

Muhammadiyah and the Shifting Interpretation of Local Religious Traditions

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Abstract

The study focuses on changes in the religious interpretation of the Muhammadiyah, an Islamic mass organization in Indonesia, which initially sought to clear Islam from local religious traditions but then began to accept the tradition. This research is qualitative research, with documented methods and in-depth interviews, to explore to what extent these changes and the factors affecting them. The study reveals that Muhammadiyah began tolerating local religious traditions and emphasized the need to redefine religious purification. Factors such as less popular *da'wah* strategies in rural areas, and the emergence of young Muhammadiyah groups supporting liberalism and moderation, have influenced this shift. This study is important to advance scientific traditions, especially in relation to Muhammadiyah, and to make constructive contributions to formulating organizational policies in connection with local religious traditions.

Penelitian ini berfokus pada perubahan dalam interpretasi keagamaan di dalam Muhammadiyah, sebagai organisasi massa Islam di Indonesia, yang awalnya berusaha untuk membersihkan Islam dari tradisi keagamaan lokal tetapi kemudian mulai menerima tradisi tersebut. Penelitian ini merupakan penelitian kualitatif, dengan metode dokumentasi dan wawancara mendalam, untuk mengeksplorasi sejauh mana perubahan ini dan faktor-faktor yang mempengaruhinya. Penelitian ini mengungkapkan bahwa Muhammadiyah tidak hanya mulai menoleransi tradisi agama lokal, tetapi juga menekankan pentingnya untuk mendefinisikan kembali tentang purifikasi agama. Faktor-faktor seperti strategi dakwah yang kurang populer di daerah pedesaan, dan munculnya kelompok-kelompok muda Muhammadiyah yang mendukung liberalisme dan moderasi, turut mempengaruhi pergeseran ini. Penelitian

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ini penting untuk memajukan tradisi keilmuan, terutama dalam kaitannya dengan Muhammadiyah, dan memberikan kontribusi konstruktif untuk formulasi kebijakan organisasi sehubungan dengan tradisi keagamaan lokal.

Keywords: local religious traditions; Muhammadiyah; religious interpretation; shifting

Introduction

Muhammadiyah, founded by Ahmad Dahlan, is an Islamic mass organization in Indonesia that places a lot of emphasis on efforts to purify religion (Syihab, 1998, p. 125). Muhammadiyah views that monotheism is the core and essence of Islamic teachings and that all religious normative references are guidelines and directions for filling, realizing, and manifesting monotheism's life (Hasyim, 1990, p. 189). The entire movement and life of Muhammadiyah refers to or departs from monotheism, namely the phrase *lā ilāha illallāh, Muḥammad Rasūlullāh*, which means "there is no god but Allah and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah" (Rais, 1995, p. 21, 1996, p. 4, 1998, p. 125).

Muhammadiyah is one of Indonesia's leading organizations for modernist Muslims, with Majelis Tarjih, the body charged with issuing its fatwās since 1927 (Anwar, 2005). Muhammadiyah has been labeled a modernist group because of its optimistic view of modernity. Muhammadiyah began to spearhead several reform movements within the Indonesian Islamic community through its methodological framework, or *tajdīd* (Hilmy, 2013).

Muhammadiyah's beliefs are the same as those of other Islamic mass organizations, but there is an assertion that will differentiate them from that which lies on the plains of praxis. Such a concept of divinity will require the implementation of daily rituals, which are also standard, in which the implementation of rituals must also be realized in its original form and prevent it from deviating from religious practices, such as reciting *tablīl*, *manāqib*, *barzanjy*, salvation of *mitung ndina*, *nyatus*, *nyewu* after death, *shalawatan*, *talqīn*, and 20 *raka'ats* of *Tarawih*, call to prayer twice in Friday prayers, the commemoration of the 10th of Ashura, the anniversary of the

death of a scholar and others. Even Muhammadiyah believes that local religious traditions considered deviant must be completely eradicated.

Muhammadiyah's rejection of local religious traditions can be seen in the *fatwā* of the Majelis Tarjih PP Muhammadiyah, which states that these religious practices are unlawful and not following the spirit of the religion that "we learned" (Majelis Tarjih - PP Muhammadiyah, 1998, p. 149). Muhammadiyah forbids not only local religious practices but also *tarekat* practices. It can be seen in HAMKA's statement, as quoted by Burhanuddin Daya, who stated: "It is better for the caliphs of mysticism (*tarekat* sheikhs) to be hanged on a coconut tree" (Daya, 1995, p. 198).

Muhammadiyah's rejection of these local religious practices is certainly not without argument. The argument raised is that these religious practices are not known or taught by the Qur'an and al-Sunnah. The prohibition of local and *tarekat* Islamic practices is also based on: First, syncretism has kept Muslims away from God. Second, syncretism led to the people's stupidity, so Christian Western nations colonized the Indonesian people. This can only be overcome if Islamic beliefs and ritual activities are carried out according to the example set by the Prophet Muhammad (Anwar, 2005; Mulkhan, 2002)

As a puritan Islamic organization with its rejection of local religious practices, Muhammadiyah will not be interesting if it does not study changes or shifts in internal perceptions of Muhammadiyah. Along with changes in social reality, there are also changes in perceptions and actions in responding to the existence of these local religious traditions, for example, the tradition of *tablīlan*, packaged into *modern tablīl*, prayer together or *munājāt* (Abdillah, 2015). Likewise, there is a new tradition, "virtual *takziyah*" in which there is chanting of the reading of the Holy verses of the Qur'an and prayers, as illustrated in online *takziyah* for the death of several Muhammadiyah figures some time ago (Handayani, 2022; Wahyudi, 2022; Wijaya, 2021).

The tendency to accommodate local religious traditions was strengthened when Muhammadiyah held its 44th Muktamar in Jakarta on 8-11 July 2000. In the Muktamar, Muhammadiyah discussed and set the guidelines for Muhammadiyah Citizens in Art and Culture Life. The 25th

Tarjih National Conference on 5-7 July 2000 also saw the importance of a new religious thought methodological construct that could answer new, more complex problems and be more appreciative of local cultural expressions (Abdullah, 2003, p. xxi).

The shift in religious interpretation of Muhammadiyah in understanding the local religious traditions is an interesting phenomenon. Because since its inception in 1912, Muhammadiyah has been known as the Islamic organization in Indonesia in its efforts to oppose the existence of local religious traditions. Based on the background of the problems above, the author views the phenomenon of shifting Muhammadiyah's religious interpretations as interesting to study.

This research has significance in developing scientific traditions, especially those related to Muhammadiyah issues. In addition, this research also has importance in providing constructive inputs for Muhammadiyah in formulating policies related to the existence of local traditions.

This research, of course, is not the first to examine Muhammadiyah in this issue. Previously, there have been many studies, writings, or research discussing Muhammadiyah, which is known as an Islamic mass organization that places a lot of emphasis on the importance of purifying religion.

Mukhsin Jamil et al. examine the reasoning system of each mass organization in Indonesia, including the Muhammadiyah. The Muhammadiyah reasoning system is regarded as rigid and inflexible, so it cannot accommodate local intelligence. So, Muhammadiyah is only popular among the upper middle class and loses its popularity among the lower class (Jamil et al., 2008).

Meanwhile, Suwarno stated that the internal dynamics of Muhammadiyah were greatly influenced by the appearance of Amien Rais as Chairperson of PP Muhammadiyah after the Muktamar in Aceh 1995. This phenomenon marked a change in leadership in Muhammadiyah from scholars to scholars and led Muhammadiyah to become more politically oriented vis a vis the government. It can be observed from the political stance of Amin Rais, who chose the principle of *nahy munkar* over *amar ma'rūf*.

Armed with a high political strategy based on social monotheism, Amien Rais brought Muhammadiyah to a cooperative attitude but was very critical of the New Order regime's abuse of power. What Amien is doing seems to align with the demands of society and the law in the framework of creating a civil society (Suwarno, 2001, pp. 194–199).

Meanwhile, Achmad Jainuri, in his research, said that Muhammadiyah's religious mission always emphasizes social welfare, that the basic principles of faith and worship are not limited to their influence on faith and ritual per se but have broad implications when placed in a social context. Regardless of these assertions, the implementation of faith and ritual always requires standard and standard daily religious practices. Because of this claim to the importance of religious practice, Muhammadiyah is still considered a movement that only pays attention to the purification of faith and worship. In fact, in the early period of the movement's development, the principles of social reform and practical theology were transformed into various infrastructures that were not limited to the areas of theological debate, but aimed primarily at providing social support (Jainuri, 2002, pp. 213–217).

Meanwhile, Musa Asy'arie explained how important it is to avoid the centralization of religious thought among the Muhammadiyah because of the wide coverage of the Muhammadiyah area. The centralization of religious thought will result in a lack of efficiency and effectiveness of the organization's policies because they are late in following the flow of social change. Therefore, it is time to consider the possibility of decentralizing religious thought among Islamic mass organizations known as the modernist group (Asj'arie, 2002).

In contrast to existing research, studies, and writings, this research will fill gaps not explored in previous research or studies. This research will only focus on the shift of Muhammadiyah's religious interpretations in understanding the existence of local religious traditions, which indicate a dialectic between religion and local culture.

This qualitative research emphasizes exploratory studies, in which the essential data of this research is extracted from relevant data sources. There are two sources of data in this study. First, documents, namely

Muhammadiyah documents related to this research, such as the formulation of the results of the Muhammadiyah National Conference, the formulation of the results of the congress, and others. Second, several Muhammadiyah stakeholders, namely important Muhammadiyah figures who is domiciled in Semarang, Central Java, Indonesia.

This article aims to find out how far there has been a shift in Muhammadiyah's religious interpretation in understanding local religious traditions, as well as the factors that influence the occurrence of a shift in Muhammadiyah's religious interpretation in understanding local religious traditions.

Muhammadiyah and the Idea of Islamic Purification

According to Charles Kurzman, the history of Islam is colored by three different traditions of thought. First, it is called "customary Islam" which is characterized by the mixing of local traditions (little tradition) with great traditions which are presumed to be "genuine Islam" and "pure Islam". Islam which has been mixed with various local traditions is regarded as Islam which is full of heresy and superstition. Based on this, a second trend emerged, known as "Islamic revivalists," which can take the form of fundamentalism and Wahhabism. This tradition seeks to carry out purification (purification) of Islam, which is mixed with local traditions that are considered un-Islamic and as a deviation from the "pure" Islamic doctrine with the jargon of "returning to the Qur'an and Hadith" (*al-rujū' ilā al-Qur'ān wa al-Sunnah*). The third stream is referred to as "liberal Islam". According to Kurzman, like revivalists, liberal Islam defines itself in contrast to traditional Islam and calls on the primacy of Islam in the early period to emphasize the illegitimacy of present-day religious practices. Liberal Islam brings back the past for the sake of modernity, while revivalist Islam emphasizes modernity in the name of the past (Kurzman, 1998, 2002).

Among the three lines of mapping of the Kurzman model of the Islamic thought movement, Muhammadiyah occupies the second position, Islamic revivalist. Viewed from the point of view of the history of Islamic thought, Muhammadiyah's ideology is *Salafi* in nature, the point of which is to return

to pure Islam, which has not been polluted either by local cultural traditions or certain doctrinal discourses. Pure Islam is understood as Islam that existed at the time of Prophet Muhammad and his companions.

But it should be understood, Salafi is not a monolithic movement. It can be seen from the thoughts and movements of figures associated as the originators of Salafism, such as Ibn Taymiyyah (1263-1328), Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab (1703-1787), and Muhammad Abduh (1849-1905). Each approach is also different in inviting Muslims to return to Salafi Islam; Ibn Taymiyyah tended to be a polemicist, Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab used violent means, and Abduh liked the rational approach.

According to Azyumardi Azra, Muhammadiyah Salafism has its own distinction. It is no longer exactly the model of Ibn Taymiyyah or Abduh, let alone Abd al-Wahhab, known to be tough and vicious. The historical and socio-religious reality of Islam in the archipelago (Nusantara) influences the style of Muhammadiyah Salafism, namely *Wasatiyyah* (in the middle and moderate), which on a specific side, seems literalist. This Salafism appears to be used by Muhammadiyah to deal with syncretic religious patterns that develop in society (Afandi, 2022; Lutaefi, 2022).

John Hick defines religion as a faith or a collection of traditions. Islam, for example, is heavily influenced by Arab cultural traditions (Said, 2015). So, it is natural that Islam in Indonesia, for example, acculturates with Javanese cultural traditions. The religious pattern of Indonesian Muslims (Javanese in particular) cannot be separated from the influence of Hindu-Buddhist culture. This culture is reflected in the symbols or symbols used in the traditions of ordinary people, where these symbols are able to give birth to concepts of mythology, sacralization, mystification, and so on. This cultural influence later formed a syncretic religious system known as Javanese Islam.

Kuntowijoyo gave an example of this mythology, such as the myth about Sunan Kalijaga's journey. It is said that Sunan Kalijaga met Prophet Khidhir, Prabu Brawijaya, and Panembahan Senopati Khalifatullah Sayyidin Panatagama Khalifatullah Ing Tanah Jawi, but the truth about when and

where this incident happened is unclear. There are also local mythologies such as Nyi Loro Kidul, the queen of the southern seas, Kiai Sapujagat, the guardian of Mount Merapi, and the myth of Sheikh Jumadil Kubro, whose graves are everywhere (Kuntowijoyo, 2006).

Likewise, with sacralization, there is an effort to glorify *sayyids* or descendants of the prophet in Islamic tradition. Then certain clerics are said to be able to perform prayers in Mecca instantly. There are also sacred tombs, where when we read specific prayers, it will make it easier for those prayers to be answered.

Meanwhile, the mystification is still going on now, for example, the mystification of names that will affect the determination of a mate or not a partner. The mystification of birth can be seen from *Neptu* (Javanese Astrology). Then the mystification of luck lies in whether or not the direction of the road you want to go is suitable or not, and so on.

This situation is what Muhammadiyah wants to overhaul towards a rational religious society. However, Muhammadiyah did not exist in a cultural vacuum. The organization stands amid the cultural plurality of the people who surround it. Many local religious traditions developed long before the founding of this association, such as congratulations on *mitung ndina*, *nyelikur*, *nyatus*, *nyewu* after death, reading *mawlid al-barzanjy*, *dhiba'iyah*, *manāqib*, *talqin*, *tarawih* with 20 *raka'at*, *adhan* twice in Friday prayers ah, the commemoration of the 10th of Ashura, the anniversary of the death of a scholar, the recitation of *talqin* qin and others.

Departing from efforts to purify Islam and adhere to monotheism in a straight line, Muhammadiyah wants to reject these local religious practices that are considered deviant, must be scrapped entirely. The argument raised is that these religious practices are not known or taught by the Qur'an and al-Sunnah. In fact, the Tarjih Council of PP Muhammadiyah openly stated that these religious practices were categorized as unlawful and not following the spirit of the religion that "we learned" (Majelis Tarjih - PP Muhammadiyah, 1998, p. 149).

Muhammadiyah also does not only forbid local religious practices, but also forbids *tarekat* practices. It is because these religious practices were also

never taught by the Prophet. In several places, the act of banning the tarekat was carried out harshly. It is clearly seen in HAMKA's expression, as quoted by Burhanuddin Daya, who stated: "It is better for the caliphs of mysticism (*tarekat* sheikhs) to hang on a coconut tree (Daya, 1995, p. 198).

The prohibition of local and *tarekat* Islamic practices is also based on several reasons. First, syncretism has kept Muslims away from God. Second, syncretism led to the people's stupidity, so Christian Western nations colonized the Indonesian people. It can only be overcome if Islamic beliefs and ritual activities are carried out according to the example set by the Prophet Muhammad (Mulkhan, 2002, p. 117).

Because of this too-strong attitude, Moeslim Abdurrahman said, the Islamic purification movement promoted by Muhammadiyah is increasingly going too far, vicious, and a priori towards local arts and culture. As a result, continued Moeslim, Muhammadiyah as a *tajdid* movement has turned out to be old-fashioned because it cannot renew awareness that is more substantial and open in interpreting that *da'wah* is not synonymous with the propaganda of faith. *Da'wah* is every work of religiosity for civilization and humanity (Abdurrahman, 2003).

The Shift of Religious Interpretation of Muhammadiyah in Understanding Local Religious Traditions

Muhammadiyah and Factors of Local Religious Diversity

The attitude of rejecting or being tolerant and accommodating of a follower of a particular religion or sect on the cultural reality surrounding it is a dynamically developing social phenomenon. Likewise, with Muhammadiyah, this community's rejection, tolerance, and accommodation of local religious traditions is also a dynamically developing social phenomenon. Each Muhammadiyah follower has a different religious pattern according to the socio-cultural context surrounding it. "Pure Islam" is more visible in urban communities, while syncretic Islamic patterns tend to develop in rural areas. As a result, Muhammadiyah, as a modernist Islamic movement, tends to be escapist-exclusively towards local culture.

In its *da'wah* strategy, Muhammadiyah is considered by various groups to be unable to modify ethical-religious patterns to suit local traditions (folk beliefs). This situation is due to the religious reasoning system implemented by Muhammadiyah through efforts to formalize Islam based on transcendent *manhāj* (paradigm), which is very far from the subjective facts of the ummah. Because if you trace the existence of local art culture within the framework of *shari'ah* formalization, you will find scenarios of marginalization and suppression of artistic traditions by official religious authorities, including cultural strategies carried out by local art communities. As a result, the logic of the religious elite could not accommodate the pluralistic synthesis of local religious art and culture at the grassroots.

According to Riaz Hassan, the modification of pure Islam and the rationalization of popular religion appear to vary following the pattern of Islamic relations and local culture and the response of agrarian society to modernization. Munir Mulkan explained that the format of "Islamization" of pure Islam resembled an introversionist or utopian-revolutionist sect. It emerged when the socialization of pure Islam, which had a low level of Sufism, met a more established local culture, and indigenization appeared that resembled a manipulationist sect. When low-level Sufism meets a receding local culture, a pattern of negotiation emerges, akin to a pragmatic manipulationist sect; meanwhile, conflicts will arise when high levels of Sufism meet strong local cultures, such as reformist sects when local culture is modernized.

This discussion related to Muhammadiyah dialectics and local culture will again lead to a reinterpretation of the reality of thinking about Islam as a conception of reality or Islam as a social reality. According to Abdul Munir Mulkan (cited by Lutfi, 2015), at least two things should be understood related to the relation between the universality of Islam and local traditions. First, Islam itself was born as a local product, later universalized and transcended to become universal Islam. Islam means a local product that Islam was born in Arabia, specifically the Hijaz region, in an Arab situation and, at that time, was intended as an answer to the problems that developed there. It is indeed then constructed as a portrait of a global trend.

Second, no matter how much we believe that Islam is a universal revelation from God, which is unseen, eventually, the adherents perceive it according to their experiences, problems, intellectual capacities, cultural systems, and the diversity of each proponent in their community. Thus, it is precisely these two dimensions that need to be realized that it is impossible on the one hand that Islam is universal, as a critique of local culture, and then local culture as a form of the wisdom of each adhesive in understanding and implementing Islam.

Apart from that, continued Mulkhan, Islam was revealed by God to humans, so that their creatures understand it as a guide in life (*hudan li al-nās*). The claim of Islam's universality makes Islam understandable in various cultural systems where Islam will be propagated. So actually, it is more because it places universal Islam in the socio-political-cultural-economic dimension of its adherents. From there, various views and understandings related to Islam emerged. It is because the one Islam (*ummatan wāḥidatan*) cannot possibly be realized in the socio-cultural expression of its adherents in a single and monolithic form.

According to Darori Amin (interview, 2012), one of the Central Java PW Muhammadiyah figures said within Muhammadiyah, there was a tug-of-war between the "puritan Muhammadiyah" and "culturalist Muhammadiyah" groups. This puritan group still holds on to ideological struggles as a *da'wah* movement and *tajdīd* as its barometer. On the other hand, the culturalist group prefers culturally fundamental changes to the organization, which has been claimed as a modernist carriage since its inception.

A similar statement was expressed by Dadan Wildan (2005) that puritanists tend to side with emphasizing the importance of maintaining the authenticity of teachings following the Qur'an and Sunnah. This group wants that religious values are not polluted by cultural factors, especially those that lead to the practice of superstition, *bid'ah*, and *khurafāt* (TBC - *takhayyul*, *bid'ah*, *churafat*). Consequently, this puritanist group tends to reject the concept of cultural *da'wah*.

Meanwhile, Mujiono Abdillah (interview, 2012), one of Central Java Muhammadiyah figures, emphasized that the character of puritanists tends to reject the concept of developing cultural *da'wah*, which is carried out by building local cultural wisdom and will intersect with heretical traditions because this kind of practice is believed only to make Muhammadiyah members trapped again in syncretic Islam, not authentic Islam.

Unlike the case with the character of *da'wah* desired by the culturalist Muhammadiyah group, they are more focused on solving social problems by emphasizing the importance of local cultural wisdom. They try to accommodate two models of tradition, which Ernest Gellner calls high tradition and low tradition (Gellner, 1994). This multicultural understanding of Islam is then directed at solving social problems due to the spread of cultural machines, social systems, and the incessant flow of information that spreads “neo-TBC” diseases such as materialism and neoliberal ideology. It provides answers to the emergence of deviations from social redistribution.

This culturalist Muhammadiyah group found its momentum under the leadership of Ahmad Syafi'i Maarif. The train of thought, which refers to the contextualization of Fazlur Rahman's model, applies a new perspective in viewing the relationship between religion and culture. Here, religion is perceived as a moral-ethical originating from the cultural system. Religion is a social reality that exists and is manifested in people's lives. Therefore, Islam cannot be separated from all aspects of humanity and all-natural and human changes.

In the context of thought, according to Mujiono Abdillah (interview, 2012), within Muhammadiyah, there is no synergistic relationship between the culturalist and puritan groups. The synergistic relationship is very important for Muhammadiyah members to maintain the spirit of understanding the texts of the scriptures on the one hand and creative movements in reading texts and historical contexts on the other. The lack of synergy within Muhammadiyah shows tension between religious doctrine and theology and socio-cultural reality and the complete movement of change with social shifts that occur as a sociological or mechanical implication.

The starting point of this tension is at least sparked by different perspectives in seeing the relationship between high tradition and low tradition. High tradition tends to be assumed as an official and central order, while low tradition is represented as something informal and peripheral. This perspective has logical consequences for mainstreaming on one side and suppression on the other. Traditions that are considered official will become a top priority to lead to the sacralization of the high tradition itself, while the project of marginalizing and eliminating small traditions will continue to be applied to low traditions. As a result, the religious character of Muhammadiyah seems ferocious, closed, and elitist, given the distance that stretches and separates it from the religious pattern of the common people.

The sacralization of high traditions by Muhammadiyah is evident in the dominant understanding of Muhammadiyah members who view that high traditions cannot be changed and changed (*ṣalīh li kulli zamān wa makān* = suitable at anywhere and anytime.). While Islam has the nature of flexibility, there will always be gaps and space for perceptions of Islam to change. This is where the weakness of the puritan Muhammadiyah group appears, so the term accommodation of local culture emerges in their *da'wah* strategy.

This accommodative-responsive-acculturative approach is based on the understanding that each tradition has strengths and weaknesses. The culturalist Muhammadiyah group generally uses a post-colonial perspective to view low tradition is the counter-part of high tradition. As a unit, each is obliged to complement each other.

Because of this, Kuntowijoyo once criticized Muhammadiyah's speculative attitude in addressing traditions, traditions that should be considered permissible were misunderstood and considered heretical. This UGM historian gives an example of *Wayang Sadat*, which tells the story of saints from Klaten, Central Java. According to him, *wayang* figures such as the gods, knights, or guardians are nothing but fairy tales that can be intruded with Islamic teachings as a medium of *da'wah* at the level of ordinary people. Because of this, a ban will be raised if art leads to violations of religious ethical norms in its expression, both in terms of visual and textual markings.

The same confusion among Muhammadiyah members also occurs in attitudes toward the *Bedoyo* Dance. The debate always revolves when viewed from the point of view of the art of dance or looking at uncovered private parts. If the dancer's genitals are closed, the *Bedoyo* dance will lose its identity and philosophy (Nasir, 1999, p. 175).

Muhammadiyah dialectics and local culture can also be seen in the decisions of the *Tarjih* Council regarding musical instruments, *gamelan* and *angklung*, which medieval scholars forbade. Even al-Shafi'i stated that the testimony of people who listen to many musical instruments could not be accepted before the law, as well as people who invite singers. Muhammadiyah, through the Majelis Tarjih, classifies the provisions regarding these musical instruments into three: 1) musical instruments that bring benefits are sunnah, 2) those causing immorality are forbidden, 3) those not causing benefits nor immorality are deemed *makrūh* (Nasir, 1999, p. 176).

Meanwhile, Mujiono Abdillah, a Muhammadiyah cadre also an expert on environmental fiqh from Walisongo University, exemplified this pattern of local cultural accommodation and internalization of rational values in the *larung laut* tradition. For the Javanese people, especially those who live around the Yogyakarta Hadiningrat palace civilization center, the *larung* tradition is a symbolic ceremonial that uses Javanese Hindu offerings to serve as offerings for the rulers of the southern seas. The community believes this tradition can bring blessings and safety for fishermen who want to go to sea to find fish. This tradition is considered strategic for uncovering and interpreting the meaning of texts and transforming them into fresh symbols and new ideas that bring enlightenment.

According to Mujiono Abdillah (interview, 2012), *takhayul* traditions can be accommodated by incorporating rational elements in them. For example, the tradition of *larung* should not be underestimated as the low level of civilization of the common people, but can be understood as ecological wisdom. The tradition of *larung* is evidence of the peripheral community's deep concern for the life of marine biota and ecosystems.

Because of this, Mujiono believes one day, the offerings which are used as cultural symbols will not only bring buffalo heads as “offerings” but also chopped meat or other food in large quantities so that they can be used as food for the fish and marine biota that live in it. This is a form of developing environmental theology that collaborates with the concept of local traditions.

A similar example was given by Darori Amin (interview, 2012) about the idea of modern *tablil*, namely prayer rituals for the spirits of people who have died. The religious tradition that Muhammadiyah has labeled as a violation has now begun to be accommodated with modern *tablil*. The format of this *tablil* is different from conventional *tablil*, like that of the Nahdlatul Ulama community. If conventional *tablil* has its standard readings, modern *tablil* does not have clarity in its format. Muhammadiyah administrators have different opinions about this modern *tablil* format.

In this case, Darori Amin said that the readings in this *tablil* should not be standard to avoid sacralization and *bid'ah*. Because of this, the readings in modern *tablil* can be changed by each imam who leads their congregation. Meanwhile, Mujiono and Machasin, other prominent figures of Muhammadiyah in Central Java, said that the readings in modern *tablil* are not much different from those owned by the Nahdlatul Ulama community. One different thing is the theological basis, modern *tablil* is believed only to be praying, not sending rewards from readers to people who die. Muhammadiyah does not believe in a “reward transfer system” in Islamic teachings.

In general, Muhammadiyah members think that *tablilan* is *bid'ah*, namely carrying out certain practices that did not exist or were not taught at the time of the Prophet Muhammad. But there are Muhammadiyah members who carry out the *tablilan*. There are three main reasons why the Muhammadiyah community agreed and carried out the explanation. The first reason is that they are afraid if they do not perform evicition, then their family or brother who died will not be guaranteed enjoyment in the grave or the Hereafter. The second reason is that the condition of Muhammadiyah lives in a neighborhood where the majority of people are NU. There is a

feeling of discomfort in the local community. So, Muhammadiyah members, not a fanatic, will usually understand this. Third, to protect the unity and promote the mercy of the neighborhood (Iman, 2022).

Anything from a tradition that does not have a foundation in Islamic law must be abandoned since it is deemed heresy in current Islamic philosophy. In Kotagede, Yogyakarta, the majority as Muhammadiyah members, but there is quite the reverse. Modernist Muslims have historically engaged in widespread *tablilan* activity, one of those prohibited customs. Due to three factors—their tolerance and accommodating attitudes, the cultural elements passed down from generation to generation, and social needs—the modernized Muslim community in Kotagede adheres to the *tablilan* (Sirait, 2016).

The accommodation value that Muhammadiyah wants to show for this *tablil* tradition is that Muhammadiyah wants to see that *tablil* can provide a togetherness value in strengthening social interaction in the grassroots community. So the term “Tradition, yes! Traditionalism, no!” appeared. The culturalist Muhammadiyah believes that Islam values *‘urf* or tradition, including in the context of legal and *mu‘āmalah* issues. The accommodative character of Islam is evident in the history of its civilization.

However, Muhammadiyah remains of the opinion that not all traditions can be accommodated. This is because Islam itself has normatively reformed traditions that are deemed inconsistent with the principle of monotheism and human social values, for example, *tawāf*, *sa’i*, marriage, *‘aḳīqah*, determining the length of menstruation for women, the practice of *‘aḳīdah*, al-Qur’an, and so on. This is where the term appears in Islam as a cultural product (*muntaj al-thaqāfah*) and producing culture (*muntij al-thaqāfah*).

Culturalist Muhammadiyah circles have widely criticized this perspective. Because so far, Islam has shown itself as a religion that not only purifies local traditions but also accommodates and reforms culture so that there is an Islamization of culture as Walisongo and other traditional *kiai* did. Because basically, Islam is a collection of universal moral-ethical values that cross various cultural systems, and now these values are still scattered in the context of the local traditions of our society.

Therefore, the attitude of *tasāmuḥ* (tolerance) and communicative dialogue is an ontological necessity to avoid tensions and misunderstandings in the life of religious people at the grassroots. In addition, it is a collective understanding among anthropologists that a static religion, coupled with cultural developments, will undermine cultural dynamics. However, in every phase of cultural development, spirituality (read: religion) always plays a role in accompanying cultural progress. No culture develops unless there is spirituality in it that always overshadows it. As stated by Jalaludin Rumi, if the spiritual meaning is printed intensively into a form of cultural expression, even though that form of cultural expression has been developing for a long time, the form of expression will automatically change and appear as if it were something new (Nasr, 1993, pp. 99–109).

Muhammadiyah and the Accommodation to the Local Religious Tradition

Mohammad Abid al-Jabiri, in his project of criticism of Arabic reason, established that there are three types of approaches to Islam, first the *bayānī* approach, which leads to a legal-formalistic religious attitude. This approach generally ends in a hegemonic-scripturalistic understanding, in which Arab cultural influences are still strongly emphasized as symbols of Islam. Second, the *burhānī* approach, namely the Islamic approach, is based on ratios and carried out through logic, social law, and humanities arguments. Third, the *‘irfānī* approach puts forward the meaning of the essence behind the sharia and the inner being behind what is born. The concoction of these approaches then gave rise to the idea of Islamic post-traditionalism as a train of thought that is lenient and accommodating to local traditions and culture. It is this idea that recently began to emerge among the Muhammadiyah.

Cultural life in Muhammadiyah must be returned to its original state and then formulated towards preaching *amar ma’rūf nahy munkar*, which is accommodating and polite in responding to the diversity of traditions (Baidhawi & Khoirudin, 2017).

In this context, accommodation can be interpreted as an effort to accommodate, adjust, or reconcile. Accommodation can also be understood as a restriction not to accept unconditionally without change. The

accommodative approach means confronting religious doctrine's substantive dimensions with the adherents' socio-cultural context. Within Muhammadiyah, the understanding of local religious traditions has shifted. This is a logical consequence of the contemplation process of some of the organization's management after feeling alienated and dry from their social-community context (Hadi, 2003, p. 131).

Because from the start, the agenda of purification of Islam (*tanẓīf al-'aqīdah al-Islāmiyyah*) was a quite prominent feature of the early generations of Muhammadiyah organizations, even today. The purification program is indeed more focused on aspects of faith. The eradication of superstition, heresy, and *khurafāt* (TBC - *takhayul*, *bid'ah*, *churafat*) is a concrete response from Muhammadiyah towards local culture that deviates from Islamic law. The movement to renew religious thought toward the reality and historicity of the people's understanding of the Islamic faith is necessary. However, after a long period of time, sharp criticism emerged regarding the implementation of the purification of Islam through eradicating *takhayul*, *bid'ah*, and *khurafāt*, so that purification of Islam became synonymous with eradicating, criticizing, and even removing cultural roots that had long grown and developed in Indonesia society.

The haphazard implementation of the idea of purification of Islam, admit it or not, seems to complicate the position of Muhammadiyah members amidst the siege of the diversity of traditions and culture of society. Empirically, the realm of *bid'ah*—which is based on *kullu bid'atin ḍalālāh*—usually extends to realms that are not merely *aqidah*, but rather pervade and mix with cultural domains. If this is the case, then erasing and eliminating traditions, culture, and customs that are considered to “collide” with faith and pure Islam, which Muhammadiyah members understand, must be done carefully.

The implication of blurring the boundaries of heresy between faith and culture, to mention one, is that Muhammadiyah has become very unpopular among rural communities that uphold a lot of ancestral traditions and culture. The educated Muhammadiyah, who on average have received a lot

of tertiary education at home and abroad, are starting to “feel uncomfortable” about confronting the tradition of heresy with the local traditions and culture of the local community.

In the perspective of da’wah interests, the “unfriendliness” of Islamic purification promoted by Muhammadiyah will interfere with the success of da’wah activities, which this modernist mass organization has faithfully carried out. Borrowing Amin Abdullah’s language, Muhammadiyah became dry, formal, and less appreciative of the Islamic da’wah strategy. This certainly needs to be considered considering that other missionary groups are racing to embrace local culture, as was done by the early propagators of Islam in Indonesia (Abdullah, 1995, pp. 10–11).

Based on this point of view, it is very natural for ideas and efforts to re-dialogize the idea of purification, which Muhammadiyah always promotes with the diversity of local cultures which are empirically found. In fact, for the sake of the success of da’wah activities which Muhammadiyah always strives for, efforts to dialogue between the two become necessary. Because for the success of this *da’wah*, Muhammadiyah must appear more popular and friendly in the plurality of local cultures.

Changes in da’wah strategy, as above are not new in Muhammadiyah’s long history. When founded in 1912, Muhammadiyah had a dialectic with local cultural diversity. In this regard, Hamim Ilyas noted that three dialectics occurred in the emergence of these modernist mass organizations. *First*, Muhammadiyah has shrewdly introduced Islam as a religion of the world and the hereafter. Before the emergence of the reform movement, Islam was understood as the religion of the afterlife. At least this appears in the notes of Dutch writers who stated that Islam was only seen as the religion of the hereafter during the colonial period. Borrowing Mukti Ali’s expression, Islam is a religion that invites humans to die. Muhammadiyah appears not only to invite death but to dare to live, even though this formulation only appeared recently.

Second, Muhammadiyah has also presented Islam as a religion of justice, which was very popular in the 1930s. The understanding that Islam is a

religion of justice results from the dialectics of Islam and local culture in the colonial context, which does not know the meaning of justice. Here it is very clear that Muhammadiyah is not historical but historical and grounded. *Third*, there is controversy in Muhammadiyah itself regarding social relations between religious communities. The emergence of this controversy reflects that accepting pluralism and multiculturalism is still a big problem within Muhammadiyah's internal circles (Ilyas, 2003, p. 175).

From the dialectic above, it can be understood that the interpretation and implementation of Islamic purification among the Muhammadiyah is not single and rigid. There are still many loopholes and empty spaces to enter permissive and accommodative ideas on local religious traditions. The above dialectics also shows that there has been a diversity of religious understandings within Muhammadiyah.

In line with this diversity of religious understandings, a phenomenon has begun to appear indicating that the religious behavior of Muhammadiyah members can no longer be centralized. In fact, as stated by Munir Mulkhan, the religious behavior of Muhammadiyah members can never be mapped based on, for example, the *fatwā* of Majelis Tarjih compiled in the *Tarjih Ruling Association*. The general view of the Muhammadiyah circles regarding the prohibition of local religious traditions also seems to be fading.

Recently, it is very clear how various Muhammadiyah circles are no longer “awkward” to see the reading of warnings and testaments to the bodies in the graves (*talqīn*). When UIN Walisongo collaborated with Majelis Ta’lim al-Khidmah to hold *istighāthah*, a local religious tradition that was carried out on a massive scale, several Muhammadiyah figures even “without burden” joined in. Some khatibs from the Muhammadiyah circle delivered Friday sermons without feeling awkward at several mosques, even though they knew very well that the call to prayer (*adhan*) was held twice in those mosques, a tradition that the Muhammadiyah had outrightly rejected. Whether on purpose or not, these preachers also “slipped” in saying the word *sayyidinā* to precede the word Muhammad, a habit previously considered wrong by Muhammadiyah.

The above reality also shows that the religious practices of Muhammadiyah members will always differ between generations, communities, and regions. This is because Muhammadiyah members in every generation, community, and region will always face different problems which cannot all be solved based on the *fatwā* of Majelis Tarjih (Mulkhan, 2003, p. 209). To prove his observation, Mulkhan then gave an example that the Muhammadiyah community's commitment to *fiqh* rules in Sumatra seemed stronger than that of the Muhammadiyah community in Java. In socio-political and religious relations, the former is also more radical and fundamentalist than the latter, which tends to be *sufistic*. This is also seen among the Muhammadiyah communities in West Java, Central Java, and East Java, and the Muhammadiyah communities who live in rural and coastal areas. The practice of *sufi* life is shown more by the K. H. Ahmad Dahlan than the next generation. The socio-political relations of the early generation were more open and pragmatic with such high movement innovation. The ideas of *tajdīd* appeared slower after the Majelis Tarjih grew as a *shari'ah fatwā* institution (Mulkhan, 2003, p. 209).

In this context, Mulkhan sees that the reality of pure Islam understood by Muhammadiyah can be distinguished at three levels: universal (international), national and local. Pure Islamic ideals are more visible at the universal level as studied from the formal decisions of *tarjih*. At the national level, these movements often differ from the formal decisions they make. This is even more evident at the local level. Firmness on the *fatwā tarjih* is more evident at the national policies level rather than the socialization of pure Islam locally. Pure Islam in the *fatwā tarjih* is more diverse from one local area to another. In this case, it can often be seen that the religious practices of the followers of Muhammadiyah are contradictory and classified as *bid'ah* according to the *tarjih* version.

The dialectical relationship of pure Islamic beliefs and social dynamics can explain the diversity of religious and socio-political patterns of the Muhammadiyah members. This phenomenon is a worldly expression (externalization), which places pure Islam as a social fact and a reference for

action (objectification) and its meaning for followers (internalization). The deviation of Muhammadiyah followers from the *fatwā* of *tarjih* and the ideal symbol of “Muhammadiyah people” can be explained from the dialectical relationship between pure Islam and the social dynamics of the Muhammadiyah members. In this connection, the modernization of education pioneered by Muhammadiyah has a dual function. On the one hand, the modernization of Muhammadiyah education has resulted in the fading of *takhayul*, *bid'ah* and *khurafat* practices. However, on the other hand, the modernization of education has also led to widespread tolerance of religious traditions and practices considered deviant (Mulkhan, 2003, pp. 210–211).

So, the rejection or tolerant attitude of the Muhammadiyah community towards existing local traditions, as has been stated, is a social phenomenon that continues to develop dynamically. The rejection of local traditions is a consequence of the Muhammadiyah purification movement which is more visible in urban areas. Meanwhile, a tolerant attitude towards considered deviant traditions will appear in rural areas. In other words, Islamic purification tends to weaken in rural areas. Purification seems to be getting stronger in urban areas, coupled with efforts to eradicate local religious traditions, although this last ‘rigidity’ is also starting to fade.

The shift in religious interpretation among the Muhammadiyah in understanding local religious traditions began to change when a new generation of Muhammadiyah with modern higher education, both graduates from within and outside the country, appeared in the leadership of the Muhammadiyah. The emergence of these young intellectuals marked the decline of the role of *shari'ah* experts. After that, local religious traditions that had been identified with *takhayul*, *bid'ah* and *khurafāt* began to be re-examined to find substances compatible with Islam’s moral message. Majelis Tarjih, a *fatwā* institution, has been changed to “Majelis Tarjih and the Development of Islamic Thought”. The urban Muhammadiyah community also seems to be starting to be a little more open and tolerant of people’s beliefs. Kuntowijoyo explicitly suggests the need to redefine the term

purification of Islam, so that it will be more open in understanding “local intelligences” (Mulkhan, 2002, p. 119).

This shift in Muhammadiyah religious interpretation in understanding local religious traditions became even more obvious when among the Muhammadiyah, critical young groups began to emerge who joined the Muhammadiyah Young Intellectual Network (JIMM) and the Center for the Study of Religion and Civilization (PSAP). It is unclear whether, because of their frequent contact with their NU partners, some of these young Muhammadiyah groups always emphasize the importance of accommodating local religious traditions.

But above all, controversy over religion and cultural entities is a natural necessity. This is because structural tensions will always arise between protecting and maintaining the unity of religion and cultural diversity, between different regions that serve as places for spreading religion. Therefore, it is not excessive with the logic conveyed by Amin Abdullah that confusion will appear when Muslims consider two aspects of the dilemma. That is, if regional diversity is emphasized, then religious unity will weaken and disband. If religious unity is emphasized, it will be difficult to adapt that religion to the social, psychological, cultural, economic needs required by each existing tradition.

Conclusions

Although not seen massively, there has been a shift in religious interpretation among the Muhammadiyah in understanding local religious traditions. In this case, there is a tug-of-war within Muhammadiyah between the “puritan Muhammadiyah” and “culturalist Muhammadiyah” groups. This puritan group still holds on to ideological struggles as a *da'wah* movement and *tajdid* as its barometer. In contrast, the culturalist group prefers culturally fundamental changes in understanding the diversity of local cultures, which must be willing to accommodate local religious traditions. Some people in this group even dare to accommodate traditions that smell of *bid'ah*, *khurafāt*, and *takhayul* by incorporating rational interpretations in

them, for example, understanding the tradition of *larung laut* from the perspective of marine ecology.

The shift in Muhammadiyah's religious interpretation in understanding local religious traditions is certainly not without reason. Many factors influence it, for example, the diversity of local cultures and the importance of da'wah strategies to anticipate Muhammadiyah's declining popularity, especially in rural areas.[w]

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