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Eschatological Consciousness and The Formation of Islamic Subjectivity: Re-Reading "Turi Putih" in The Islamic Preaching of Walisongo

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Abstract

This study examines Turi Putih, a Javanese devotional song traditionally attributed to Sunan Kalijaga, to explore how Islamic ethical and eschatological concerns are articulated through vernacular poetic form. It aims to extend understandings of Islamization in Java beyond institutional transformation and cultural accommodation by examining the song's potential for ethical reflection. The study employed hermeneutic textual analysis and conceptual interpretation of a circulating lyric version, focusing on symbolic structure, repetition, moral instruction, and temporal imagery. The analysis was informed by dhikr al-mawt, tazkiyah al-nafs, Foucault's concept of technologies of the self, and disciplinary poetics. Findings indicate that mortality, accountability, and moral orientation emerge cumulatively through images of planting, falling, floral plurality, moral guidance, and future regret rather than explicit theological exposition. Repetition and symbolic indirection create recurring occasions for attention and reflection. The study implies that vernacular devotional forms can provide culturally situated media through which Islamic ethical and eschatological concerns become available for contemplation. Its originality lies in conceptualizing Turi Putih through disciplinary poetics, treating eschatological subject formation as an interpretive potential rather than a demonstrated effect, and offering a nuanced account of vernacular Islamization in Java.

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Studi ini meneliti Turi Putih, sebuah lagu devosi Jawa yang secara tradisional dikaitkan dengan Sunan Kalijaga, untuk mengeksplorasi

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bagaimana perhatian etika dan eskatologis Islam diartikulasikan melalui bentuk puisi vernakular. Studi ini bertujuan memperluas pemahaman tentang Islamisasi di Jawa melampaui transformasi institusional dan akomodasi budaya dengan menelaah potensi lagu ini untuk refleksi etis. Studi ini menggunakan analisis tekstual hermeneutik dan interpretasi konseptual dari versi lirik yang beredar, dengan fokus pada struktur simbolik, pengulangan, instruksi moral, dan citra temporal. Analisis ini didasarkan pada dzikir al-mawt, tazkiyah al-nafs, konsep teknologi diri Foucault, dan poetika disipliner. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa kematian, akuntabilitas, dan orientasi moral muncul secara kumulatif melalui gambar penanaman, jatuh, pluralitas bunga, bimbingan moral, dan penyesalan di masa depan, bukan eksposisi teologis eksplisit. Pengulangan dan indirection simbolik menciptakan kesempatan berulang untuk perhatian dan refleksi. Studi ini menyiratkan bahwa bentuk devosi vernakular dapat menyediakan media yang terletak secara budaya di mana perhatian etika dan eskatologis Islam menjadi tersedia untuk direnungkan. Orisinalitasnya terletak pada konseptualisme Turi Putih melalui poetika disipliner, memperlakukan pembentukan subjek eskatologis sebagai potensi interpretatif daripada efek yang terbukti, dan menawarkan penjelasan bernuansa tentang Islamisasi vernakular di Jawa.

Keywords: Turi Putih; Walisongo; Islamic eschatology; disciplinary poetics; technologies of the self.

Introduction

Religious transformation is never merely institutional. When a new religious tradition enters a cultural landscape, it reshapes moral perception, temporal imagination, and forms of self-understanding. Recent work in anthropology and philosophy of religion has emphasized that religion operates not only through ritual or doctrine but through the cultivation of interior dispositions, including habits of attention, affective orientation, and modes of ethical self-relation (Mahmoud & Abu-Odeh, 2016; Hirschkind, 2018; Breteau, 2022; Putra et al., 2026). From this perspective, religious change may also involve the emergence of new possibilities for ethical and religious self-understanding.

The Islamization of Java provides a compelling setting for examining this less visible dimension of religious change. Scholarship on the Walisongo, particularly Sunan Kalijaga, has generally emphasized cultural accommodation and strategic enculturation. Studies highlight how Islamic teachings were translated into Javanese symbolic and artistic forms, allowing continuity within transformation (Alif et al., 2020; Abbas et al., 2023; Ardyansyah, 2024; Aminim et al., 2025). In this

view, Kalijaga's dakwah is understood as a method of integrating Islam into existing aesthetic and social structures rather than displacing them. Such scholarship provides an important account of Islamization as cultural translation, while leaving open questions about how vernacular religious forms articulated ethical and existential concerns.

A second body of research focuses on Javanese Islamic songs and devotional compositions. Analyses of works such as Lir Ilir have explored their semiotic structures, ideological messages, and pedagogical functions (Dwi Puspitasari & Wirajaya, 2024; Hidayah & Mahliatussikah, 2025). These studies provide important descriptive and interpretive insight into religious lyricism in Java. However, they tend to focus on symbolic meaning and social messaging rather than on how devotional poetry may provide occasions for moral and existential reflection. A third strand of literature examines Islamization in Java from broader historical and theological perspectives. Scholars have discussed the political, social, and Sufi dimensions of the fifteenth–sixteenth century transition, including questions of religious moderation, Sufi influence, and structural transformation (Maulana, 2022; Riyadi et al., 2022; Adib, 2023; Santika, 2024). While these works illuminate macro-level change, they leave relatively little discussion of how Islamic ethical and eschatological concerns were articulated through vernacular devotional forms.

Within the literature reviewed for this study, limited attention has been given to Turi Putih as a devotional and poetic medium for articulating mortality, moral accountability, and reflection on human finitude. While Sunan Kalijaga's role as a cultural accommodator in the Islamization of Java has been widely acknowledged, the existential and devotional dimensions of songs traditionally associated with this cultural-religious tradition remain comparatively under-examined (Riyadi & Karim, 2023). Traditionally attributed in Javanese oral memory to Sunan Kalijaga, Turi Putih foregrounds themes of mortality, purification, and preparation for death. This traditional attribution is treated in the present study as part of the song's received cultural history rather than as independently verified evidence of authorship or historical provenance. Its imagery of whiteness, fragility, and impermanence can be read alongside Islamic teachings concerning human

accountability and the transience of worldly existence. In contrast to devotional compositions that primarily emphasize celebration or praise, the song can be read as adopting a contemplative and eschatological orientation, inviting reflection on the finitude of human life and the moral significance of one's conduct.

Recent theoretical discussions of religious aesthetics suggest that forms such as sermons, poetry, and recitation can function as "technologies of the self," insofar as they provide cultural and devotional means through which individuals may engage in practices of reflection, self-examination, and moral orientation (Mahmoud & Abu-Odeh, 2016; Hirschkind, 2018). In this study, however, the concept is used as a theoretical framework for examining the potential relationship between poetic form and ethical self-reflection, rather than as evidence of demonstrated subject formation. From this perspective, Turi Putih can be approached not simply as a form of cultural expression, but as a devotional medium that articulates particular possibilities of existential and moral reflection. Through its symbolic language and repetitive poetic structure, Islamic eschatological ideas may be rendered within a familiar Javanese aesthetic vocabulary, potentially making questions of mortality, accountability, and moral conduct available for reflection within devotional life. This does not, however, imply that the song necessarily produces or internalizes a particular form of Islamic subjectivity among its listeners. Rather, the song may be understood as offering a cultural and devotional framework within which such ethical and eschatological orientations may be articulated and contemplated.

Accordingly, the objective of this article is to interpret how Turi Putih articulates Islamic ethical and eschatological concerns through its symbolic structure, repetition, and moral instruction, and to examine its potential significance as a form of disciplinary poetics within Javanese devotional culture. The theoretical framework draws on dhikr al-mawt, tazkiyah al-nafs, and Foucault's concept of technologies of the self to interpret the relationship between eschatological content, poetic practice, and possible ethical self-reflection; these frameworks guide the interpretation rather than constitute separate empirical claims. Such a perspective allows the Islamization of Java to be considered not only in terms of institutional transformation and cultural accommodation, but also

through the symbolic and poetic forms by which Islamic understandings of mortality, accountability, and human finitude could be articulated and made available for religious reflection.

Religious songs can function as disciplinary poetics, shaping subjectivity through repeated existential reminders

The analysis is informed by Michel Foucault's formulation of "technologies of the self," which refers to practices through which individuals act upon themselves in order to transform their bodies, thoughts, conduct, and ways of being (Foucault, 1988). This concept needs to be distinguished from Foucault's broader notion of disciplinary power. Whereas disciplinary power primarily concerns the regulation of conduct through institutional arrangements, surveillance, and normative expectations, technologies of the self concern the ways in which subjects actively engage in practices that work upon themselves. The distinction is important for this study because communal devotional singing is not treated simply as an instrument through which external authority disciplines believers. Rather, attention is given to the practices of self-engagement that the song may invite: repetition and remembrance, reflection upon mortality, examination of one's conduct, and the cultivation of an orientation toward moral accountability.

Foucault's framework, although developed through his analysis of Greco-Roman and Christian traditions, has been productively extended to Islamic contexts. Scholars have examined sermons, recitation, and devotional repetition as practices through which religious subjects engage in forms of ethical reflection and self-cultivation (Mahmoud & Abu-Odeh, 2016; Hirschkind, 2018; Suroyo et al., 2023). From this perspective, religious texts and performances are not understood merely as vehicles for communicating doctrine. Their significance also lies in the practices they make possible: repeated remembrance can return particular ideas to consciousness, recitation can establish a recurring rhythm of attention, and devotional performance can provide occasions for evaluating one's conduct in relation to religious ideals. These practices do not necessarily produce a uniform transformation of subjectivity; rather, they provide a context in which particular forms of ethical self-reflection may be repeatedly enacted.

This Foucauldian perspective is further complemented by the Sufi concept of tazkiyah al-nafs, commonly understood as the purification or refinement of the soul. Classical Sufi thinkers such as al-Ghazālī and Ibn ʿArabī conceptualized spiritual development as an ongoing struggle against heedlessness (ghaflah) and excessive attachment to worldly existence (al-Ghazālī, 1995; Ibn ʿArabī, 1980). Within this tradition, remembrance of death (dhikr al-mawt) serves as an important means of interrupting moral complacency and redirecting attention toward the consequences of human action. Rather than treating death merely as a theological proposition, this tradition understands its remembrance as a practice that can prompt self-examination and reorientation. Contemporary scholarship similarly emphasizes that Sufi ethics involves forms of disciplined self-awareness rather than abstract mystical contemplation alone (Chittick, 2000; Knysh, 2017). Studies of Islamic piety have further shown how practices of purification and remembrance can become embedded in everyday religious life (Hermansen, 2000; Howell, 2001). Within this framework, poetic and sonic forms may provide accessible means through which ethical and eschatological concerns are repeatedly recalled.

A complementary perspective is provided by anthropological discussions of death consciousness. Research in the anthropology of religion has examined how awareness of mortality can shape ethical orientations, temporal understandings, and forms of social belonging (Robbins, 2014; Coleman & Hausner, 2020). In Islamic contexts, reminders of death, whether expressed through sermons, ritual practices, or devotional recitation, can serve as occasions to reconsider one's relationship to worldly life, moral responsibility, and the hereafter (Martin van Bruinessen and Julia Day Howell, 2012; Mittermaier, 2022). From this perspective, death consciousness is not simply a matter of possessing theological knowledge about mortality. It may also involve recurring practices of remembrance that encourage individuals to bring mortality and accountability back into their moral horizon.

Bringing these perspectives together, this study conceptualizes devotional singing as a possible site of ethical self-practice rather than as a straightforward mechanism of disciplinary power. The analytical focus is therefore placed on four

interconnected practices: repetition, remembrance, self-examination, and eschatological orientation. Through repetition, the song's images and moral propositions are brought back into attention; through remembrance, mortality and accountability are repeatedly recalled; through self-examination, listeners may be invited to consider their own conduct in relation to religious expectations; and through anticipation of the afterlife, everyday existence may be interpreted in relation to an eschatological horizon. Communal performance is significant here not because it necessarily produces the same transformation in every participant, but because it provides a recurring social setting in which these forms of remembrance and reflection can be enacted collectively.

On this basis, Turi Putih may be approached as a localized devotional form through which Islamic eschatological ideas are articulated in Javanese aesthetic language. Its potential significance as a "technology of the self" lies not in an assumed capacity to automatically produce Islamic subjectivity, but in the forms of self-engagement that its performance may invite and sustain: remembering death, reflecting upon one's conduct, and orienting moral life toward accountability before God. This formulation allows the study to move beyond a simple account of cultural accommodation while remaining attentive to the limits of textual and interpretive evidence. Rather than claiming to demonstrate that Turi Putih directly formed particular kinds of Islamic subjects, the analysis examines how the song makes certain forms of Islamic moral and eschatological self-understanding available for contemplation and repeated devotional practice.

Result

This study employed a qualitative hermeneutic research design, using hermeneutic textual analysis and conceptual interpretation to examine *Turi Putih* as a Javanese devotional text. The primary data consisted of the complete lyrics of *Turi Putih*, specifically the circulating version traditionally attributed to Sunan Kalijaga, which served as the textual corpus for this study. This version was selected because it contains the complete sequence of verses required to examine the song's symbolic structure, recurring expressions, moral instruction, and eschatological imagery. The traditional attribution to Sunan Kalijaga was treated

as part of the song's received cultural history rather than as independently verified evidence of authorship or historical provenance.

Variations in wording across circulating versions were treated as part of the song's oral transmission rather than as grounds for assuming a single definitive textual form. Secondary data consisted of scholarly literature on Javanese Islamization, Walisongo, Islamic devotional traditions, Sufi ethics, technologies of the self, and religious approaches to mortality and eschatology. These sources were used to contextualize and interpret the primary text rather than to substitute for textual evidence. The analysis covered the complete lyric as its textual corpus, with individual lines, recurring phrases, symbolic images, structural sequences, and explicit moral injunctions serving as the principal units of analysis. The Javanese text was first retained in its original form and was then translated into English for analytical discussion, while culturally significant terms such as *guru*, *lakune*, and *getun* were retained where direct translation could have reduced their contextual meanings. Translation was undertaken as an interpretive aid rather than as an attempt to establish a definitive English equivalent, and the original Javanese wording was retained wherever its semantic or cultural nuance was analytically significant.

The interpretation proceeded through four stages: first, the researchers conducted a close reading of the lyric's linguistic and structural features; second, they identified recurring symbolic and thematic patterns, including planting, whiteness, falling, floral multiplicity, repetition, moral guidance, and future regret; third, they examined the relationships among these elements to identify broader ethical and eschatological trajectories; and fourth, they interpreted these patterns through the complementary concepts of *dhikr al-mawt*, *tazkiyah al-nafs*, technologies of the self, and disciplinary poetics. At the first stage, attention was given to the literal and linguistic features of the lyric; at the second, recurring images and expressions were grouped into provisional symbolic categories; at the third, these categories were examined in relation to one another rather than treated as isolated symbols; and at the fourth, the resulting patterns were brought into dialogue with the theoretical frameworks. Rather than assigning fixed meanings to individual symbols, the analysis considered their meanings

relationally and examined possible pedagogical, aesthetic, Javanese cultural, ethical, and Islamic interpretations before identifying the eschatological reading that most coherently accounted for the lyric's cumulative structure. The theoretical frameworks therefore functioned as interpretive lenses rather than predetermined coding categories: *dhikr al-mawt* provided the Islamic ethical lens for mortality and accountability, *tazkiyah al-nafs* informed the interpretation of moral refinement, Foucault's technology of the self clarified the potential relationship between repeated devotional practice and self-reflection, while disciplinary poetics described the poetic mechanisms through which such reflection could be invited. Interpretive subjectivity was addressed through reflexive reading, explicit distinction between textual evidence and theoretical inference, consideration of alternative interpretations, and cautious formulation of claims. Accordingly, the analysis identified the song's formative and eschatological potential without treating textual interpretation as evidence that listeners necessarily internalized or experienced those meanings.

No ethnographic observations, interviews, audio recordings, or reception data were collected; consequently, claims concerning contemporary performance practices, patterns of transmission, or listeners' responses were not treated as empirical findings but only as possible implications of the text's formal characteristics. The study was therefore limited to what could reasonably be established through textual and conceptual interpretation. It did not attempt to verify historical authorship, reconstruct original compositional intent, establish a definitive transmission history, or determine how particular communities or listeners actually interpreted or experienced the song. These limitations were addressed by distinguishing throughout the analysis between textual evidence, theoretical interpretation, and claims requiring empirical verification.

Symbolic Structure of "Turi Putih": A Disciplinary Poetics of Mortality and Obedience

The lyric of *Turi Putih* does not unfold as a linear narrative. Rather, it develops through a patterned arrangement of questions, natural imagery, repetition, and moral instruction. Its movement between ambiguity and clarification is particularly important: the song does not begin by stating a moral proposition, but

gradually directs attention from an apparently simple image of a flower toward questions of conduct and future consequence. This structure provides the basis for what this article terms "disciplinary poetics." The concept does not refer to disciplinary power as institutional surveillance or coercive regulation. It instead describes a poetic mode in which repetition, symbolic indirection, moral address, and temporal anticipation organize attention and create occasions for remembrance and ethical reflection. Its disciplinary quality, therefore, lies not in the enforcement of a prescribed response, but in the recurring invitation to attend to, interpret, and reconsider particular moral concerns;

"Mbok kiro kembange apa?"

(What flower do you think it is?)

This illustrates this poetic mechanism. At the most immediate level, the line serves as a refrain, contributing to the song's participatory and playful quality. It may also be understood pedagogically, since the question invites listeners to remember, respond, and participate rather than merely receive information. Yet its repeated return does something more than sustain musical rhythm. It temporarily withholds semantic closure. The listener is invited to return to the question without receiving an immediate, definitive answer. In this sense, repetition organizes attention and creates a small space for interpretive hesitation. The significance of the refrain is therefore not that it necessarily produces a particular psychological effect, but that its formal structure makes repeated acts of attention and reflection possible. This is an important feature of disciplinary poetics: moral orientation begins through the organization of attention rather than through direct doctrinal instruction. The opening image;

"Turi putih, ditandur neng kebon agung"

("The white Turi flower, planted in the great garden")

Establishes the song's primary symbolic environment. The image of planting can first be understood in ordinary agrarian and aesthetic terms. It evokes cultivation, growth, care, and familiarity with the natural world, all of which are particularly resonant within Javanese cultural experience. It may also serve a pedagogical function by translating more abstract ideas about human existence

into an image accessible through everyday life. From a broader ethical perspective, planting can suggest that life is situated within a process of cultivation in which growth depends upon care and orientation.

An eschatological interpretation becomes possible when this image is considered in relation to the rest of the lyric. The "great garden" may be read as a metaphor for the temporal world in which human beings are placed before confronting the consequences of their conduct. Such a reading resonates with the Islamic distinction between worldly existence and the ultimate horizon of accountability. Yet the garden should not be treated as a fixed equivalent of *dunya*. The lyric itself does not explicitly establish such a correspondence, and the image can retain its Javanese, agrarian, aesthetic, and pedagogical meanings. What gives the eschatological interpretation analytical force is therefore not the garden in isolation, but its position within a sequence that moves from planting to falling, from natural imagery to moral instruction, and eventually to future regret.

The same caution applies to the symbolism of whiteness. White may evoke purity, clarity, simplicity, innocence, or aesthetic beauty, and these associations extend beyond any single religious tradition. Within Javanese cultural and aesthetic contexts, the color can be appreciated as part of the song's natural imagery without requiring a theological interpretation. Within an Islamic ethical framework, however, whiteness may also resonate with ideas of spiritual purity and moral clarity. The present analysis does not assume that the white flower "means" a purified soul. Rather, its significance develops through its relation to what follows. The whiteness of the flower establishes an image of clarity and stability that is subsequently interrupted by falling and surrounded by a plurality of other natural forms. The interpretive movement from purity and cultivation toward fragility and moral orientation makes an eschatological reading possible without making it exclusive.

This relational quality becomes particularly visible in the image *"cemleret tiba nyemplung."* At a literal and aesthetic level, falling introduces movement into the song's natural imagery and contributes to its visual and rhythmic character. Pedagogically, it may also evoke the fragility of things that appear stable. In an ethical reading, falling may suggest deviation or the possibility of going astray, a

possibility that becomes especially relevant when the lyric later refers to *lakune ora kliru*. From an eschatological perspective, the same image can be read as an indirect evocation of mortality: something that has been planted and appears situated within the garden suddenly falls and disappears. The lyric does not explicitly name death, however, and therefore the association should remain interpretive rather than definitive. What is significant is the structural interruption. The movement from planting to falling introduces contingency into an otherwise ordered landscape, making impermanence available as a subject of reflection:

The subsequent sequence of *tebu*, *jambe*, and *waru* extends the lyric's attention to plurality and arrangement. Expressions such as *"cacahe pitu," "di ronce-ronce,"* and *"diwiru-wiru"* produce patterned repetition and a sense of abundance. These images can be appreciated aesthetically as part of the song's engagement with flowers, plants, rhythm, and oral performance. They may also have Javanese cultural and cosmological resonances that should not be automatically subsumed under Islamic symbolism. The number seven provides a particularly important example. Its recurrence may invite associations with Islamic cosmology, including the seven heavens and the seven layers of the earth, but seven is also a widely circulating symbolic and mnemonic number. Its presence alone cannot establish an Islamic eschatological meaning.

The more productive question is therefore what the plurality of flowers does within the composition. Their repetition and arrangement create an image of multiplicity and abundance. This may simply celebrate the richness of the natural world; it may also provide a mnemonic structure that supports communal singing and learning. Yet when this abundance is placed between the imagery of falling and the subsequent moral instruction, it can also be read as part of a broader reflection on the instability and attraction of worldly existence. The eschatological interpretation consequently emerges from the relationship among the images rather than from an assumption that each flower possesses a predetermined theological significance. The crucial transition occurs when the lyric moves from symbolic imagery toward explicit moral instruction;

Kang mituhu marang guru

Ben lakune ora kliru.

*Rungokno pitutur*e

Ben ra getun tembe mburine.

At this point, the song's ambiguity is partially resolved through direct ethical address. The listener is encouraged to heed the *guru*, avoid an erroneous course of conduct, listen to instruction, and avoid future regret. This shift is significant for the concept of disciplinary poetics because the song connects interpretation with conduct. The listener is not merely asked to understand a symbolic image but is invited to listen, trust, and consider imitation as a mode of ethical orientation.

The figure of the *guru*, however, also deserves a plural reading. In pedagogical terms, the *guru* is a teacher and source of instruction. In social terms, the figure may represent a bearer of knowledge and moral authority within a community. Within Javanese traditions, the relationship between teacher and learner may involve respect, imitation, and the transmission of ethical as well as practical knowledge. In an Islamic context, the figure may also resonate with traditions of religious and spiritual guidance. These meanings overlap without being identical. Consequently, the *guru* should not be reduced to an authoritarian disciplinary figure. The ethical force of the passage lies instead in the relationship it establishes among listening, trust, imitation, and conduct. This is where the poetic structure begins to resemble a technology of the self: not because an external authority necessarily imposes behavior upon the listener, but because the lyric invites the subject to consider how conduct might be oriented through received guidance.

The final phrase, *"Ben ra getun tembe mburine"* ("so that there will be no regret later"), introduces a distinctly temporal dimension. At the most immediate level, the phrase can be understood as a familiar ethical warning: listening to good advice may prevent future regret. It therefore has a clear pedagogical and social function. Yet the phrase also opens a wider eschatological horizon by evaluating present conduct in light of future consequences. Within an Islamic interpretive framework, this temporal orientation can resonate with the idea that human action has consequences beyond immediate worldly experience. Nevertheless,

the lyric does not explicitly articulate a doctrine of post-mortem judgment. Its eschatological dimension is thus better understood as a possible horizon of interpretation than as a literal theological statement:

- Planting (Existential Placement); The soul is situated within the great garden.
- Planting - situated existence: life is represented through the image of being placed and cultivated within a larger environment.
- Falling - fragility and interruption: the apparent stability of existence is disrupted, opening a space for reflection on contingency and finitude.
- Proliferation - plurality and worldly experience: the abundance of natural imagery evokes the richness, variety, and attraction of the surrounding world.
- Moral orientation - guidance and imitation: the *guru* introduces an explicitly ethical dimension through listening, trust, and imitation.
- Future regret - temporal accountability: present conduct is connected to consequences that lie beyond the immediate moment.

This sequence suggests that the eschatological meaning of *Turi Putih* does not reside in any single symbol. The garden may evoke cultivation and Javanese agrarian experience; whiteness may suggest beauty, purity, or clarity; falling may signify fragility or deviation; and the number seven may function aesthetically, mnemonically, or cosmologically. Their eschatological significance emerges instead from their cumulative relation to moral instruction and future regret. The lyric thus moves from situated existence and worldly plurality toward finitude, ethical guidance, and future accountability.

This cumulative structure also clarifies the concept of "disciplinary poetics." It is distinct from religious pedagogy, which primarily communicates moral or religious instruction; devotional aesthetics, which emphasizes affective and aesthetic experience; and Foucault's "technology of the self," which concerns practices through which subjects work upon themselves. Disciplinary poetics refers here to the poetic organization through which repetition, symbolic indirection, and moral-temporal redirection create occasions for ethical attention and self-reflection. Its disciplinary quality lies not in coercion, but in the patterned return of moral and existential concerns.

Three mechanisms are particularly evident in *Turi Putih*: repetition, which makes particular images and questions memorable; symbolic indirection, through which moral and existential concerns are conveyed without explicit doctrinal exposition; and moral-temporal redirection, which connects present conduct with future consequence. These mechanisms do not demonstrate that listeners necessarily internalize the song's meanings or experience transformed subjectivity. Rather, they indicate how devotional performance may provide a recurring space for remembrance, interpretation, and moral reflection.

Accordingly, *Turi Putih* can be understood as a culturally situated instance of disciplinary poetics. Its significance lies in the interaction of Javanese imagery, repetition, moral instruction, and eschatological anticipation, rather than in any fixed Islamic meaning assigned to individual symbols. The concept may also be extended cautiously to other religious poetic or sonic forms when similar mechanisms can be demonstrated. In this sense, *Turi Putih* offers a case through which poetic form, devotional practice, and ethical self-orientation can be examined without assuming that every devotional song produces the same effects or forms of Islamic subjectivity.

Eschatological Encoding: Translating Metaphysics into Aesthetic Form

If the previous section mapped the symbolic architecture of *Turi Putih*, this section asks a sharper question: how does the lyric encode eschatology without ever preaching it directly? The power of the song lies precisely in this indirection. It does not declare doctrines of death, judgment, or the afterlife in explicit theological language. Instead, it normalizes them through aesthetic repetition.

Death as Normalized Event

The line *"Cemleret tiba nyemplung,"* something suddenly slips and falls, constitutes a subtle but decisive rupture in the lyric's calm opening. There is no lamentation. No dramatic vocabulary. No mourning. The falling happens abruptly and without explanation. Structurally, this absence of narrative elaboration is crucial: death is presented as ordinary, almost incidental. It interrupts but does not suspend the flow of the song. By refusing emotional excess, the lyric performs a form of normalization. Mortality is not staged as catastrophe but as inevitability.

The white flower planted in the great garden is not described as withering, yet the sudden fall implies fragility. Existence is shown as precarious without being sensationalized. In this sense, the song habituates the listener to finitude. Death is folded into rhythm.

Judgment as Implied Horizon

Eschatology, however, is not only about death but also about accountability. The clearest encoding appears in the moral imperatives:

Rungokno pituture / Ben ra getun tembe mburin

(Listen to the advice / So you will not regret later.)

Regret (getun) is projected forward. The phrase "tembe mburine" (later, afterward) establishes temporal extension beyond the present. The lyric never names the Day of Judgment, yet it constructs a future evaluative moment. Regret presupposes reckoning. One regrets because one recognizes error after consequence becomes irreversible. Similarly, "Kang mituhu marang guru / Ben lakune ora kliru" links obedience to the avoidance of deviation. Mistake (kliru) is not merely social misbehavior; it is misdirection in a moral journey. The path metaphor lakune (one's way of walking) implies movement toward a destination. Within Islamic metaphysical vocabulary, life is a journey toward divine encounter. The lyric encodes this teleology without doctrinal terminology. The path must not be mistaken, because its end matters. Thus, judgment is present as horizon, not spectacle. The song produces eschatological awareness without theological exposition.

Impermanence as Structural Principle

Impermanence permeates the lyric's floral imagery. The sequence of *kembang tebu*, *kembang jambe*, and *kembang waru* introduces plurality and ornamentation, yet each flower is presented in processes of arrangement: counted (*cacahe pitu*), strung (*di ronce-ronce*), folded (*diwiru-wiru*). These verbs emphasize manipulation and temporality. Flowers are handled, organized, displayed. They are not permanent forms; they are aesthetic configurations.

Even the number seven (*pitu*) often symbolizing completeness does not stabilize permanence here. It suggests fullness within the world, yet fullness

remains fragile. The recurring interrogative *"Mbok kiro kembange apa?"* further destabilizes fixation. What you think it is may not be what it truly is. Appearance is provisional. Recognition is uncertain. Impermanence is therefore not only thematic but formal. The lyric cycles without closure. It returns to the question instead of concluding with resolution. This circularity mirrors the repetitive condition of worldly life distraction, reminder, distraction, reminder until the final horizon of regret interrupts the cycle.

Metaphysics in Aesthetic Translation

Taken together, these elements demonstrate a sophisticated encoding of Islamic metaphysics:

- Finitude is translated into the sudden fall of a flower.
- Moral accountability is translated into the anticipation of regret.
- Transience of the world is translated into floral plurality and repetitive questioning.

The lyric does not instruct through doctrinal argument. It disciplines perception. By embedding eschatological consciousness into images of gardens, flowers, counting, and listening to advice, the song converts metaphysical truths into sensory memory. A child singing about flowers internalizes mortality. A community repeating the refrain rehearses accountability. This is precisely the mechanism of eschatological encoding: transcendence is not abstracted; it is aestheticized. Islamic metaphysics is translated into symbolic repetition so that theological awareness becomes embodied habit. The listener does not merely understand death and judgment; they rhythmically inhabit them.

Performative Context: Song as Communal Discipline

The meaning of *Turi Putih* does not reside solely in its semantic content. Its potential performative significance can also be considered from the formal characteristics of the lyric itself. Because this study does not include ethnographic observation, recordings, or reception data, the following discussion treats performance as an interpretive possibility rather than as an empirically established social practice. The repeated call *"Turi putih..."* followed by the echoing structure creates a dialogical pattern, while the refrain invites

participation and repetition within the song's formal design. The structure of *"Mbok kiro – mbok kiro…"* can therefore be understood as particularly compatible with repeated or participatory singing, although the specific contexts in which it is performed require empirical verification.

This matters analytically. When *"Kang mituhu marang guru / Ben lakune ora kliru"* is considered as a line suitable for repeated vocalization, obedience is no longer only an abstract proposition at the textual level. Its repetition could make the ethical instruction more memorable and publicly articulated. Similarly, when the line *"Opo to tegese guru / Digugu ugo ditiru"* is sung aloud, the repeated articulation of the figure of the *guru* may reinforce the relationship between authority, listening, and imitation. The lyric thus offers a formal possibility through which moral instruction may move from textual meaning toward repeated ethical attention. However, whether such repetition actually produces shared normative commitment cannot be established from the present textual evidence alone.

The structural redundancy of the song—its recurring floral sequences, cyclical questioning, and duplicated lines—can appear simple on paper. From a performative perspective, however, such repetition can be understood as a mechanism that facilitates memorability and recurrent attention. Each return of *"Mbok kiro kembange apa?"* reopens the interpretive question, while the recurrence of *"Ben ra getun tembe mburine"* keeps future consequence within the semantic horizon of the lyric. Through repetition, the lyric can shift from an external message to an internalized memory. This should be understood as a theoretical possibility rather than evidence that such interiorization actually occurred among listeners.

The image *"Cemleret tiba nyemplung"* may similarly acquire additional significance when considered in relation to repetition. Its sudden movement interrupts the otherwise ordered floral imagery, introducing fragility and contingency. If encountered repeatedly in performance, this image could make finitude a recurrent object of attention. Yet the present study cannot determine whether listeners actually experienced mortality in this way. What can be established textually is that the lyric provides a repeatable poetic form through which such reflection may be invited.

As an orally circulated song, *Turi Putih* may also derive part of its cultural durability from the memorability of its floral imagery and repeated verbal patterns. The imagery of *kembang tebu*, *kembang jambe*, and *kembang waru* anchors moral reflection in concrete and familiar vocabulary. Such formal characteristics are compatible with oral learning and transmission, but claims concerning children's learning, intergenerational transmission, or specific educational settings require historical or ethnographic evidence beyond the present corpus. Likewise, the phrase *"Rungokno pituture"* ("listen to the advice") creates an interesting reflexive relationship between the content of the instruction and the act of attending to the song, although this does not by itself demonstrate embodied internalization.

Moreover, the relationship between vernacular imagery and religious meaning can be interpreted as a potential mechanism of cultural translation. The garden, flowers, and number seven can retain their pedagogical, aesthetic, and Javanese cultural meanings while simultaneously opening an Islamic interpretive horizon. The performative repetition of these familiar motifs may therefore provide a culturally accessible form through which ethical and eschatological themes can be repeatedly encountered. This interpretation concerns the lyric's affordances rather than a demonstrated pattern of communal reception.

Read in this way, the performative dimension of *Turi Putih* should not be treated as empirical proof that the song shaped communal subjectivity. Rather, its repetitive structure provides a plausible poetic basis for considering how performance could mediate between symbolic meaning, ethical remembrance, and potential self-reflection. Death may be repeatedly represented by the image of falling; future accountability by the language of regret; and moral orientation by the repeated injunction to listen to and follow the *guru*. The song can therefore be understood as offering the formal conditions for disciplinary poetics, while the actual effects of performance remain an important question for future ethnographic and historical research.

Discussion

The analysis of *Turi Putih* suggests that Islamization in Java may be understood not only through social accommodation and cultural translation but also through the ways in which devotional forms could provide occasions for ethical and existential reflection. Previous studies have emphasized how Walisongo's *dakwah* incorporated Islamic teachings into existing symbolic forms, rituals, and vernacular cultural practices (Alif et al., 2020; Abbas et al., 2023; Ardyansyah, 2024; Aminim et al., 2025). Research on Javanese Islamic songs has similarly examined their lyrical themes and social functions (Dwi Puspitasari and Wirajaya, 2024; Hidayah and Mahliatussikah, 2025), while historical studies have documented broader political and institutional transformations in fifteenth–sixteenth century Java (Maulana, 2022; Riyadi et al., 2022; Adib, 2023; Santika, 2024; Soedjiwo et al., 2025). These studies provide an important account of Islamization as social, cultural, and institutional transformation. The present analysis extends this discussion by considering how devotional poetry may also create a space in which Islamic ethical concerns become repeatedly encountered within everyday cultural forms.

The relationship between Sufi ethics and Foucauldian subject formation becomes clearer when the two are treated not as parallel theoretical frameworks but as different analytical dimensions of the same process. In this study, *dhikr al-mawt*, or remembrance of death, provides the Islamic ethical content of the reflection. Within Sufi traditions, awareness of mortality serves to counter *ghaflah* (heedlessness) and to redirect attention toward the consequences of one's conduct (al-Ghazālī, 1995; Chittick, 2000; Knysh, 2017). The repeated poetic encounter with images of impermanence, falling, moral guidance, and future regret in *Turi Putih* can therefore be read in relation to this ethical orientation. The song does not formulate *dhikr al-mawt* as a formal theological doctrine; rather, it renders mortality and future consequence through familiar vernacular imagery.

Poetic repetition constitutes the practical form through which this ethical content becomes repeatedly available for attention. The refrain, recurring images, and patterned performance make particular themes memorable and suitable for communal reproduction. Repetition is therefore not, by itself, equivalent to

spiritual transformation. Rather, it provides the practical condition through which remembrance can recur. This distinction is important because the present textual analysis cannot establish how individual listeners actually experienced or internalized the song. It can demonstrate that the poetic form creates recurring opportunities to encounter themes of mortality, moral conduct, and future consequences.

Foucault's concept of the technology of the self provides the mechanism for interpreting what such repeated encounters may potentially do at the level of ethical practice. Technologies of the self concern practices through which individuals act upon themselves to shape their conduct, thoughts, and orientations (Foucault, 1988). Applied cautiously here, the concept does not mean that *Turi Putih* automatically produces a particular Islamic subject. Rather, it helps explain how a devotional form may mediate between religious teaching and self-directed reflection. Listening, remembering, interpreting, and considering one's conduct are potential forms of self-engagement through which the ethical content of *dhikr al-mawt* may become personally meaningful.

The three dimensions can therefore be understood as analytically connected: Sufi ethics provides the content of moral and eschatological orientation; poetic repetition provides the recurring practice through which that orientation is encountered; and the technology-of-the-self framework explains how such practices may invite subjects to turn ethical attention toward themselves. This integration also clarifies the role of disciplinary poetics developed above. Disciplinary poetics describes the textual and performative organization repetition, symbolic indirection, moral address, and temporal anticipation through which such ethical reflection is made possible. It thus operates at the level of poetic form, while the technology of the self operates at the level of potential self-practice. From this perspective, *Turi Putih* can be situated within a broader process of Islamization that operates across several interconnected dimensions:

- Social accommodation, through which Islamic teachings are articulated within existing cultural practices;
- Cultural translation, through which Javanese symbolic and aesthetic forms become vehicles for Islamic meanings;

- Ethical remembrance, through which themes such as mortality, accountability, and moral conduct are repeatedly encountered; and
- Potential self-formation, through which repeated engagement with these themes may provide occasions for individuals to reflect upon and orient their own conduct.

The final dimension should be understood as a potential rather than an empirically demonstrated outcome. The present study does not claim that *Turi Putih* necessarily transformed listeners into particular forms of Islamic subjects. Rather, it demonstrates how the song's poetic structure can be interpreted as creating a medium through which Islamic ethical concerns, particularly mortality, accountability, and moral vigilance, are rendered memorable and available for repeated reflection. This distinction allows the analysis to retain the Foucauldian insight concerning ethical self-formation without exceeding the evidentiary limits of a hermeneutic textual study.

Taken together, these perspectives suggest that the significance of *Turi Putih* lies not simply in its role as a translated expression of Islamic teaching, but in the relationship between ethical content, repeated practice, and the possibility of self-reflection. *Dhikr al-mawt* gives the song an ethical and eschatological orientation; poetic repetition makes that orientation recurrent within devotional practice; disciplinary poetics describes the form through which attention is organized; and the concept of technologies of the self provides a framework for considering how such practices may become occasions for ethical self-engagement. Islamization, in this sense, can be approached not only as a transformation of institutions and cultural symbols, but also as a process in which religious meanings become available for repeated reflection within the ordinary forms of communal life.

Why This Matters: Reframing Islamization Beyond Surface Forms

The notion that Islamization is solely about outward conformity or cultural adaptation has prevailed because much of the literature focuses on observable behaviors and social rituals (Crouch, 2018; Woodward, 2019; Suroyo et al., 2024). These are critical and necessary insights. Yet without accounting for interior moral formation, understandings of Islamization stay at the level of exterior phenomena what people *did* rather than what people *became*.

Recent work in the anthropology of Islam underscores the importance of interior processes. Mahmood's *Politics of Piety* illustrates how habitual practices in the mosque and women's piety movements shape ethical selves (Mahmoud and Abu-Odeh, 2016; Hirschkind, 2018). Hirschkind's analysis of cassette sermons demonstrates how repetitive devotional speech configures moral listening. These studies foundationally shift from the external to the interior, but they largely focus on contemporary urban Muslim contexts rather than historical vernacular formations. By directing attention to *Turi Putih*, this study extends such insights into the early period of Islamization. It shows how communal singing, repetitive refrains, and symbolic ambiguity can embed Islamic eschatology within collective moral consciousness. Here, religion is not merely believed; it is *lived* through patterned performance.

Formation of the Ethical Self

In the context of Islamic ethics, the self is not pre-given; it is *formed* through disciplined practices (Arkoun, 1970; Nasr, 2002). When the repeated refrains of *Turi Putih* place obedience (*digugu ugo ditiru*) at the heart of moral attention, they do more than communicate a rule; they habituate ethical orientation. Habituation here is not a cognitive moment alone but an enacted formation of character. Recent scholarship in moral anthropology further elucidates this process. (Lambek, 2010) emphasizes how moral worlds are constituted through social practice. (Butler, 2011) insists that ethical subjectivity emerges through interpellation within communal frames. In *Turi Putih*, ethical self-formation is mediated not by sermon alone, but by the embodied repetition of song in communal arenas.

Habitual Awareness of Death

Scholars have long recognized that death-awareness plays a formative role in religious life. (Mittermaier, 2022) shows how Islamic charitable practices are suffused with a consciousness of mortality. (Seeman, 2020) argues that death-related rituals configure moral imagination by making finitude felt. *Turi Putih* encodes mortality through sudden imagery (*cemleret tiba nyemplung*), normalizing precarity. What distinguishes this analysis is the identification of

rhythmic habituation: mortality becomes a shared affective category through repetition. When people sing *"Mbok kiro kembange apa?"* in communal settings, the lyric does more than ask a question; it rehearses the soul's vulnerability. This bridges affect theory (Ahmed, 2021; Suroyo et al., 2025) with lived religion.

Production of Moral Subjectivity

Finally, moral subjectivity the sense of oneself as a moral agent is not a spontaneous awareness but a cultivated effect of disciplined practices. In Taylor (1989), selfhood is understood as a reflection of socially and historically mediated moral horizons. In Islamic contexts, research shows this happens through liturgy, ritual, and piety practices (Voll, 1994; Bowen, 2004). The current study situates *Turi Putih* as a historically under-theorized form of such cultivation. The song's structure, repetition, and communal performance make it a vector of interior disciplining, adding a new dimension to our understanding of the moral self in early Islamic Java.

The Impact of This Study

By suggesting that devotional song may serve as a medium for ethical and existential reflection, this study offers implications across several fields. The historiography of Islamization highlights the importance of looking beyond institutional and cultural transformations toward everyday processes of ethical formation (Ricklefs, 2006; Hefner, 2011). For religious studies, it demonstrates how repetition, aesthetic form, and devotional practice may provide occasions for ethical self-reflection, complementing discussions of technologies of the self and Islamic piety (Foucault, 1988; Mahmood, 2005). In the anthropology of religion, *Turi Putih* illustrates how vernacular sound and embodied repetition can connect religious ideas to everyday experience (Hirschkind, 2006; Meyer, 2012). More broadly, the study suggests that Islamization may be understood not only as cultural and institutional change, but also as the circulation of ethical and eschatological orientations through familiar devotional forms.

Limitations and Future Directions

This study is limited by its reliance on hermeneutic textual analysis and conceptual interpretation of *Turi Putih*. The analysis can identify symbolic

patterns, ethical orientations, and the potential of poetic repetition to facilitate moral and eschatological reflection, but it cannot establish how listeners actually experienced, internalized, or transformed their sense of Islamic subjectivity. Accordingly, the concepts of "technology of the self" and "disciplinary poetics" are used here as analytical frameworks for interpreting the song's formative potential, rather than as evidence of demonstrated subject formation. The study also does not seek to establish definitive authorship, original compositional intent, or uniform interpretations across communities. Future research involving ethnographic reception studies, comparative analysis of other devotional songs, and historical or archival investigation could further examine how such poetic forms were performed, received, and potentially incorporated into processes of ethical and religious formation.

Conclusion

This study has argued that *Turi Putih* can be interpreted as a vernacular poetic form through which Islamic ethical and eschatological concerns are articulated. Rather than treating individual images as fixed theological symbols, the analysis has shown how their cumulative arrangement together with repetition, moral instruction, and anticipation of future consequence opens an interpretive horizon centered on mortality, accountability, and ethical conduct. In this sense, the song may be understood as translating religious concerns into familiar Javanese aesthetic and vernacular forms.

The concept of disciplinary poetics further helps explain this relationship between poetic form and ethical reflection. Repetition, symbolic indirection, and moral-temporal redirection can create recurring occasions for remembrance and self-reflection, while the concept of the technology of the self provides a framework for considering how such practices may invite ethical engagement. These concepts, however, should be understood as interpretive frameworks rather than evidence that Turi Putih directly produced or transformed particular forms of Islamic subjectivity. The analysis therefore identifies the song's potential

to mediate ethical and eschatological reflection rather than demonstrating its actual effects upon listeners.

The broader implication is that the Islamization of Java may be approached not only through institutional change, ritual adaptation, or cultural accommodation, but also through vernacular forms that made Islamic ethical and eschatological concerns available within everyday devotional life. Turi Putih therefore offers a case for examining how poetic and potentially performative practices may mediate between religious ideas and ethical self-reflection. Rather than establishing the historical role of the song in Walisongo's dakwah or in the formation of Islamic subjectivity, the present study demonstrates its interpretive value for reconsidering how vernacular devotional forms may have provided spaces in which Islamic understandings of mortality, accountability, and moral orientation could be articulated, repeated, and contemplated.

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