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Assimilation of Javanese Art and Tradition in Sunan Kalijaga's Da'wah on the Formation of Javanese Culture

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Abstract

This study analyzes the assimilation of Javanese art and tradition in the da'wah of Sunan Kalijaga and its contribution to the formation of Javanese Islamic culture. The research addresses the problem of understanding how Islamic teachings were accepted in a predominantly Hindu–Buddhist Javanese society without cultural resistance. Using a qualitative descriptive method supported by textual and historical analysis, this study examines how Sunan Kalijaga employed wayang kulit, gamelan, symbolic aesthetics, and macapat poetry as media of cultural adaptation. The findings show that Sunan Kalijaga did not reject existing traditions, but reinterpreted and Islamized them by embedding moral teachings, monotheistic concepts, and ethical values within familiar cultural forms. This approach strengthened social acceptance, minimized cultural disruption, and enabled Islam to integrate harmoniously with Javanese identity. The assimilation of arts and traditions not only facilitated da'wah but also shaped a distinctive Javanese Islamic culture characterized by refinement, symbolism, and spiritual depth. The study concludes that Sunan Kalijaga's method represents an effective cultural strategy for religious propagation, demonstrating that Islam can coexist with local traditions without losing its essential principles. Further research is recommended to explore comparative models of cultural da'wah in other regions.

Keywords: Sunan Kalijaga, integration, da'wah, Javanese art, Islamic-Javanese culture.

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INTRODUCTION

Islam entered the archipelago around the 13th century through trade routes involving traders from Gujarat, Persia, and Arabia. In Java, the process of Islamization takes place gradually and peacefully while respecting local customs and traditions that are deeply rooted. One effective approach in the spread of Islam is through art and tradition, which are used as a tool to introduce Islamic values without generating cultural resistance (Masruroh et al., 2021). Before the arrival of Islam, Javanese art and traditions were heavily influenced by Hinduism and Buddhism, which are reflected in wayang kulit, gamelan, batik, and various religious rituals. When Islam began to spread, these arts and traditions were not eliminated, but modified to be in harmony with Islamic values. For example, the story of wayang kulit began to contain stories with Islamic nuances such as the story of Amir Hamzah, gamelan was used to accompany da'wah songs, and batik motifs changed with the emergence of Islamic patterns that avoided depicting living things in their entirety (Fitri et al., 2021). This research aims to analyze how the assimilation of Javanese art and traditions is used in the da'wah of Sunan Kalijaga and its contribution to the formation of a distinctive Javanese cultural identity. Thus, this study provides a deeper understanding of culture-based da'wah strategies that succeed in building harmony between Islam and local traditions.

The long process of interaction between local culture and Islamic teachings created new art forms that reflected this blend. The role of Wali Songo, especially Sunan Kalijaga, had a great influence in the process of preaching the spread of Islam. In contrast to the formal and dogmatic approach of da'wah, Sunan Kalijaga chose the cultural path by utilizing art and tradition as a medium of conveying Islamic messages that are more easily accepted by the community. Sunan Kalijaga has a very important role in the development of Islam in the land of Java. This role cannot be separated from the cultural acculturation approach used as a method of da'wah. Javanese culture, which was previously heavily influenced by Hindu and Buddhist traditions, is slowly being combined with elements of Islamic law, creating a cultural and religious harmony that is interesting to study further. Religion and culture are closely linked, as they serve as guidelines for life. The difference lies in the source: religion comes from God's instructions, while culture is the result of human agreement. When Islam entered Indonesia, the interaction between religion and culture also occurred, especially in the Java region, especially in coastal areas. This area is a meeting place for various community groups with diverse backgrounds. Through the initial interaction between Muslim traders and the local community, elements of Islam slowly began to influence the customs of the local community.

Article titled "Akulturasi Budaya Jawa dan Islam melalui Dakwah Sunan Kalijaga" published in jurnal Al-'Adalah Vol. 23 No. 2 (2020) oleh Naufaldi Alif, Laily Mafthukhatul, dan Majidatun Ahmala, discussed the role of Sunan Kalijaga in spreading Islam in Java with an approach that accommodates local culture. This research highlights Sunan Kalijaga's da'wah method that does not impose Islamic teachings directly, but through integration with Javanese cultural elements such as wayang kulit, tembang macapat, and gamelan. This approach allows the Javanese people to accept Islam without feeling alienated from their traditions. Sunan Kalijaga believes that with a deep understanding of Islam, people will naturally abandon old customs that are not in accordance with the teachings of Islam. Therefore, his teachings tend to be syncretic, combining Javanese culture and Islamic values to create harmony between the two. This strategy is effective in spreading Islam in Java because it respects and integrates local values (Alif et al., 2020)

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Based on an article published in the journal *Al-Adalah* by Naufaldi Alif, Laily Mafthukhatul, and Majidatun Ahmala (2020), which examines the role of Sunan Kalijaga in spreading Islam through the assimilation of Javanese and Islamic cultures, several important questions arise that can deepen our understanding of his da'wah. One of them is how Sunan Kalijaga assimilated elements of Javanese culture, such as wayang kulit, tembang macapat, and gamelan, with Islamic teachings, and the extent to which this affects people's acceptance of Islam. In this context, the assimilation carried out by Sunan Kalijaga was not just the introduction of new religious teachings, but rather the creation of a bridge that connects existing local values with the Islamic teachings that he brought. In this way, Javanese people do not feel alienated from the teachings of Islam, but rather see it as something that is in harmony with their long-standing culture and traditions.

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LITERATURE REVIEW

Studies on Sunan Kalijaga's da'wah and the acculturation of Islamic culture with Javanese traditions have been widely carried out by researchers, both from the perspective of history, cultural anthropology, and da'wah communication. One of the main sources is research (Ricklefs & Stanford, 2001), which explains that the process of Islamization in Java takes place through an acculturative, not confrontational, approach. In Ricklefs' view, the guardians, especially Sunan Kalijaga, did not oppose the local culture, but inserted Islamic values into it, thus creating a distinctive form of religion that was accepted by the Javanese people.

This approach is also supported by (Sholikhin, 2011) in his work which reviews various forms of Islamic rituals and traditions in Java. He emphasized that Sunan Kalijaga does not erase local traditions, but Islamizes the values contained in the culture through symbolic and spiritual approaches. Various practices such as selamatan, tahlilan, and traditional art

performances are used as a contextual da'wah medium that can be accepted by the Javanese people at large.

Furthermore, (Umami Sumbulah, 2012) examines how the culture-based da'wah carried out by Sunan Kalijaga not only succeeded in spreading Islam, but also formed a strong cultural synthesis. He emphasized that this cultural da'wah strategy allows Islam to not only coexist with Javanese culture, but also give a new color that enriches the local cultural treasures. This assimilation made Islam part of the cultural identity of the Javanese people, not as a foreign force that displaced the original culture. These three studies are an important foundation in this study to understand how Sunan Kalijaga's da'wah strategy forms an influential cultural acculturation pattern to this day.

METHODS

This study uses the library *research method* because the focus of this study is on historical and conceptual analysis of the process of assimilation of Javanese art and tradition in Sunan Kalijaga da'wah and its contribution to the formation of Javanese culture. This method was chosen because the object being studied is historical and cultural, which cannot be directly observed, but is traced through relevant and credible written sources. The literature method allows researchers to dig deep into data from various authentic references that record the traces of da'wah and cultural strategies applied by Sunan Kalijaga. The data sources in this study consist of primary sources and secondary sources. Primary sources include ancient manuscripts, babad manuscripts, historical chronicles, and original documents that directly record the da'wah activities and Sunan Kalijaga's interaction with the local culture. Secondary sources include history books, scientific journal articles, previous research results, and other relevant academic publications. The criteria for selecting sources are based on three aspects, namely: (1) the relevance of the content to the research focus on cultural assimilation and Sunan Kalijaga's da'wah; (2) the credibility of the source, both from the side of the author and the publishing institution; and (3) the completeness and depth of the information presented.

Data were analyzed using historical and descriptive-analytical approaches. Historical approaches are used to reconstruct the social, cultural, and religious context of Javanese society during the spread of Islam by Sunan Kalijaga. Meanwhile, a descriptive-analytical approach is used to identify, decipher, and compare various patterns of artistic and cultural assimilation found in his da'wah. The analysis was carried out by examining and comparing various written sources to find the consistency of data, cultural patterns, and the form of culture-based da'wah strategies used. The results of this process are then compiled in the form of a narrative that explains how the cultural da'wah strategy carried out by Sunan Kalijaga is able to integrate Islamic values into the local cultural structure, thus forming a distinctive, inclusive, and harmonious Javanese cultural identity.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Findings

The findings of this study show that the process of Sunan Kalijaga's da'wah takes place through a strong pattern of cultural assimilation between Islamic teachings and Javanese traditions. The results of an analysis of various literature sources show that Sunan Kalijaga uses wayang kulit, gamelan, tembang macapat, and Javanese symbols as a da'wah medium that is able to convey the values of monotheism and Islamic ethics without causing cultural rejection. This integration can be seen from changes in the storyline of puppets, the reinterpretation of Javanese symbols such as mountains, and the arrangement of songs with sufistic nuances that

internalize Islamic values. If presented in tables or pictures, supporting narratives can clarify the relationship between art media and da'wah messages, such as how the Mahabharata story is Islamic or how the gamelan philosophy is aligned with Islamic values. These findings confirm that the cultural-based da'wah approach is not only effective in spreading Islam, but also forms a harmonious Javanese-Islamic cultural identity.

Discussion

Cultural Assimilation

Cultural assimilation is a social process that occurs when two groups of people with different cultural backgrounds have intensive and continuous interactions, resulting in cultural changes and adjustments that ultimately form a new, more uniform culture. According to Ritonga (2017), assimilation can occur if there is direct contact between two different cultural groups for a long period of time, so that existing cultural patterns begin to merge. In this process, attitudes, values, and behavior patterns become more and more similar for the sake of social integration. Furthermore, Romli (2015) explained that cultural assimilation includes various dimensions, including cultural assimilation or acculturation, structural, and identification. Cultural assimilation or acculturation shows a change in cultural patterns in minority groups in terms of language, values, and forms of cultural expression such as art. However, acculturation does not require minority groups to completely lose their cultural identity of origin, but rather allows them to retain certain elements while adopting elements from the dominant culture as needed and context.

Sunan Kalijaga's da'wah strategy can be understood through the framework of this cultural assimilation theory. In spreading Islam in Java, Sunan Kalijaga did not reject local culture, but instead integrated Islamic values into a form of culture that was familiar in the community. This strategy reflects a form of two-way assimilation, in which Islamic values and Javanese culture adapt to each other without eliminating the other. Sunan Kalijaga chooses a communicative, flexible, and inclusive da'wah path by utilizing local cultural mediums such as puppets, gamelan, and songs. Wayang, as one of the main da'wah media, has a strong symbolic and philosophical function in the life of the Javanese people. Sunan Kalijaga inserted Islamic teachings into the puppet story, replacing Hindu-Buddhist deities with Islamic characters who carried moral and monotheistic messages. This transformation shows an effective form of acculturation because it maintains the old cultural structure while filling it with new values. This is in accordance with Romli's (2015) explanation that in cultural assimilation, the elements of the old culture are not completely removed, but are reconstructed to suit the new values introduced. Gamelan, as a traditional music, is also used by Sunan Kalijaga in da'wah activities. Smooth and meditative gamelan music is considered to be in harmony with the principles of balance and tranquility in Islamic teachings. Through gamelan, Islamic messages are conveyed aesthetically, making it easier to accept them among the community. The function of gamelan in da'wah shows how local cultural expressions are not only a means of entertainment, but also a means of internalizing spiritual values.

In addition, Javanese tembang or poetry is used to convey Islamic messages in a beautiful and memorable form. In the songs composed by Sunan Kalijaga, Islamic teachings are packaged in lyrics that contain local symbols. This process becomes a means of internalizing values, where people slowly adopt Islamic values through cultural media that have become part of their daily lives. The Javanese symbols and philosophies used by Sunan Kalijaga in his da'wah also show a form of local wisdom that is not ignored, but instead processed and refilled with Islamic meaning. For example, the concept of "manunggaling kawula lan Gusti" which

was originally rooted in the Javanese tradition, is given a sufistic meaning in the context of Islam. With this approach, Islamic values are accepted without causing cultural resistance, because da'wah is not present as a threat, but as a refinement.

Thus, Sunan Kalijaga's da'wah approach can be understood as a concrete form of the process of cultural assimilation, where Islam is integrated into Javanese culture in a harmonious and sustainable manner. This process not only spreads religion, but also forms a new identity in Javanese society, namely an Islamic identity that is firmly rooted in local traditions and culture. This strategy shows that da'wah that pays attention to the cultural context is able to create strong integration and contribute greatly to the development of Javanese culture.

The role of art and tradition in Javanese society

Art can be understood from a variety of perspectives. There are two approaches that can be used to understand the meaning of art. The first approach is done by referring to various definitions of art obtained from dictionaries or online sources. Meanwhile, the second approach focuses on discussing the reasons and goals behind the creation of artworks. Based on definitions taken from various sources, art can be concluded as a combination of thoughts, skills, and physical skills that produce observable shapes or movements. (Felix, 2012). Tradition comes from the Latin *traditio*, which means something that is inherited or passed on. In the context of language, tradition refers to a habit that develops in society until it becomes a custom that is often related to customary and religious rituals. Based on the Great Dictionary of the Indonesian Language, tradition is a habit that is inherited from generation to generation from ancestors and is still carried out by the community. In Arabic, tradition is called *'urf*, which refers to the customs of the people in a particular place and time that are not explicitly regulated in the Qur'an or the Sunnah. Etymologically, tradition includes various elements such as customs, beliefs, customs, and teachings that are inherited from one generation to the next.

Some experts have different views on tradition. Soerjono Soekamto defines tradition as an activity that is carried out repeatedly and continuously in a community group. Van Reusen sees tradition as a heritage that includes morals, customs, and social norms, which can still change according to the times and the role of humans in preserving them. Meanwhile, Coomans, M defines tradition as a pattern of behavior that has been around for a long time and has been passed down from generation to generation. Based on these various definitions, tradition can be concluded as a habit or behavior that is inherited and continues to be practiced in society. Tradition survives because it continues to be inherited, both orally and in writing, from one generation to the next. In an Islamic perspective, tradition is often associated with customs. Customs refer more to actions that contain religious values, while traditions are more related to cultural values in people's lives (Azizah, 2020)

Traditional arts have a crucial role in maintaining and strengthening the cultural identity of a community. Through various forms of expression such as dance, music, theater, fine arts, and literature, these arts serve as a means to pass on cultural, historical, and identity values to future generations. Traditional arts reflect the rich culture and ancestral heritage that are the basis of the collective identity of the community. Research shows that traditional arts also act as social glues, connecting community members through shared activities, such as traditional ceremonies, cultural festivals, and art performances. In Bali, for example, dance arts such as Kecak Dance and Barong Dance not only serve as entertainment but also have a deep ritual and spiritual meaning. The Kecak dance, which is often performed in religious ceremonies, tells the story of the epic of the Ramayana and reflects the philosophy of life of the Balinese people. In Yogyakarta, gamelan and wayang kulit have become strong cultural symbols, representing

noble values and local wisdom that have been passed down from generation to generation. Meanwhile, in Toraja, traditional carving and funeral rituals such as Rambu Solo have become a distinctive cultural identity that distinguishes the Toraja people from other ethnic groups. Art and tradition have an important role in the life of the Javanese people, both as a means of cultural preservation, educational media, and as social glue. Traditional arts such as wayang kulit, dance, batik, and gamelan are not just entertainment, but also contain a deep philosophy that is passed down from generation to generation. Wayang kulit, for example, not only conveys epic stories such as the Mahabharata and Ramayana, but also teaches life values, such as wisdom, patience, and justice. In addition, Javanese traditions such as salvation and mitoni serve as expressions of gratitude and prayers for safety and well-being, which reflect spiritual values in people's lives. Art and tradition are also part of the identity of the community. Javanese, distinguish them from other cultures and strengthen the sense of togetherness. In its development, Javanese art and traditions have survived despite various adaptations to modern times, showing cultural flexibility in the face of change without losing its cultural roots (Ratna Sari, 2024).

The interaction of Javanese culture with Islamic teachings

The spread of Islam in the archipelago is estimated to have lasted since the 12th century AD. The process of the entry of Islam occurred through various ways, places, and times, so that it had a different impact in each region. The early spread of Islam began in coastal areas such as Pasai, Gresik, Goa, Talo, Cirebon, Banten, and Demak. This is due to the strategic position of these areas as trading centers, allowing interaction between locals and traders and outsiders. Therefore, Islamic society in the early days was known as a cosmopolitan community. In Java, the spread of Islam also began in coastal areas before finally spreading to the interior (Bagaskara et al., 2023). Kuntowijoyo identified this change as a shift from cosmopolitan Islam to agrarian and mystical Islam. Historian Azyumardi Azra puts forward four possibilities about how Islam entered the archipelago. First, it was brought directly by the Arabs. Second, it is spread by preachers. Third, it was introduced by the local rulers who first converted to Islam. Fourth, it was preached by scholars or religious teachers who came around the 12th to 13th centuries.

Meanwhile, Graaf in his research divides the process of Islamization in the archipelago into three main methods. First, through Muslim traders who spread the teachings of Islam while trading. Second, through scholars or guardians who actively preach in various regions. Third, through the Indians or Arabs who deliberately came to Islamize the community, strengthen the existing beliefs of Muslims, and introduce Islam to the local population who did not know it. With these various methods, Islam has developed rapidly in the archipelago and has a great influence on the social and cultural life of the community (Jakaria et al., 2023).

Islam entered the land of Java when non-Islamic cultures and traditions, especially Hinduism and Buddhism, were firmly rooted in people's lives. One of the main references in the study of Javanese religion is Clifford Geertz's work entitled *The Religion of Java*, which is widely used by Western researchers in understanding the religious diversity of Javanese society. In the book, Geertz groups Javanese society into three main typologies, namely *abangan*, *santri*, and *priyayi*. *Abangan* and *santri* are associated with a person's level of affiliation and commitment to religious teachings, while *priyayi* is more of a social classification. *Abangan* refers to individuals who do not strictly follow religious teachings, while students are those who have a high level of obedience to religious rules. On the other hand, *priyayi* are a group that socially and economically has a higher status than village people in general. Through these three categories, Geertz wants to show that Islam in Java is a combination of various

expressions of faith, doctrine, and ritual that developed over time, adapted to local traditions and cultures. In its development, Islam in Java is not only present, but also processes through accommodation, integration, and dialogue with pre-existing cultures, especially animism and Hindu-Buddhism (Makin, 2016).

Furthermore, Geertz emphasized that Islam that entered Indonesia, especially Java, did not build a new civilization, but took over the existing civilization. This is in contrast to Islam in Morocco, which developed by forming a new civilization from the beginning, shortly after the death of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), and brought by the Idrisiyah Dynasty. Since Islam in Java developed in the midst of the cultural background of animism and Hinduism, it is natural that the style and character of Islam in Java also has the influence of these beliefs. This influence is still seen today in various rituals of the Javanese people, such as slametan which is carried out on various occasions, for example in weddings, circumcision, village cleanliness, and other religious traditions (van Bruinessen, 2015).

Based on various studies that have been conducted, it can be concluded that the slametan ritual has an important role in uniting the various elements of Javanese society. In the implementation of slametan, there is no striking difference between rich and poor groups, nor between normative Islam adherents and Javanese Islam (abangan, according to Geertz's classification). One of the proofs that slametan is able to unite various groups in society can be seen from Beatty's findings, which show the practice of worship of Great-Grandfather Cili and Great-Grandfather Cungking in the Bayu community. A similar thing was also found by Hefner in the ritual of respect for Nyai Po in Pasuruan, which involved all elements of the community.

In the slametan ritual, various groups of people, including adherents of animism, mysticism, normative Islam, Javanese, and Hindu-Buddhism, can participate without carrying attributes or symbols that distinguish them from each other. The dishes served in slametan are generally in the form of yellow rice and apem, which are eaten together after being prayed by someone who is considered more experienced or elder in the community. Prayers in this ritual usually begin with prayers to the Prophet Muhammad PBUH and his companions, then continue with prayers for the ancestors and village dancers. Even in ritual practices carried out by normative Islamic groups, there are often still elements of animist traditions and pre-Islamic beliefs (Nasuhi, 2017).

Compared to other regions in Indonesia, Javanese people generally have a high level of tolerance towards other religions. However, according to anthropologists, tolerance in Javanese Islam is not pure tolerance, but has undergone a form of syncretism that blends with pre-Islamic traditions, especially animism and Hindu-Buddhism. As a result, the boundaries between tolerance and syncretism in Javanese Islam became increasingly blurred. This is due to the strong values of virtue and local wisdom inherited from various traditions, philosophical teachings, and religions that have taken root in Java long before the arrival of Islam. Islam practiced in Java shows a unique, flexible, and varied character in understanding and responding to spiritual reality. This diversity can be seen in various forms of mysticism, such as kejawen and Sangkan Paran, as well as in the differences in understanding between traditionalist, scripturalist, and reformist Islam (Pamungkas et al., 2024). In addition, the level of people's obedience to religion also varies, ranging from those who are very compliant to the maximum to those who only carry out the social aspect. These various differences show that the Javanese people have a very complex spiritual and cultural disposition and are rich in local wisdom values. (Sumbulah, 2012).

Sunan Kalijaga and His Da'wah Strategy

The development of Islamic teachings in the archipelago is inseparable from the important role of Wali Songo. The Wali Songo spread and taught Islam in the land of Java in the 14th century. Their da'wah activities cover various areas on the island of Java, including Surabaya, Gresik, and Tuban in East Java; Demak, Kudus, and Muria in Central Java; and Cirebon in West Java. The success of the spread of Islam in Indonesia, especially on the island of Java, can be seen from how Islamic teachings are well accepted by the community. This is inseparable from the da'wah method used by Wali Songo, who adapt their approach to the local culture and traditions. Sunan Kalijaga is one of the members of Wali Songo who has a different method of da'wah compared to other wali. If other Wali Songo settled more in one place and established a pesantren, Sunan Kalijaga actually chose to wander to various regions on the island of Java. He did not build formal educational institutions such as pesantren, but spread Islam by visiting the community directly. This approach is in line with his da'wah principle which emphasizes the closeness between Wali Songo and the community. His unique way of preaching makes his name more known than other members of Wali Songo. (Vindalia et al., 2022).

Sunan Kalijaga is a very well-known figure among the Indonesian people, especially on the island of Java. As one of the Wali Songo, he had an important role in the spread of Islam in the region. In Cirebon, there is a belief that the name "Kalijaga" comes from a village in the area. It is said that when he was in the village, he often bathed in the river, so the name was associated with his custom. Sunan Kalijaga, whose real name is Raden Sahid, was born in Blambangan, East Java, in 1460. He was the son of Tumenggung Wilatikta, a ruler of Tuban, and his mother was named Dewi Nawangrum. In addition to the name Raden Sahid (or Raden Said as it is called in some sources), he is also known by various other names, such as Shaykh Malaya, Lokajaya, Raden Abdurrahman, Prince Tuban, and Ki Dalang Sida Brangti. The name "Sunan Kalijaga" itself has various meanings based on its origins. The title "Sunan" comes from the word "Susuhunan," which means a respected person. Meanwhile, the name "Kalijaga" has several interpretations. One version states that in Javanese, "kali" means river and "jaga" means to guard. This refers to the story in the Babad of the Land of Java which tells that Sunan Kalijaga once underwent a hermitage on the riverbank, as if to maintain the flow of water.

As a student of Sunan Bonang, Sunan Kalijaga is one of the most famous members of Wali Songo. In preaching, he uses artistic and cultural approaches, such as wayang kulit and Javanese songs, so that Islamic teachings can be more easily accepted by the community. This approach has earned him the attention of many scholars and the wider community. Sunan Kalijaga has a close relationship with the Javanese people, and is even considered a respected professor. Despite coming from a noble family, he chose to leave behind luxury and dedicate his life to spreading the teachings of Islam. With his simplicity, he succeeded in harmonizing Islamic values with Javanese culture, so that this religion could be well accepted by the local community. Apart from being known as a scholar, Sunan Kalijaga is also a wise leader who cares about the welfare of the people. He also assists the community in solving various social and economic problems and plays a role in the construction of mosques and Islamic boarding schools to improve religious education in Java. Sunan Kalijaga died in 1546 in the village of Kadilangu, Central Java. Even though he has passed away a long time ago, his influence and teachings are still remembered and continue to inspire many people to this day. (Irawan, 2023)

In spreading Islam, Sunan Kalijaga took a different way compared to several other guardians. If some guardians choose to establish Islamic boarding schools, prayer rooms, or padepokan as da'wah centers, Sunan Kalijaga actually wanders from one place to another. He

interacted directly with the community and conveyed Islamic teachings in every area he visited. The active da'wah approach that reaches all levels of society, especially the lower class, makes the name of Sunan Kalijaga very well known in the land of Java. Sunan Kalijaga applies the da'wah strategy with a direct approach or "picking up the ball" instead of waiting for people to come to him. This means that he prefers to go down to the community to convey the teachings of Islam directly. This method of da'wah is actually not new, because since the beginning of the entry of Islam, the spread of religion has also been carried out in a similar way. (Oktaviani, 2020)

Sunan Kalijaga spreads Islamic teachings with a cultural and artistic approach. He understands that the Javanese people have a strong tradition, so they choose to use cultural elements as a medium for da'wah. One of the methods used is through puppet shows. Wayang kulit is a traditional Javanese art that is very popular. Sunan Kalijaga uses it as a means to convey Islamic values to the community. He changed the storyline in the puppet show by including Islamic figures such as the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and his companions. With this approach, the public is more interested in listening to performances as well as accepting Islamic teachings indirectly. In addition, Sunan Kalijaga also uses Javanese songs or songs in his da'wah by changing the lyrics to contain moral messages, good values, and Islamic teachings on justice and ethics.

Assimilation of Javanese Art and Tradition in Da'wah Sunan Kalijaga Puppet as a medium of da'wah Sunan Kalijaga utilizes puppetry as a means of Islamic education by incorporating Islamic values into the local culture of the Javanese people. Through his creativity and innovation, he was able to adapt Islamic teachings into deep-rooted traditions, such as gamelan art, dance, wayang, suluk (poetry), and Javanese clothing. In this way, the culture that is already known to the people is used as a tool to convey the teachings of Islam, so that they can understand and accept Islam naturally through their own cultural elements. The success of Sunan Kalijaga's da'wah is supported by his ability to apply methods that are in harmony with local traditions. In spreading Islam in Java, he used a flexible approach and respected the existing culture. This strategy not only helps in disseminating Islam but also plays a role in preserving the local culture while strengthening the identity of Muslims in the region. Puppets, which were part of the tradition before the entry of Islam, were then assimilated by Sunan Kalijaga to have more Islamic nuances. He changed the story, symbols, and language used in puppet performances to suit Islamic teachings, so that the concept of monotheism could be easily understood by the public. Since the beginning of the spread of Islam in the archipelago, wayang has been an effective medium to convey Islamic values in a way that is closer and relevant to the lives of the local community. (Marsaid, 2016).

In addition to wayang kulit, Sunan Kalijaga also utilizes various other art forms, such as music and dance, as a medium for da'wah. He often inserted stories from the Qur'an and hadith into the performance, presenting them in an engaging and entertaining way. With this approach, Islamic teachings can be conveyed more effectively and accepted by various circles of society. (Irawan, 2023). Wayang is a performing art that displays the story of a character or kingdom in the world of puppetry. The word "puppet" comes from Ma Hyang, which means towards spiritual spirits, gods, or God Almighty. Wayang kulit itself is the art of carving on sheets of leather that are projected onto a screen or kelir so as to produce shadows. The stories in puppet shows are generally sourced from the epic Mahabharata and Ramayana. This art has developed in Indonesia since the era of the Hindu kingdom and became a popular entertainment in the past. During the reign of the kings in Java, wayang was used as a means of entertainment for the people. The Javanese people believe that puppets contain deep philosophical values, so

they are used as a medium for learning philosophy and religious teachings. Wayang kulit is full of symbolism, because in its performance it depicts the journey of human life in finding identity and understanding its origins. The structure of the story presented by the puppeteer often reflects the journey of a puppet figure, which depicts the phases of human life.

The form of wayang kulit that is known today is the result of the development of the puppets of Songo, especially Sunan Bonang and Sunan Kalijaga. They understand that puppets have become part of the culture of Javanese society, so they use them as a medium of Islamic da'wah. Sunan Kalijaga hopes that through puppetry, Islamic teachings can be more easily accepted by people who like the performing arts. The creativity of the guardians in adapting local culture as a means of da'wah has proven to be effective in accelerating the spread of Islam in Java. In addition, the guardians also contribute to preserving and popularizing wayang as a typical Indonesian art that continues to develop and undergoes various refinements from time to time. (Setiawan, 2020)

Macapat and gamelan songs in the spread of Islam

The sounds can be studied down to their basic principles, so that Muslims can find hidden meanings that can be harmonized with their teachings and considered an important part of life. This awareness allows them to connect the spiritual world with sound culture, thus being able to create a melodious and clear gamelan sound. The tone of this gamelan is in harmony with the inner atmosphere, reflecting the connection between sound and soul. The tone in gamelan has a relationship with the sound in Javanese. For example, nong-nung-ning is associated with the expression nong kana-nong kene (here and here). Pung-pung is related to the word put-put, which means to gather. Ndang-ndang depicts the immediate or immediate meaning. Ghur is associated with njegur, which means to enter. While genjur, which is played last, symbolizes the final decision that must be accepted. Overall, this sound philosophy contains a message of invitation to all people to unite, act immediately when ordered, and accept Islam as part of their lives. Kenong in gamelan has a philosophical meaning as a tool that helps calm and clear the mind. The sequence of sounds neng-ning-nong-nang reflects the process of cleansing the soul. Neng means to be silent to achieve calmness, which then results in clarity of heart (ning). After the mind becomes clear, one can understand and respond to problems wisely (nung). Finally, with inner calmness and clarity, a person can master himself (nang), thus being able to better control his or her life.

In addition to using puppets as a medium for da'wah, Sunan Kalijaga also uses tembang in spreading Islamic teachings. This song serves to express praise for something that has a deep meaning, replacing the praises previously used in Hindu-Buddhist teachings. In addition, tembang is also believed to have protective powers, such as those found in the Kawedar Song. This song has several other names, such as the Song of Sarira Ayu, which refers to the text in the third stanza, and the Song of Rumecko Ing Wengi. Based on the notes in Primbon by KH.R. Mohammad Adnan, Sunan Bonang is known as a figure who perfected the gamelan arrangement and created the rhythm of gending. Likewise, Sunan Kalijaga, who composed the songs Sekar Ageng and Sekar Alit, and perfected the rhythm of the gending that had been developed by Sunan Bonang. One of the most famous songs created by Sunan Kalijaga and widely memorized by the Javanese people is the Kidung Rumecko Ing Wengi, which is performed in the style of Dandhanggula.

The song created by Sunan Kalijaga contains a deep spiritual meaning. For example, Dandhanggula describes the happiness that a person feels when his or her wishes are fulfilled, and is believed to have benefits in curing diseases in children. The Rumecko Ing Wengi song

is often recited after night prayers and is believed to provide protection from various dangers, including the interference of black magic. Lir Ilir is a toy song for children who like to play under the full moonlight. Meanwhile, Lingsir Wengi is one of the da'wah songs used by Sunan Kalijaga to spread the teachings of Islam. At that time, the Javanese people did not easily understand and recite prayers in Arabic. Therefore, Sunan Kalijaga compiled prayers in Javanese through Rumecko Ing Wengi, so that it would be easier to be accepted by the community. With language and delivery style that is in accordance with the Javanese mindset, this song has a profound influence on its listeners. In fact, those who cannot speak in Javanese can still feel the benefits, as long as they have strong faith and understand the meaning of the prayers they chant. (Nur Waqid, 2020)

Javanese symbols and philosophies in Islamic teachings

Javanese symbols and philosophies in Islamic teachings are the result of cultural acculturation that has occurred since Islam entered the archipelago. This blend reflects how Islam is able to adapt to the local culture without losing the essence of its teachings. In the Javanese tradition, there are various concepts that are related to Islamic values, both in spiritual and social aspects. One of the most famous concepts is Manunggaling Kawula Gusti, which is often associated with the thought of Sheikh Siti Jenar. This philosophy refers to the unity between man and God, which in Islam can be associated with the concepts of monotheism and ihsan. Tawhid affirms that Allah is the only God who must be worshipped, while ihsan teaches that man should worship Allah with full awareness as if he were seeing Him, even though it is not possible to see Him with the naked eye. Manunggaling Kawula Gusti describes a deep spiritual relationship between man and his God, as it is taught in Islam that closeness to Allah can only be achieved through worship, self-introspection, and purification of the heart. (Nafisah et al., 2024)

In addition, the symbol of the mountains in puppets also has a philosophical meaning that is in harmony with Islamic teachings. Gunung symbolizes the journey of human life, from birth to finally returning to the Creator. In Islam, this reflects the concept of fitrah, which is the purity of human origin at birth, as well as the hereafter, which emphasizes that the life of the world is only temporary and man will return to Allah to account for all his deeds. This philosophy teaches humans not to be too attached to the world and to always prepare for life after death. In puppet shows, mountains are often used as the opening and closing of the story, which also symbolizes the beginning and end of life, as in Islam, every human being has a beginning of birth and the end of death that has been set by Allah. In addition to the symbol of the mountain, there is also the concept of caring practice, which in Javanese tradition means an effort to refrain from worldly pleasures in order to achieve spiritual perfection. This concept has similarities with the teachings of zuhud in Islam, namely living simply, controlling lust, and focusing more on worship and the afterlife. Caring practices in Javanese culture are often manifested in the form of fasting, meditation, or self-isolation to reflect on the meaning of life. In Islam, fasting is not only an obligatory worship, but also a means to exercise patience and increase piety to Allah. Therefore, the concept of caring practice is very closely related to Islamic values that teach self-control and simplicity in living life. (Imron et al., 2023).

In addition to the spiritual aspect, the philosophy of slamet is also an important part of the life of the Javanese people who have a close relationship with Islamic teachings. The word "slamet" in Javanese culture means a state of safety, peace, and happiness, which in Islam is in line with the meaning of the word Islam itself, namely peace and obedience to Allah. In daily life, the Javanese people often hold slametan rituals as a form of gratitude and prayer to be

given salvation by God. In Islam, the concept of salvation is highly emphasized, both in the form of prayer, worship, and deeds. A Muslim is encouraged to always pray for the salvation of this world and the hereafter, as taught in various prayers such as *Rabbana atina fid-dunya hasanah wa fil- akhirati hasanah waqina 'adzaban nar* (O Allah, give us good in this world and good in the hereafter and protect us from the torment of Hell). Thus, the concept of *slamet* in Javanese culture does not contradict Islamic teachings, but enriches the way Javanese people implement Islamic values in their lives. Furthermore, the local wisdom of the Javanese people is also reflected in the worship movement, which has similarities with the movement in prayer. In Javanese culture, *sembah* is a form of respect for parents, ancestors, or higher spiritual powers. In Islam, the movement in prayer teaches reverence to Allah as the only God worthy of worship. The movements of *takbiratul ihram*, bowing, prostration, and *salam* reflect the submission of a servant before his Lord. In the Javanese tradition, the attitude of respect for God is often done by sitting cross-legged or bowing the head as a symbol of humility. This concept has similarities with solemnity in prayer, where a Muslim must be fully focused and present a sense of submission to Allah while worshipping. (Solikin & Wakidi, 2013)

Contribution to the Formation of Javanese Culture

The development of Islam on the island of Java is greatly influenced by local culture that has long been rooted in the community. In the process of spreading, Islam is flexible with existing beliefs, including Hindu, Buddhist, and indigenous Javanese traditions. This approach makes Islamization more acceptable to the locals. The relationship between Islam and Javanese culture can be described as two sides of a currency that complement each other. The Islam that developed in Java was also influenced by the local culture, while the Javanese culture was increasingly rich with Islamic values. The result of this interaction is the formation of *Kejawen* Islamic culture, which is Islam that has local characteristics with elements of Javanese tradition that are still maintained (Wardani, 2023).

The symbiosis between Islam and Javanese culture allows Islamic teachings to be accepted by all levels of society, both the nobility in the palace environment and the people in the countryside. In inland areas such as Mataram (Surakarta and Yogyakarta), the developing Islam was heavily influenced by the teachings of *wihdatul wujud*, which was introduced by figures such as Hamzah Fansuri. This teaching has similarities with the Javanese belief system which has previously been influenced by Hinduism and Buddhism, making it easier to be accepted by the public. Some old traditions, such as the salvation to send prayers, have survived even though people have embraced Islam. The spread of Islam in Java is inseparable from the important role of Wali Songo, who became a major figure in Islamic da'wah in the region. Literally, Wali Songo refers to a group of scholars who are tasked with spreading Islam in various regions. With a smart and wise da'wah strategy, they succeeded in spreading Islam among the Javanese people with great success (Santosa & Armansyah, 2013).

CONCLUSION

This research shows that the da'wah approach carried out by Sunan Kalijaga plays a significant role in shaping the face of Islam in the land of Java through a subtle but profound cultural assimilation process. His da'wah does not place Islam as a force that negates local culture, but as a teaching that is able to coexist and even integrate with the traditions of the local community. The cultural da'wah strategy that he carried out succeeded in absorbing and

transforming Javanese cultural symbols, rites, and expressions into an Islamic value system without causing social resistance. This confirms that da'wah that pays attention to the local cultural context is more acceptable and is able to create sustainable social change.

More than just a historical success, Sunan Kalijaga's da'wah strategy has high relevance in the context of religious life in the modern era. His approach, which is flexible, tolerant, and based on local wisdom, is a tangible manifestation of the principle of religious moderation, which is the middle way between extreme religious and those that ignore Islamic values. In the context of the Islamic discourse of the archipelago, the traces of Sunan Kalijaga's da'wah are historical evidence that Islam can grow and take root in the local culture without losing the essence of its teachings. This strategy is very important to continue to be developed in the midst of the challenges of globalization, identity conflicts, and the increasing tendency of religious exclusivism. By using culture as a medium of da'wah and social dialogue, this approach is able to maintain harmony in a pluralistic society, while strengthening an inclusive and contextual Islamic identity.

The traces of Sunan Kalijaga's da'wah that still survive in modern society confirm the success of his flexible, communicative, and cultural transformation-oriented approach. Islam is conveyed not as an ideology that breaks the roots of culture, but as spiritual values that are integrated into people's lives. The cultural assimilation formed from da'wah gave birth to a typical Islamic face of the Islamic archipelago that is religious but still attached to the local culture, Islam that is polite, moderate, and adaptive.

The overall findings in this study show that the da'wah process can not only be seen from the theological aspect, but also from the broader sociocultural aspect. The cultural-based da'wah approach as exemplified by Sunan Kalijaga is very relevant to be used as inspiration in facing the challenges of da'wah in the modern era which is characterized by social complexity, cultural diversity, and changes in people's views on religion. By prioritizing the values of local wisdom, Islamic da'wah will not only be accepted, but can also form an inclusive, tolerant, and deeply rooted society in their cultural identity.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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