M. Ali, 2011).

Among all the studies that have been presented, no research explicitly addresses the thoughts and thoughts of saints to overcome the problem of radicalism. Therefore, the author finds the argument that in applying ideas to overcome the problem of religious radicalism, the saints carry out *ijtihad* on the source of the texts by adhering to the methodological framework of one of the schools of thought to find clues in answering the problem.

Therefore, this research aims to outline the concept and strategy employed by Walisongo in addressing religious radicalism among the people of Indonesia. In dealing with religious radicalism, Walisongo engaged in *ijtihad*, using independent reasoning to derive legal answers to various problems, particularly when confronted with new challenges. They conducted *ijtihad* by re-evaluating the primary source of Islam, namely the Qur'an, and Hadith, within the framework of the school's methodology in light of the socio-historical context that prevailed in Indonesia, thus establishing a relevant foundation. This approach also involved considering the local communities and translating divine revelations into the practical realm, adapting to the dynamic nature of the world. This framework can be referred to as the 'abrasive method'.

This study is conducted using a qualitative approach with a focus on literature. The data were collected from various literary sources, including works and manuscripts such as *Primbon Sunan Bonang*, *Suluk Linglung Sunan Kalijaga*, and books and writings from local and Western authors discussing Islam's development in the 14th to 16th centuries. The interview method was also accomplished with Islamic boarding school officials in the Bali Province. The study aims to identify patterns employed by Walisongo when encountering resistance from the community. Once patterns are identified, they are linked to broader issues to establish their relevance to the research topic. Following data collection, the analysis is conducted to extract meaningful insight, which is further interpreted and compared to conclude.

The Concept of Religious Radicalism

Radical or radicalism in *the Black Law Dictionary* encompasses three primary lexical meanings. First, it refers to political understandings or movements that aim for social and political change or renewal through violent means. Second, it denotes extreme attitudes within political movements. And third, it pertains to transforming established processes into something new and expedited. In the process of change, ‘*radical*’ is defined as a transformative process that leads to new effectiveness (*Radical*, n.d.-a). Radicalism is “the belief that there should be great or extreme social or political change” (*Radicalism*, n.d.).

Meanwhile, according to the *Oxford Learner’s Dictionary*, when used as an adjective placed before nouns, ‘*radical*’ has three meanings. First, it relates to the fundamental and essential aspects, providing a comprehensive and detailed understanding. Second, it denoted something new, different, and likely to have a significant impact. And third, it signifies the support or advocacy for extreme and comprehensive political or social change (*Radical*, n.d.-b). In philosophy, “*radical*” originates from the word ‘*radix*’ meaning ‘*root*’. *Radical* philosophically refers to delving into the deepest root of a problem to uncover its true nature or essence. In their quest for knowledge, philosophers go beyond mere sensory perception and seek to grasp the underlying meaning behind phenomena or events (Chalik, 2017; Tafsir, 2004).

Indeed, the term ‘*radical*’ can be associated with attitudes or actions that exceed established limits or norms. When connected to religious attitudes, it often carries connotations of violence and division. However, in the context of this study, the meaning of ‘*radical*’ aligns with the third definition provided by *the Black Law Dictionary*, which refers to the process of change or pursuit of bringing about new effectiveness (*Radical*, n.d.-a). Therefore, discussing ‘*radicalism*’ implies an understanding that seeks to create fundamental, comprehensive, and rapid change.

The perception of radicals can vary depending on those involved’s context and perspective. If a change aligns with commonly held opinion and

is within the mainstream, it may be viewed as positive. However, when a change goes against established norms and is outside the mainstream, it tends to be seen as a negative. Radicalism is often associated with ideas or movements that fall outside the mainstream and are embraced by minority groups (A. S. Ali, 2014). Radicalism not only attacks dominant ideas, actors, and institutions using a rhetoric of subversion, but also how it can use a rhetoric of reversion to urge intimate transformations in morals and behavior (Karell & Freedman, 2019). Theoretically, radical can manifest as ideas or concepts, as well as movements seeking rapid, fundamental, total, and comprehensive change. Authorities typically prefer to avoid immediate and complete transformation.

The historical examples, such as Prophet Moses being seen as a radical figure by Pharaoh or Prophet Muhammad being viewed as extreme by the Quraish of Mecca, demonstrated attempts to completely transform the societal worldview of their time (M. S. Salim, 2020). It is important to note that the interpretation and meaning of the term “radical” can vary depending on who uses it, leading to a lack of a singular definition (Taher, 1998, p. xvii).

The significance of radical ideas lies in their ideological nature rather than their form, as they may pose a minor concern in that state. However, when these ideas materialize into movements, problems arise, particularly when opposing forces hinder desires and aspirations. This often leads to the emergence of violence (Rokhmad, 2012). Radical movements typically seek fundamental and extensive transformations. Within the framework of a nation, groups aiming to alter the foundation of the state pose a threat to its stability, as they call for changes to the established basis of the state. Consequently, the rulers are inclined to adopt measures that diminish the radicalism inherent in thought and movement, striving to prevent any attempts to alter the foundation of statehood. For genuine progress to occur, change must take place gradually to avert the risks of anarchy (Chaidar, 2018a, p. 5, 2018b).

Meanwhile, religion and practicing religion have different meanings; religion is associated with belief in the supernatural, whereas practicing

religion is the actualization of religious teachings. Religion is connected to sacred scriptures, whereas practicing religion involves understanding those scriptures. The meaning of religion can be found in the three basic norms; *agama*, *dim*, and *religi* (Shabir, 2015, p. 12). Religion carries the connotation of a bond that is upheld and adhered to by humans, requiring an attitude of submission and obedience to God (Madjid, 1992, p. 13). Religion becomes an ideal human need as it serves as inspiration and a basis for behavior.

Radicalism in practicing religion arises from the belief that the religion one follows is the most legitimate while considering others as illegitimate. Some religious concepts involve sincere attempts by individuals or groups to discuss comprehensive changes. However, when these ideas take the form of a movement, they embody radical thinking transformed into a planned and organized collective effort. The significant distinction between the two lies in the fact that the former remained confined to ideas and thought, whereas the latter becomes an action movement.

The radicalism of thought retains validity; radical movements can threaten mainstream groups, leading to their potential prohibition. Understanding the contexts in which radicalism is expressed or demonstrated is crucial since 'radical' is an adjective that adapts to the given context.

The Abrasive Strategies Concept

Indonesia, also known as Nusantara, is a nation composed of numerous islands situated in the Pacific Ocean and the Indian Ocean. Throughout history, Indonesia or Nusantara has been a significant hub and intersection point for global trade routes. The introduction of Islam to the region can be traced back to external individuals who gradually sailed from Hindustan and arrived in the Nusantara from the 7th century onward, around the 12th century. These outsiders, who initially came for trade purposes, eventually settled and formed connections through intermarriage with the local population. Over time, their community proliferated, establishing sizable Islamic communities (A. Salim, 1962, p. 10). The presence of Islam in the Nusantara was documented in Western literature around 1292. During this

period, an Islamic kingdom called Perlak (Ferlec) emerged in Sumatra, with immigrants from India. Malacca became a prominent gathering place for merchants worldwide, including China, India, Java, Arabia, Gujarat, and India. From Malacca, these merchants continued their voyages toward Java (Aboebakar, 1979, pp. 9–10).

According to Western sources, the Islamic community in Indonesia began to take shape in the 13th century due to the region's maritime trade connections, which were part of the Silk Road network spanning Southeast Asia, the Indian Ocean, and the Middle East. Muslim merchants from Gujarat and Malabar were among the early visitors to the Nusantara, followed by Arab Merchants from Hadramaut. In the 15th century, the establishment of the Islamic kingdom of Demak marked a significant development, as it replaced the previously dominant Majapahit kingdom in Java and played a central role in shaping the religious beliefs of the local population (Campo, 2009, pp. 358–360). Demak also became the birthplace of Islamic preachers known as Walisongo, who played a crucial role in spreading Islam among the indigenous peoples. Tome Pires, in 1515, witnessed the presence of Muslim leaders along the north coast of Java, a finding that was further confirmed by Pigafetta's visit to Java in 1522 (Sunyoto, 2016a, pp. v–vi).

Tome Pires explains how the coastal Javanese people embraced Islam despite their previous adherence to pagan beliefs. The coastal communities of Java converted to Islam due to the arrival of traders from Persia, Arabia, Gujarat, Bengal, Malay, and the Moors. These merchants came to engage in trade, establish permanent residences, construct mosques, and bring foreign scholars (*Mullah*) with them. Over time, the Muslim community gradually grew, and subsequent generations identified themselves as Javanese (Pires et al., 2015, p. 254). In 1521, the population of Demak was estimated to be around 130 thousand people, residing in approximately 20,000 houses (Reid, 2011, p. 83).

Walisongo refers to the figures who significantly spread Islam during the 15th and 16th centuries. Western literature associates Walisongo with the

kingdom of Majapahit, Demak, Pajang, and Mataram. However, the exact details are not explicitly mentioned in works such as the *Suma Oriental* and the *History of Java* (Fanani & Kahfi, 2019). On the other hand, the local literature recounts the story of Walisongo in texts like *Babad Ngampeldenta*, *Babad Tanah Jawi*, *Babad Tingkir*, *Babad Bedah Majapahit*, and *Babad Syekh Malaya*.

Katalog Induk Naskah Nusantara (the Nusantara Manuscript Master Catalog) identifies the personage of Walisongo as contained in *Serat Kaklempakan Suluk* and *Piwulang Warna-Warni*. *Serat Kaklempakan* in Javanese script, after 697 pages, consists of four parts that have a collection of didactic texts, such as *Serat Tuladha*, *Serat Dewa Ruci*, *Serat Nitistruti*, *Serat Slokantara*, *Serat Undhang-Undhang*, *Serat Gembring*, *Suluk Ngabdul Salam*, *Suluk Wulang*, *Suluk Wiji*, *Suluk Sarengat*, *Suluk Bab Salat*, *Suluk Cublak*, *Suluk Nglamong*, *Suluk Seksiraga*, *Suluk Piwulang*, *Suluk Purwaduksina*, *Suluk Pandhawa*, *Suluk Purwa*, *Kanjeng Nabi Ngalih (Ing Mekah)*, *Surasaning Kitab*, *Serat Sewaka*, *Tegese Bismilah*, *Tegese surat ing Kitab*, *Bab Ayating Qur'an*, *Pepali Ki Ageng Sela*, *Serat Cabolek*, *Suluk Pitutur*, *Serat Wulangreh*, *Suluk Nglamong*, *Sejarahing Para Wali*, *Kitab Ahya*, *Serat Kancil*, *Kidung Rumecko ing Wengi*, *Serat Lelembut Ing Tanah Jawi*, *Serat Digbyatama*, *Serat Pratingkahing Krama*, *Serat Su'al Jawab*, *Cariyos Endah*, *Serat Tuladha*, *Serat Wirasat*, *Suluk Peksi Bantah Kawruh*, *Suluk Tasringalam*, and *Serat Pancadriya*. The description of Walisongo is also drawn from *Babad Tanah Jawi: Ajisaka Dumugi Demak* (626 pages), *Babad Tanah Jawi Dumugi Pajang* (1,124 pages) (Linsdsay et al., 1994, pp. 97–98, 200–201). The Nusantara literature that reviews the description of Walisongo contains Islamic stories such as *Wirid Hidayat Jati*, *Serat Dewi Patimah*, *Serat Santri Marjuki*, *Taju Salatin*, and so on (Behrend & Pudjiastuti, 1997, pp. 149, 151, 201). The local literature did not originate during 15th and 16th centuries, it has been gathered and documented since the era of Mataram, commencing with the reign of Panembahan Seda Krapyak and reaching its pinnacle during the time of Sultan Agung (Simuh, 1988, pp. 23–24).

Regardless of the authenticity of Indonesian literature, the Walisongo chronicle mentions the presence of eight (8) guardians (*para wali*) explicitly. The argument that associates the number of Walisongo with nine (9) stems from the notion that the guardians represent the eight (8) cardinal points, with one (1) acting as trustee expanding to at least 21 individuals, who alternately held the position of guardians (Widji, 1995, pp. 21–22). Solichin Salam identified the nine (9) well-known guardian names, which include Sunan Maulana Malik Ibrahim, Sunan Ampel, Sunan Giri, Sunan Gunung Jati, Sunan Bonang, Sunan Drajat, Sunan Kudus, Sunan Kalijaga, and Sunan Muria. On the other hand, other saintly figures are not universally agreed upon or categorized as part of Walisongo, such as Sunan Tembayat, Sunan Prawoto, Sunan Ngudung, Sunan Geseng, Sunan Mojoagung, Siti Jenar, Subakir, Maulana Ishak. Although these saints may have different names attributed to them, they were all influential preachers who successfully facilitated a transformation in the social order of Indonesia, promoting openness and deviating from radical ideologies.

The strategy of Walisongo in reducing religious radicalism is carried out abrasively, namely slowly transmitting Islam to civilized societies. Abrasive work patterns change a rough personality (radical) into a subtle personality (moderate). In other words, the abrasive strategy is to formulate *da'wah* plans in specific ways to change the character of Javanese society slowly and subtly 'constructed' to a subtle character.

The abrasive strategy is based on a gradual erosion of faith through the continuous introduction of Islam, analogous to the eroding effect of seawater upon a coast. This method aims to diminish one's faith in old beliefs while gradually instilling the teachings of Islam. It distinguishes itself from compromise and non-compromise approaches (Simuh, 1996, pp. 13, 15). In this abrasive strategy, legality and morality are combined, incorporating both Shari'a (Islamic law) and Sufism, as suggested by al-Ghazali. The guardians of Islam recognized that eradicating religious radicalism within Javanese society was challenging. Besides possessing a rich civilization, the Javanese also had deep-rooted cultural traditions. According to Sunyoto, the early

presence of Islam before the 14th century faced obstacles as it was perceived as idolatrous.

The acceptance of Islam among the Javanese before the 14th century was challenging due to various factors. As described in the book “*Sejarah Lengkap Islam Jawa*,” Javanese society resisted outsiders, particularly those who aimed to spread Islam. However, this resistance ceased when a saint named Subakir defeated oppressive forces (Rumilah et al., 2020). Another obstacle was the influence of Javanese culture, myths, and traditions, which emphasised belief in supernatural powers and deities residing in objects, plants, and animals with magical attributes. Despite these beliefs, a formal and conscious religious manifestation had not yet emerged (Simuh, 1988). Harun Nasution categorised society as exhibiting dynamism, animism, and polytheism (Nasution, 2015).

Amidst this cultural backdrop, Javanese society also encountered the influence of Hinduism, which spread through the upper class and Javanese nobility. The people accepted and embraced Hinduism based on the understanding and practices of the nobility. However, the Javanese populace continued to adhere to their existing beliefs, while Hinduism and Buddhism remained confined to the palace community (Sunyoto, 2017).

There were several reasons behind the difficulty faced by Islam in its development among the Javanese. These included finding the appropriate method to reduce radicalism, the limited utilisation of knowledge and technology, and the social stratification that placed foreigners in a lower class (Sunyoto, 2016b). In response to the challenges, the *da'wah* strategy was modified. During the time of the guardians, a combination of compromise and non-compromise methods, referred to as the abrasive strategy, was employed. This approach involved gradually introducing Islam to the already civilised Javanese society. The propagation of Islam was carried out not through violence or war but through cultural means. While Arabic literature served as the entry point for the spread of Islam in the Arabian Peninsula, in Java, cultural arts played a significant role in disseminating Islamic teachings.

In the Arabian Peninsula, the delivery of Qur'anic verses by the Prophet Muhammad triumphed over the prominence of Arabic literature, despite its high standing at the time (Rahman, 2019). Qur'anic verses encompass various aspects, including legal matters involving grammatical, lexical, and contextual meanings. Through studying these verses, legal principles or *Usul Fiqh* can be derived (Zubairin, 2020). The core principle of the abrasive strategy is to provide practical solutions without giving rise to new problems. The *da'wah* pattern aims to achieve its objective smoothly, like catching a fish without stirring up the water. As the Saints travel to different locations, they pass on several traditions to the people they visit.

Abrasive strategies are implemented based on the capabilities of the community. Teaching is conducted in stages to ensure a clear understanding of religious teachings and minimize misunderstandings. According to Saksono (Widji, 1995), religious knowledge is imparted gradually and periodically, using language that is easy to comprehend. Abrasive strategies emphasise long-term goals, encompassing incidental, intermediate, temporary, and general objectives. This approach does not negate one approach in favour of another; instead, it extracts the essence of various methods and seeks to apply them effectively within the community.

The Radicalism and Abrasive Strategies

Western literature has traditionally recognized Europe, Islam, India, and China as the world's major civilizations while considering the civilization in Nusantara (Southeast Asia) as a lost continent. However, Nusantara had a remarkable civilization that flourished from the 5th to the 15th centuries. The cultural influence in Nusantara spanned from India, Islam, and China to Europe (Lombard, 1996, p. 1). Javanese civilization, in particular, thrived as the center of the Majapahit Kingdom, with its glory reaching distant lands such as Syangka (Siam), Ayodhyapura (Thailand), Rajapura (Thailand), Darmanagari (Lihor), Campa, Cambodia, Yawana (Vietnam), and even China (Munandar, 2008).

The story of Majapahit contains anachronisms; Malay history acknowledged it as a powerful kingdom whose influence extended to the

Malay Peninsula. (Muljana, 2005, p. 67). The structure of the Majapahit kingdom was characterized by a king, supported by a grand advisory council, the Patih Amangku Bumi, as well as dignitaries such as *the Maha Mantri, Mantri, Maha Menteri Katrini, Hino, Halu, and Sirikan*. This progressive civilization was evident in political power and permeated its society's daily culture. Majapahit residents in coastal areas were primarily engaged in trade, donning traditional attire and carrying the *keris* from childhood.

Wayang Beber, a traditional storytelling form, was a favorite entertainment among the Majapahit residents. They collected jewelry, perfumes, silk, and cotton, and transactions were conducted using a currency known as *Ina* copper money for transactions (Munandar, 2008). The depiction of Javanese kings leading the kingdom portrayed them as knights with extraordinary endurance. They acquired supernatural powers through training under the guidance of teachers, practicing *Lara Lapa* (self-control) and *Tapa Brata* (austerity). The kings believed that true fulfillment came from distancing oneself from worldly pleasures. (Purwadi & Toyoda, 2006) These practices empowered kings, poets, and knights to govern the kingdom effectively.

An abrasive strategy was devoted to penetrating the Javanese culture with its rich civilization. Prior attempts to reduce radicalism have proven unsuccessful since the 7th century (Rumilah et al., 2020). In the 14th century, an abrasive approach was adopted by explaining Islamic concepts in local languages. This gradual process of introducing Islam to Javanese society eventually led to an open-minded Muslim community. This strategy drew inspiration from the Prophet's approach when preaching among the *Arab Jahiliyah* community, which had a solid literary civilization. Islam presented the Qur'an, a highly literary work that surpassed the creations of Arab poets (J. Ali, 1993). Similarly, the saints who preached Islam in the 14th-16th centuries faced a progressive civilization in culture and art.

Abrasive strategies were employed to address the issue of religious radicalism. These strategies encompassed regional management (geographical considerations), arts management (cultural engagement), health management (medical aspects), fostering noble behavior (*akhlāq al-*

karīmah), Marriage alliances, and deepening religious knowledge (strengthening the understanding of Islam). These strategies aimed to gradually influence society, shape behavior, and establish a firm foundation of religiosity (see Figure 1).

Naturally, geographical variation can impede the process of strengthening religious radicalism. Geographically, Java is situated in Southeast Asia, historically serving as a meeting point for foreign traders (Lombard, 1996). During the 14th century, Java developed into a highly advanced hub for inter-island trade under the rule of the Majapahit empire (Lombard, 1996). In the 15th century, as Majapahit's power waned, Islam began to emerge along the northern coast, introducing a new economic and social order. Islam gained followers among the royal elite, alongside existing religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, local beliefs, ancestor veneration, totemism, and shamanism (Tikhomirov, 2020).



Figure 1
The Abrasive Strategies of Walisongo

Java shares cultural similarities with Southeast Asia. Javanese society is characterized by a “*homo ludens*” typology, denoting a group of individuals who enjoy playing games. Javanese people utilize their free time for creative pursuits, and this tendency towards playfulness is embraced by both the ordinary people and the leadership (Reid, 1992, p. xxvii). This cultural pattern fosters social cohesion, positioning the Javanese as “*homo ludens*.” The presence of guardians within the community plays a vital role in reinforcing social acceptance. The absence of a guardian at community ceremonies is not well-received. The guardians, known as “*Para Wali*,” employ various art forms such as puppet shows, gamelan music, and various games to fill leisure time (Reid, 1992).

According to Western sources, particularly Pires, the Islamization of Java occurred due to three factors: voluntary acceptance by the Javanese natives, influence from foreign merchants, and political pressures leading to compulsory conversion. However, Reid suggests that changes in Javanese beliefs occur naturally (Reid, 1992). For instance, a native might adopt the religion of their employer, mainly if the employer is affluent. Reid argues that the source of turmoil is not conversion itself but the labor struggle.

By combining the perspectives of Pires and Reid, one can conclude that the decline in radicalism levels in Java can be attributed to the economic power of foreign merchants who “coerced” local rulers and the populace into embracing Islam. Meanwhile, Ricklefs suggests that the pattern of Islamization in Java unfolded as follows: the first one, Muslim merchants established new centers of power within local territories, successfully converting the ruling elite and expanding their influence beyond these territories. Islam spread rapidly, reaching the hinterland. The encounters between coastal communities and external merchants led to a tug-of-war between local and foreign cultures, resulting in dynamic cultural syncretism and acculturation. This gave rise to practices such as incorporating Islamic beliefs alongside indigenous beliefs. Javanese Islam in coastal areas took on distinct local nuances influenced by those who brought it, transforming it into a religion based on the interpretations of Islamic saints or preachers (Syam, 2005, pp. 5–6).

The second approach to reducing religious radicalism lies in the realm of culture. The cultural path recognises the Javanese people's inclination towards playfulness. Thus, various art forms were created, including shadow puppets, gamelan music, poetry, and community teachings. Sunan Kalijaga, for instance, introduced Islam through puppetry, organizing popular performances that captivated the public. Artistic presentations featuring puppets, *Barongan*, and mask dances accompanied these puppet shows (Sunyoto, 2016a). Sunan Drajat composed *tembang* (songs) like *Pangkur*, Sunan Kalijaga created *Dandanggula* and *Semarangan* songs, Sunan Kudus crafted the *Maskumambang* and *Mijil* songs, Sunan Bonang wrote the *Durma* song, Sunan Muria continued his father's theatrical works (Sunyoto, 2016a). Sunan Muria developed the philosophy of community integration with the motto "*tapa ngéli ning ora kéli*" (Ridwan et al., 2015, p. 216).

Cultural engagements operate subtly, embracing and tolerating local traditions. Sunan Muria extended Islam to the hinterland, requiring the translation of religious texts to better resonate with the ordinary people. As a result, Sunan Muria employed artistic expressions, Sufism, and direct community teaching methods (Anasom, 2018). This cultural approach was chosen due to resistance encountered in Islamic *da'wah* efforts, owing to the strong influence of Javanese mythology and traditions.

Walisongo refined existing arts within the community. Sunan Muria incorporated religious principles into traditional customs, recognizing that imposition would be met with resistance. *Adat Istiadat* (customary traditions) were preserved while their contents were composed and aligned to avoid contradicting religious laws (Arroisi, 2008b, pp. 4–5). Changes were implemented gradually, ensuring societal acceptance. Adjustments to customary practices were made subtly, prioritizing the ethics of Java.

The acculturation process to Islam in Java can be observed through various ceremonies that accompany different stages of life, from birth to death. These ceremonies involve the recitation of prayers and the practice of *Slametan*, where offerings are given to the surrounding community. Despite these changes, the Javanese identity is not eradicated, as Javanese Islam

demonstrates adaptability in accepting rapid social, political, economic, and cultural transformations (Mufid, 2006).

The third approach to the strategy of introducing Islam is through peaceful means. Islam is embraced by the society based on its moral teachings. Prominent figures such as Maulana Malik Ibrahim, Sunan Bonang, and Sunan Drajat attempted to preach Islam to the nobles of the Majapahit empire. Malik Ibrahim's position as a *Syahbandar* (harbor master) in Gresik Port allowed him to establish contact with foreign traders, increasing shipping activities in Gresik. The coastal rulers of Java became interested in Malik Ibrahim's work, including his Islamic faith. This led to interactions between Malik Ibrahim and the Majapahit nobles, eventually resulting in their visit to Gresik. However, Malik Ibrahim recognized that some nobles hesitated to embrace Islam due to their ancestral religious ties. This reluctance stemmed from the belief that the relationship between the people and the ruler was not solely political but also held a sacred spiritual connection.

Maulana Ibrahim's objective in preaching Islam to the king was to gain the favor and support of the people. While respecting other beliefs, the courteous introduction of Islam exemplified *akhlāq al-karīmah*, or noble character (Nuh, n.d., p. 27). For example, Sunan Bonang developed *Gending Dharma*, a musical composition, to propagate Islam respectfully. He authored essays in the form of *Suluk* (spiritual guidance) using language that ordinary individuals could easily comprehend. The approach to *da'wah* varied depending on the audience. Peasants were addressed in their vernacular, nobles in a more sophisticated language, and students in scholarly terms. This approach aligned with the Prophet's teachings to communicate with people according to their level of understanding (Arroisi, 2008a, pp. 9–10).

Sunan Drajat was renowned for his exemplary character and strong sense of social responsibility (Nuh, n.d.). He encouraged people to assist those in distress, suffering, or need, advocating principles such as “*caring for the blind, feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, and providing shelter for*

*the homeless.*¹ Sunan Drajat promoted awareness of poverty, emphasized the well-being of the people, and advocated for empathy, hard work, generosity, poverty alleviation, efforts to create prosperity, social solidarity, and cooperation within the community (Sunyoto, 2016a). These qualities contributed to the acceptance of Islamic preachers in society. Bisri Mustofa's perspective is relevant as he asserts that Islam spread in Indonesia by supporting influential and accomplished preachers who arrived not solely as merchants but intending to propagate Islam (Musthofa, 1952, pp. 18–19).

The concept of *akhlāq al-karīmah*, representing the virtuous character, is embodied in the title “Sunan,” which encompasses three elements: speaking kind words (*qawlan ma'rūfan*), speaking eloquently and persuasively (*qawlan sadīdan*), and practicing righteous deeds (*ṣālihan*) (Machfoed, 1970, p. 26). When dealing with local customs, the saints employed three main approaches: outright rejection, complete acceptance, and acceptance with the intention of improvement or reinterpretation (Hapsin, 2010). The saints profoundly understood Islamic teachings and the meanings, laws, and inner dimensions of other legal sources. By conveying the truths of Islamic religious teachings, they could present Islam in a morally appealing manner. This ethical approach fostered acceptance of the Islamic path within the community, and the residents responded positively to Islamic preachers due to their virtuous character, as stated by Nurhadi² (interview, 2022). Islam was propagated not through violence but through courteous proselytization. The ethical approach also entailed refraining from using offensive or derogatory terms in Islam when referring to non-Muslims.

The fourth approach involves the implementation of healing methods. Sunan Ampel and Malik Ibrahim successfully treated individuals in the Surabaya region by combining roots and leaves as medicinal remedies (Shabir, 2019, p. 207). Similarly, Sunan Gunung Jati taught various practices

¹ In Javanese: “*Wenehana teken marang wong wuta, wenehana mangan marang wong kang luwe, wenehana busana marang wong kang wuda, menehana ngiyup marang wong kang kudanan.*”

² K. H. Norhadi is Rais Syuriah Pengurus Wilayah Nahdlatul Ulama, Bali Province.

such as prayer, recitation of mantras, medical procedures, and forest clearance techniques.³ This method aimed to address societal concerns and reduce religious radicalism.

Nurhadi adopted a similar approach when spreading Islam among the Balinese community, using treatment to attract people's interest in Islam. By employing various leaves and roots as medicinal ingredients, Nurhadi administered treatments widely accepted by the community. Additionally, prayer was used to promote mental well-being and reject negative influences (Widji, 1995).

The fifth strategy involves the institution of marriage, which played a pivotal role in strengthening the presence of Islam in the region. Sunan Gunung Jati, for instance, married Nyai Rara Santang from the Padjajaran Kingdom (Shabir, 2019), while Sunan Ampel married Nyai Gede Manila, the daughter of Adipati Tuban from the Majapahit Kingdom. These marriages resulted in the birth of children such as Sunan Bonang, Nyi Ageng Maloka, and Dewi Saroh, or Siti Syariah, Siti Mutmainah, Siti Hafsoh, Raden Ibrahim, and Raden Qosim.

Marriages between Islamic preachers and members of the royal family exemplify the profound influence of Islam within a kingdom. Fata Asrofi's research indicates that these marriages followed two patterns: the guardians marrying into other guardian families and marrying into royal authorities (Yahya, 2020). For instance, Sunan Drajat married Dewi Sufiyah (the daughter of Putri Sunan Cirebon) (Musthofa, 1952). Sunan Kalijaga married Siti Muthmainah (the daughter of Putri Sunan Drajat), and Raden Patah married Siti Asyikah (Putri Sunan Drajat's daughter). In an alternative account, Sunan Kalijaga married Dewi Saroh, the daughter of Maulana Ishaq, having three children: Raden Said, Dewi Ruqayyah, and Dewi Sofiyah (Musthofa, 1952).

³ In Javanese: "*Kanjeng Susubunan ing Gunung Jati ing Cirebon, amewahi donga hakaliyan mantra, utawi parasat miwah jajampi utawi amewahi dadamelipun tiyang babad wana*" (Shabir, 2019).

Sunan Muria married Dewi Soejinah, the daughter of Sunan Ngudung, and their union gave rise to a son named Pangeran Santri, who later became known as Sunan Ngadilangu. Sunan Kudus Ja'far Sodik married Dewi Ruhil, the daughter of Sunan Bonang, and their marriage bore a child named Raden Amir Hasan. In an alternative version, Jafar Sodik also married Pecat Tanda, having eight children: Nyai Ageng Pembayun, Panembahan Palembang, Panembahan Makaos, Panembahan Kadhi, Panembahan Karimun, Panembahan Joko, Ratu Prajoko, and Ratu Probodinalar (Arroisi, 2018, p. 24).

The process of Islamic *da'wah* through marriage can be done because Sunan Ampel compiled Islamic Shari'a rules for Javanese people, ranging from regulations regarding family and household matters, marriage law (*munākahāt*) with matters of *khiṭbah*, *nikāḥ*, *ṭalāq*, referencing, equipped with family law (*usraḥ*), ceremonies when the baby is born, giving names, *'aqīqah*, *walīmah*, *hadānah*, *muwalah*, *wirathah*, *ṣadaqah* or *slametan* (Sunyoto, 2016a). The marriage factor was practised by Islamic advocates in the early days when settling in one of the places in Java and then marrying local residents. Communion Islam is formed and proliferated this way (A. Salim, 1962). Preaching Islam through marriage was preceded by trade routes, educational activities, Sufism, and art paths (Sugiri, 2021, pp. 16–20).

Islam thrived among the ordinary and nobility, with marriage playing a significant role in social advancement. The local population believed that marrying their family members to knowledgeable and virtuous preachers would be beneficial. As a result, unions between the advocates of Islam and noble families gave rise to notable individuals such as Sunan Ampel, the son of King Champa, Sunan Giri, the offspring of King Blambangan, and Raden Patah, who was born to King Brawijaya. Additionally, Sunan Kalijaga, associated with Tumenggung Wilatikta, and Sunan Ngudung, who was Tumenggung Wilatikta's son-in-law, further solidified the influence of these esteemed figures in Java. This is in accordance with Ricklefs' opinion that religious conversion among Javanese residents was due to two things, namely the spread carried out by foreign traders, who intermarried with the

locals, and a Muslim community, where this community developed from the religion adopted earlier (Ricklefs, 2013).

The sixth aspect involves possessing a profound understanding of religion. To provide answers to inquiries, the saints engage in *ijtihād*, a process where they refer to the fundamental sources of religion as a guide for their responses. This ability to convey meaning is crucial to ensure their guidance and teachings are well received. Developing a charismatic and wise character is essential for this purpose. Hence, the presence of knowledgeable and learned individuals becomes indispensable as trustees. Such individuals should also possess tolerance towards others, demonstrating both intelligence and humility. Attaining this state requires dedicated practice in acquiring knowledge, ultimately enabling one to embrace and accommodate others. As a result, those who possess extensive knowledge tend to exhibit wisdom in various aspects of life.

The accurate interpretation of texts within the context of the abrasive method requires a thorough mastery of religious science. Sunan Bonang, while instructing Sunan Kalijaga, imparted various facets of religious knowledge, encompassing disciplines such as *kalām* (theology), *fiqh* (jurisprudence), Sufism, *ḥadīth* (prophetic tradition), *nahwu* (Arabic grammar), *falak* (astronomy), and *uṣūl fiqh* (principles of Islamic jurisprudence). This educational process commenced with self-preparation and proceeded gradually until Sunan Kalijaga could comprehend the texts literally and discern their underlying meanings. Upon completion of their studies, the graduates who have pursued religious and social sciences are dispatched to locations for *da'wah* (religious propagation). When addressing societal challenges, law (*fiqh*) assumes significance.

Consequently, a firm grasp of Islamic law and its methodology and knowledge of approaching God (*Tasawuf*) becomes essential. The saints engage in *ijtihād*, employing their mastery of jurisprudence and legal principles to interpret Islamic textual sources within the specific context of Javanese society. Such *ijtihād* is facilitated by the foundational knowledge that must be possessed by the saints.

Furthermore, a profound understanding of Islam fosters substantive thinking, prioritizing content over forms and symbols. The values of Shari'a can be internalized in daily life without explicitly labeling every action as Islamic law. For instance, the mention of the word “*ṣalāt*” may be replaced with “*sembah Hyang*” and “*ṣawm*” with “*puasa*.” This perspective encourages the community to embody and implement Sharia principles without overtly labeling them as such.

Conclusion

The efforts initiated by Walisongo in dealing with religious radicalism within the Nusantara community were carried out through various channels. These channels include geographical considerations, as the region, particularly Java, served as a hub for international traders, fostering an open attitude towards outsiders. Cultural engagements were also utilised, incorporating traditional art forms such as shadow puppets, *gamelan* or *gending*, and providing necessary tools for community teaching, recognizing the community's inclination towards recreational activities. The third method involved spreading Islam through individuals with polite personalities and commendable morals. Medical aspects included utilizing natural remedies such as roots and leaves to address community ailments, demonstrating a holistic approach to healing. Marriage alliances with noble families further strengthened the influence of Islam in the region. However, at the core of these channels lies a deep understanding of Islam, serving as the foundation for most of these efforts. The ability to reduce the levels of radicalism within society is facilitated by providing new perspectives and meanings to various aspects of life. This approach ensures that the community receives the presence of the saints and the teachings they convey.[w]

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