



Title: Ruwatan, Acculturation, and Strengthening Prophetic Values: A Study of the Magetan Community

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***Ruwatan*, Acculturation, and Strengthening Prophetic Values: A Study of the Magetan Community**

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Abstract

This study explores the transformation of *ruwatan*, a traditional Javanese ritual intended to remove misfortune, into a form of prophetic education within the Muslim community of Magetan, East Java. Originally rooted in pre-Islamic animistic and Hindu-Buddhist traditions, *ruwatan* has experienced a gradual acculturation process by integrating Islamic values and discarding elements contrary to Islamic principles. In its current form, the ritual incorporates Qur'anic recitation, congregational prayer, and acts of charity, replacing symbolic offerings and mythological narratives. Using a qualitative religious-sociological approach, data were gathered through participant observation, in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and document analysis to capture both theological and cultural dimensions. The findings revealed a significant shift from *ruwatan* as a purely ceremonial act toward its function as a socio-religious and educational practice that embodies prophetic values: humanization (*amar ma'ruf*), liberation (*nahy munkar*), and transcendence (*tu'minuna billah*). This reorientation was achieved not through abrupt religious reform, but through the culturally sensitive and persuasive strategies of local Islamic leaders, who sought to harmonize local wisdom with Islamic orthodoxy. The study demonstrates that, when grounded in cultural empathy, Islamic education can facilitate spiritual renewal, foster social cohesion, and reconstruct communal identity in the face of modern world challenges. The case of *ruwatan* in Magetan illustrates the dynamic interplay between tradition and religious reform, highlighting the potential for local customs to serve as vehicles for prophetic education in contemporary Muslim societies.

Keywords: *Ruwatan*, misfortune removal, acculturation, Javanese culture, prophetic education

Introduction

*Ruwatan*¹ is a ritual performed to help people free themselves of *sukerto*² (spiritual impurity), which the Javanese believe comes from bad luck or misfortune. *Sukerto* or *rukeged* is considered an

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¹Ruwatan: a Javanese ritual intended to liberate a person from *sukerta* (misfortune), performed through symbolic acts, prayers, or wayang kulit (shadow puppet) plays

²Sukerta: a condition of ritual impurity or "cosmic burden" believed to bring misfortune, often linked to birth conditions or cultural taboos.

inner weakness that can invite disaster for humans. Etymologically, *ruwatan* comes from the word *ruwat*: made helpless, destroyed, perish, evil, cursed, and under wicked influences.³ The term *ruwat* has long existed and is found in ancient Javanese literary works. In the Ramayana, re-written in ancient Hindu Mataram, around the tenth century, *ruwat* means “loose.”⁴ It is a traditional practice in Javanese community life, which is seen as a sacred inheritance from the past.⁵ To a certain extent, *the ruwatan* tradition can be said to shape the mindset of most Javanese people. Hence, this tradition continues until today, either as a preventive action towards bad luck or as an exorcism ritual after the bad luck or tragedy has happened.

According to Bratasiswara, *sukerto* manifests in three ways: *First*, *sukerto* can appear in humans as a congenital disability. *Second*, it manifests in negligence and/or ignorance or disrespect of age-old beliefs, such as people who open their windows wide at dusk, make barns without foundations, or sweep their homes at night. *Third*, it emerges when people are affected by non-compatibilities and are not aligned to forces (including spirits) within their environment (which sometimes results in an accident at work or elsewhere).⁶ People who fall into these three groups must be cleansed or exorcized. In the past, the ritual was performed through a puppet show, followed by an exorcism, which reflected strong pre-Islamic traditions. This was believed to prevent them from becoming prey to *Bathara Kala*,⁷ considered an evil diety.⁸ The evil is meant to be released through a ritual,⁹ known as *Murwakala*¹⁰ *Ruwatan*, performed to release people from such malevolent forces.

Over time, *ruwatan*, especially in Magetan, is no longer associated with just puppet shows, as in the past (Interview P2, August 2024), but it is now more closely linked with al-Qur’ān and recitations invoking blessings (*shalawat*¹¹). *Ruwatan*, which initially was derived from pre-Islamic and “polytheistic” traditions, soon started adopting Islamic practices.¹² This transformation can be observed through at least three key shifts. First, the *ruwatan sukerto*, which initially used shadow puppets by taking the theme of *Murwakala* as a medium for removing bad luck (*sukerto*), was Islamized with the introduction of the recitation of short verses from the Qur’ān (such as *Surah Al-Falaq*, *An-Nās*, *Al-Ikhlās*, the Throne verse). Second, the authority holder of *meruwat* (*dalang*¹³),

³Lies Mariani, “The Murwakala Ruwatan Ritual in Surakarta” *Umbara: Indonesian Journal of Anthropology* 1, no. 1 (2017): 43–56.

⁴Mardiarsito, *Old Javanese-Indonesian Dictionary* (Nusa Indah, 1978), 447.

⁵Mohamad Abdun Nasir, “Revisiting the Javanese Muslim Slametan: Islam, Local Tradition, Honor and Symbolic Communication,” *Al-Jami’ah: Journal of Islamic Studies* 57, no. 2 (2019): 329–358.

⁶R. Harmanto Bratasiswara, “*Sukerto*,” *Bauwarna, Javanese Customary Procedures* (Yayasan Sulasumirat, 2000), 636.

⁷Bathara Kala: a mythological figure in Javanese cosmology, often depicted as the child of Batara Guru, associated with calamity and the devourer of humans born under *sukerta*

⁸Bratasiswara, “*Sukerto*,” *Bauwarna, Adat Tata Cara Jawa*, 467.

⁹Mariani, “Ritus Ruwatan Murwakala Di Surakarta,” 44.

¹⁰Murwakala: a classic *wayang kulit* narrative about Batara Kala, a deity believed to prey upon those marked by *sukerta*, serving as the central storyline of *ruwatan*

¹¹Sholawat (Salawat): Islamic devotional prayers invoking blessings upon the Prophet Muhammad; frequently incorporated into Islamized *ruwatan* rituals as part of Qur’anic recitation and *dhikr*

¹²Soon-ok Myong and Byong-soon Chun, “The Nomads’ Polytheistic Worldview as the Sustainer of Islam in Central Asia,” *International Journal of Critical Cultural Studies* 20, no. 1 (2022): 63–71, <https://doi.org/10.18848/2327-0055/CGP/v20i01/63-71>.

¹³Dalang: the *wayang kulit* puppeteer, traditionally the ritual leader in *ruwatan*, mediates between humans, spirits, and cosmic forces

who initially was a puppeteer (a professional performing artist), has sometimes (as in this study) been replaced with a *kyai*,¹⁴ who may have a diploma in religious studies and also be a puppeteer. *Finally*, *ruwatan* has become a form of cultural resistance, gradually detaching itself from its pre-Islamic roots (Interview D1, September 2024).

From the interviews, it was confirmed that *peruwat*¹⁵ assumed the role of the Master of the Ceremony. The *peruwat* also played the role of the *dalang*, traditionally a puppeteer, commonly seen in *wayang kulit* (shadow play) performances across Indonesia.¹⁶ However, the *dalang* in the *ruwatan* ritual differs from the usual *dalang* as, in this case, his other role is being the *peruwat* (he is supposed to exorcize the spirits within the affected person). The *peruwat/dalang* is thought to possess mystical powers which he has inherited from his forefathers. He is able to communicate with spirits. In some cases, the *kyai* (a highly respected religious leader and teacher), who possesses religious knowledge (*tasawuf*) and mystical knowledge (*ilmu mistik*), assumes the role of *peruwat* and *ruwatan* as a more Islamic character. When the *kyai* leads the ritual, he typically brings along a group of around 30 senior students to participate in Qur'anic recitation and *shalawat*. This format replaces the *wayang kulit* performance, rendering the traditional puppeteer unnecessary.

The shifting meaning and practice of *ruwatan* in the Magetan Muslim community, as described above, is an interesting phenomenon to study, especially the values of acculturation between Islam and Javanese culture in its practice. What makes Magetan unique is its position as a transitional area between the cultural influence of the Mataraman region and the agrarian, mountainous traditions of East Java.¹⁷ This position creates a distinctive blend in how *ruwatan* is preserved, modified, and embedded with both Islamic and local cosmological elements.

Despite its cultural significance, studies on *ruwatan* practices, especially the value of prophetic education, are still limited because they are often seen as unfinished acculturation. Currently, *ruwatan* practices are studied more from a sociocultural perspective than a socio-religious one.¹⁸ Referring to Kuntowijoyo's (1991) concept of Prophetic Social Science,¹⁹ prophetic education is based on prophetic values: humanization (*amar ma'rūf*), liberation (*nahī munkar*), and transcendence (*tu'minuna billah*), which serve as a philosophical and pedagogical framework for interpreting

¹⁴Kyai: an Islamic scholar and community leader in Java; within *ruwatan*, a *kyai* may take over the role of *dalang* to Islamize the ritual

¹⁵Peruwat: the ritual specialist who conducts *ruwatan*, which is traditionally a *dalang*, but in Islamized contexts, it is often replaced or accompanied by a *kyai* using Qur'anic recitations

¹⁶Septian Bagus Winata, "The Process of Ruwatan Murwakala As A Traditional Javanese Ritual In Padepokan Suroloyo Malang" (PhD Thesis, Universitas Brawijaya, 2018), <https://repository.ub.ac.id/id/eprint/166790/>

¹⁷Sholawat (Salawat): Islamic devotional prayers invoking blessings upon the Prophet Muhammad; frequently incorporated into Islamized *ruwatan* rituals as part of Qur'anic recitation and *dhikr*

¹⁸Sri Satya Antarlina et al., "Ethnic Community Preferences in East Java Indonesia to Types of Food Daily Consumed (Case Study during the Covid-19 Pandemic)," *IOP Conference Series: Earth and Environmental Science* 1364, no. 1 (2024): 012078. <https://doi.org/10.1088/1755-1315/1364/1/012078>.

¹⁹Pradana Boy Ztf, "Prophetic Social Sciences: Toward an Islamic-Based Transformative Social Sciences," *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies* 1, no. 1 (2011): 95–121, <https://doi.org/10.18326/ijims.v1i1.95-121>.

¹⁹Muhammad Syihabuddin, and Luthfi Nurul Huda, "Exploring Kuntowijoyo's Concept of Prophetic Leadership and Its Relevance in Indonesian Muslim Society," *Jurnal Sosiologi Reflektif* 18, no. 2 (2024), 346–358, <https://doi.org/10.14421/cme5rn08>.

cultural practices. Within this framework, *ruwatan* can be positioned not merely as a traditional ritual but as a cultural educational space that internalizes prophetic values in the lives of Muslim communities.

However, the interpretation of *ruwatan* as corrective Islamization primarily emerges from the narratives of *kyais* (Islamic clerics) and *santri* (Islamic students). At the same time, traditionalists view the change as an erosion of the meaning of original culture. By presenting both perspectives, the analysis of *ruwatan* becomes more critical and balanced, and reveals the dynamics between the revitalization of Islamic values and efforts to preserve Javanese cultural heritage.

This paper addresses gaps in the literature by examining *ruwatan* as a form of prophetic education in contemporary Muslim society. It combined socio-religious and educational-prophetic approaches to address two research questions. 1) What is *ruwatan*, and how will it be defined in socio-religious terms from the Indonesian perspective? 2) To what extent has the Islamic-cultural acculturation of *Ruwatan* been successful in Indonesia?

This study is significant in demonstrating that Islam's spread—particularly in regions such as Indonesia—would not have been possible without processes of cultural acculturation that allowed it to integrate with existing local traditions. It reinforces the notion of Javanese Islam's diversity, which is considered syncretic and respects tolerance among religious communities.²⁰ In addition, *ruwatan* is positioned as an informal educational institution based on local wisdom that can answer the spiritual emptiness of modern humans due to the crisis of modernity, such as materialism and individualism. It is a transformative alternative that reconstructs the meaning of life and builds inner balance.

2. Literature Review

2.1 . Variety of Religious Expressions: Religion in the Perspective of Sociology of Religion

From the sociological perspective, religion is seen as a belief system embodied in social behaviors and practices of a community.²¹ It shapes human experiences with religious teachings, both at the individual and collective levels.²² Within this framework, Islam presents a unique case in Indonesia. Unlike other religions, Islam entered Indonesia in such an elastic way, never forcing converts into immediate and absolute immersion. This flexible process allowed Islam in Indonesia to reveal a universal and cosmopolitan face.²³ Its real manifestation can be traced historically since the time of the Prophet (Peace be upon Him), both in non-material formats such as concepts of thought, and material ones such as architectural presence.²⁴ As a universal religion that transcends time and space, Islam inevitably meets different local traditions. When it happens, the face of Islam

²⁰ Andik Wahyun Muqoyyidin, "Dialectics of Islam and Local Javanese Culture," *IBDA: Journal of Islamic and Cultural Studies* 11, no. 1 (2013): 1–18, <https://doi.org/10.24090/ibda.v11i1.64>.

²¹ Agus Salim, "Javanese Religion, Islam or Syncretism: Comparing Woodward's Islam in Java and Beatty's Varieties of Javanese Religion," *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies* 3, no. 2 (2013): 223–266, <https://doi.org/10.18326/ijims.v3i2.223-266>.

²² Saiful Hamali, "Religion in Sociological Perspective," *Al-Adyan* 12, no. 2 (2017): 233–244, <https://doi.org/10.24042/ajsla.v12i2.2111>.

²³ Titin Nurhidayati, "The Process of Spreading Islamic Values in Javanese Traditions," *Jurnal Falasifa* 1, no. 2 (2010): 73–85, <https://doi.org/10.15642/FALASIFA.2010.1.2.73-85>.

²⁴ Simuh, *Javanese Sufism: The Transformation of Islamic Sufism into Javanese Mysticism* (Yayasan Bentang Budaya, 1995), 6.

is different from one place to another.²⁵ In response to this issue, there are three crucial things to realize.

When Islam arrived in Indonesia, it did not exist in a cultural vacuum; instead, it encountered rich local traditions that Hinduism and Buddhism had previously influenced.²⁶ Therefore, the spread of Islam in Java cannot be separated from deeply rooted Javanese traditions, language, and symbols. Historically, the propagators of Islam in Java employed cultural strategies that avoided confrontation, for example, by incorporating Islamic values into the shadow puppet tradition—a form of cultural negotiation, not a total erasure. Within this framework, the transformation of *ruwatan* reflects what Clifford Geertz in the religion of Java understood as the layered complexity of Javanese Islam,²⁷ formed between syncretic tendencies and Islamic orthodoxy. However, as Talal Asad critiques,²⁸ this process is more accurately understood not as a static “syncretism” but as a dynamic and powerful negotiation of meaning, in which acculturation allows for selective adaptation while maintaining the theological core of Islam.

It is clear that the existence of local traditions has greatly enriched Islamic intellectual and cultural heritage. Therefore, ideas such as the indigenization of Islam in the Indonesian context became something to be appreciated. The problem then emerged when Islam, which is strongly interconnected with the local culture of the Arab peninsular (Arabic, Persian culture), is considered to be something that is universal in nature and therefore assumed to be applicable uniformly across regions, including newly converted regions. This, of course, brought about contrasts between Indonesian Muslims, those who still kept the cultural traditions of Indonesia, and those who adopted Arabic/Persian culture. As a result, the official Islamic term “high tradition” emerged, and this was contrasted with low tradition Islam or popular Islam.²⁹ But the preachers soon realized they had a duty to serve the vast majority who belonged to the low tradition, the people who chose local culture instead of Arab/Persian culture.

Looking at the pattern of the relationship between universal religion and local traditions, several studies are worth mentioning. *First*, universally popular young religions (such as Islam and Christianity) can provide a leap of consciousness initially confined to the local area to universal awareness,³⁰ but cannot provide guidance to deal with local problems, as in Indonesia. *Second*, local traditions can never be eradicated and will continue to be maintained and not replaced by universally accepted Islamic teachings. According to Kuntowijoyo, religion and culture can influence each other because both have values and symbols.³¹ Religion is a symbol of the value of obedience to God,³²

²⁵Esra Özyürek, “Giving Islam a German Face,” in *Moving In and Out of Islam*, ed. Karin van Nieuwkerk, Nathal M. Dessing, and Birgit Meyer (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2021).

²⁶Hajam Hajam, “Sufferance within a Cultural Framework as the Preaching Strategy of Sunan Gunungjati in Forming a Civil Society,” *Journal of Social Studies Education Research* 12, no. 4 (2021): 257–285, <https://doi.org/10.17499/jsser.2021.12.4.257>.

²⁷Clifford Geertz, “The Javanese Kijaji: The Changing Role of a Cultural Broker,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 2, no. 2 (1960): 228–49, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417500000670>.

²⁸Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), <https://doi.org/10.1353/book.16014>.

²⁹Fella Lahmar, “Islamic Education: An Islamic ‘Wisdom-Based Cultural Environment’ in a Western Context,” *Religions* 11, no. 8 (2020): 1–15, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel11080409>.

³⁰Ulib Abshar abdalla, “Indigenous Islam: Searching for the Face of Indonesian Islam” in *Tashwirul Ajkar*, 14th ed. (2003), 129.

³¹Kuntowijoyo, *Paradigma Islam: Interpretasi untuk Aksi* (Bandung: Mizan, 1991).

³²Andrianus Nababan and Darwin Salucan, “Obedience Will Result to Holiness and Restored Relationship With God According To Leviticus 5: 14-19 And Implications For Christian Education,”

while culture contains values and symbols that convince humans that they can live harmoniously because of its influences. Religion requires a symbol system; in other words, religion requires religious culture.³³ However, both must be distinguished. Religion is final, universal, eternal (perennial), and does not recognize change (absolute). Culture, on the other hand, is particular, relative, and temporary. Religion without culture can indeed develop as a personal religion, but without religious culture, as a collectivity, it will not have a place.³⁴

3. Method

This study is qualitative in nature. It used the perspective of religious sociology with a phenomenological approach. This approach argues that the object of science is not limited to the empirical, but includes phenomena, including those that are transcendent as well as a posteriori.³⁵ It tries to explain or uncover the concept or phenomenon of experience based on the awareness that occurs in some individuals in natural situations.³⁶ The approach was most appropriate when examining the extent to which religion influences a community sociologically, such as the ways of the Muslim Magetan and their associations with the *ruwatan* tradition. In this study, we focused on the meaning and function of *ruwatan* and acculturation with Islam.

In addition, social reality based on concrete experiences was explored.³⁷ The social reality was based on Kuntowijoyo's concept of prophetic sociology.³⁸ The concept seeks to understand social reality and transform it toward humanization, liberation, and transcendence, as well as the theory of cultural acculturation, to interpret how Islamic values are integrated into Javanese ritual forms without eliminating their symbolic structures.

The data collection in this study comprised multiple techniques. Mainly, it involved observation and note-taking at the *ruwatan* ceremonies (which included informal interviews with random participants). Additionally, the study conducted formal interviews, focus group sessions, and literature analysis on *ruwatan*-related studies.

The research began with preliminary observations of the socio-religious context of Magetan, followed by mapping key informants based on their role in *ruwatan* practices. Five (5) *ruwatan* ceremonies were then observed. The observations of the ceremonies were non-participant. The researcher served only as a viewer, taking detailed field notes. These observations were later enriched in focus group sessions (3 sessions, two hours each, over five months). The interviews and focus group sessions involved (1 main *dalang* (puppeteer)/*peruwat* (D1), 4 other *peruwat/dalang* (P1, P2, P3, P4), 1 *ruwat* patient (R1), and 1 elderly participant (E1) who had attended the *ruwatan* ceremony

The International Journal of Education, Theology, and Humanities 3, no. 2 (2024): 1–14, <https://doi.org/10.46965/ijeth.v3i2.77>.

³³Vlaho Kovačević et al., "Symbolic Interactions in Popular Religion According to Dimensions of Religiosity: A Qualitative Study," *Societies* 11, no. 2 (2021): 1–17, <https://doi.org/10.3390/soc11020030>

³⁴Amin Darori, *Islam dan Kebudayaan Jawa* (Yogyakarta: Gama Media, 2000), 11.

³⁵Lexy J. Moleong, *Metodologi Penelitian Kualitatif [Qualitative Research Methodology]* (Bandung: Remadja Karya, 1989).

³⁶John W. Creswell, *Research Design, Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Method Approaches*, trans. Achmad Fawaid and Rianayati Kusmini Pancasari (Pustaka Pelajar, 2016).

³⁷Saiful Hamali, "Religion in Sociological Perspective," *Al-Adyan* 12, no. 2 (2017): 224–237, <https://doi.org/10.24042/ajsla.v12i2.2111>.

³⁸Akhmad Fatoni and Silva Anggi Lestari, "Prophetic Structuralism: The Integration of Kuntowijoyo and Bourdieu in Literary Analysis," *Prapanca International Journal of Humanities and Social Studies* 1, no. 1 (2025): 1–13, <https://prapanca.or.id/index.php/PIJHSS/article/view/4>.

at least three times a year). In addition, formal, in-depth interviews were conducted with these key informants to obtain structured narratives.

The phenomenological approach in this context was applied by uncovering the meaning of *ruwatan* as experienced and understood by participants in their natural settings, acknowledging both empirical aspects and transcendent dimensions of the ritual.³⁹ Literature studies on *ruwatan* traditions, Islamic cultural adaptation, and local history were also conducted to frame the analysis. Data analysis followed Huberman's model, starting with data reduction (selecting and focusing relevant information from notes, interviews, and literature), data display (organizing findings in thematic matrices), and conclusion drawing/verification (interpreting the socio-religious meaning of *ruwatan* within the framework of acculturation theory and prophetic sociology).

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Ruwatan In Socio-Religious Terms From The Indonesian Perspective

Javanese society has a characteristic that is immediately recognizable from the outside – it is thick with ceremony. Almost every event considered necessary, whether it involves aspects of one's life, nature, or concerns one's business, is always accompanied by rituals, and *ruwatan* is just one of the numerous rituals. Pamungkas (2008), in his book *Ruwatan Tradition* traces the history of *ruwatan* from its very beginnings and discusses key ritual figures such as Bhatara Guru and Bhaṭāra Kala. In all the five *ruwatan* ceremonies where observations were made, the ceremonies seemed to have a similar flow, and the actions of the participants and proceedings were consistently similar. This was confirmed both through the researcher's observations and through interviews with the *dalang*.

The *Ruwatan* tradition in Java is always performed with many ceremonies which are also described in Old Javanese literature. Etymologically, *Ruwatan* comes from the Javanese word *ruwat*, meaning “to set loose” or “leave outside” or “release or free something which has possessed the affected being.”⁴⁰ The ceremony is essentially an act of purification, intended to restore a person to a state of original cleanliness and protect them from calamity. *Ruwatan*, therefore, is sacred, both regarding the intention, purpose, form of ceremony, ceremonial equipment, and the code of conduct. *Ruwatan* is related to the myth or belief that human beings must have defenses to avoid misfortunes in life. There must also be an attempt to clear the evil from within once it takes over the body.⁴¹ Thus, the *ruwatan* ceremony is sacred in the Javanese community to free a person of evil or prevent persons from calamity. During the interviews, the *dalang* (D1) and all four *Peruwat* (P1, P2, P3, P4) confirmed this too.

Ruwatan has a long history in the Javanese belief system and is always related to three main points. First, the ceremony is a series of events held traditionally, an infusion of culture into religion. The form of this *ruwatan* differs from region to region. Second, offerings (*ubo rampe*) are specified and required according to customs to support the processes within the ceremony. Third, *pralambang* (symbol), i.e., both offerings and *ruwatan* ceremonies are always displayed in the same form and at the same time contain *pralambang-pralambang* in accordance with local needs and habits. All these were confirmed by the *dalang* (D1) and the 4 *peruwat* (P1, P2, P3, P4) (Interview, August 2024).

³⁹ Yuliharti Yuliharti, “Spiritual Experience in Modern Religious Movements: A Phenomenological Subjective Exploration of New Community Members in Indonesia,” *Irfana: Journal of Religious Studies* 1, no. 1 (2025): 16–25, <https://doi.org/10.24042/irfana.v1i1.12>.

⁴⁰ Mardiwarsito, *Kamus Jawa Kuno–Indonesia* (Jakarta: Pustaka Jaya), 227.

⁴¹ Darmoko Darmoko, “Ruwatan: The Sociocultural Review of Javanese Society: The Ceremony of Deliverance from Disaster,” *Makara Hubs-Asia* 6, no. 1 (2002): 30–36, <https://doi.org/10.7454/mssh.v6i1.29>.

During the five *ruwatan* rituals observed, the researcher noted several commonalities in the ceremonial proceedings. The *ruwatan* procession is usually divided into three stages; first, at the preliminary stage, the *ruwatan* participants afflicted with *sukerto* are told to be dressed in white for what is known as the *sungkem* ceremony. Participants in the *sungkem* ceremony first ask their parents for blessings, and this is followed by a meditating prayer, which is essentially asking permission from God Almighty to begin the *Ruwatan* event. The second stage is the puppet performance, where the *Murwakala* play is performed. The *Murwakala* play comes from ancient Hindu Indonesian times. The third stage is the closing ritual. During the closing, the puppeteer splashes the *banyu sangga* (water from the spring infused with flowers) onto the heads of those with *sukerto*. A *mantra* and a prayer accompany this. Next, the puppeteer cuts the ends of the affected *ruwatan* patient's hair with spells and prayers. Finally, the affected participant is asked to remove their white clothes. The white garments and cut hair are handed over to the traditional leaders (*sesepuh*) to be disposed of in the open sea.

Ritual experience, as described above, can be defined in four tangible components: i) ritual artifacts, ii) ritual script, iii) ritual performance roles; and iv) audience. The ritual artifacts mostly take the form of offerings, food for the gathering (*kenduri*) clothes to be worn by the *ruwat* (patient/affected), the form of which have been passed down for generations (as described above); the ritual script is something also passed on from generation to generation and if it is conducted by the traditional *dalang* (not a *kyai*) then the *dalang* has an unwritten script as well, which is supported by supernatural forces – he is believed to go into a trance and has communication with *roh halus* (spirits) which none others understand (confirmed by all the interviewees). The exorcism ceremony goes first and it finishes with the *wayang kulit* (puppet show). The *wayang kulit* has its own script, the *Murwakala* (inherited from the Hindu empires of the past). In terms of ritual performance and roles, there are two main performances, the exorcism ceremony and the puppet show; for the exorcism, the *dalang/peruwat* plays the main role, together with the affected (*ruwat*); and the parents of the affected. The audience usually comprise only family and close relatives of the affected person. They watch as the proceedings unfold. In the event of the *kyai* taking over the role of the *peruwat/dalang*, as in some cases, the puppet show is replaced with readings of the Qur'an. The audience will also comprise the *kyai*'s senior students.

The literature on *ruwatan* corroborated by interviews with the *dalang* and four *peruwat*, recognizes seven forms.⁴² These include *ruwatan tanah*, a ceremony to purify a plot of land believed to be troubled by malevolent forces; *ruwatan desa*, a communal rite to cleanse an entire village that typically features offerings, village-wide purification, and puppet performances in a festive atmosphere; and *ruwatan gembel*, a hair-cutting ceremony for individuals—often children classified as *sukerto*, accompanied by offerings and commonly practiced in Nganjuk, Wonosobo, and Banjarnegara. Also observed are *ruwatan* conducted for the poor who bear *sukerto*, performed with the hope of breaking the cycle of poverty; mass *ruwatan*, a collective rite for participants with different types of *sukerto* that follows a largely uniform procedure and is regularly held in *Pepadi Ponorogo* and *Nganjuk*; and *ruwatan Murwakala*, a ceremony addressing *sukerto* through a shadow-puppet performance based on the *Murwakala* play. A further form is *ruwatan rasul*, also known as *ruwatan santri*, a protective rite intended to safeguard the community from calamity and still practiced in Bedingin, Tirtomoyo Village, Wonogiri (as reported in the same interviews).

In Magetan, the term *ruwatan*, with origins in Hindu tradition—has gradually given way to *pageran*, reflecting a more Islamic orientation, though many less literate community members

⁴² Muhammad Roy Purwanto, *Akulturası Islam dan Kebudayaan Jawa* (STIQ An-Nur Yogyakarta, 2007), 73.

continue to use the term *ruwatan* (as noted in focus-group sessions with D1, P1, P2, P3, P4, E1, and R1).

4.2. The Success of Acculturating Islamic Culture in Ruwatan

Ruwatan has a meaning and impact built over the ages from pre-Islamic times to the present. As a result, it carries various meanings and has resulted in differing impacts on implementation. The meanings that arise are associated with social, multiculturalism, philosophical, cultural, and current-value meanings. The Magetan community in Indonesia has characteristics that rely on religious values, in this case, Islam, which is the leading benchmark in every act. Likewise, this *slametan* (*ruwatan*) activity cannot be separated from Islamic elements. The characteristics of the Magetan community which have embraced Islamic values form the basis of the evolving *ruwatan* ritual and despite this evolution the ritual can still be distinguished in present times (confirmed in focus group sessions). There is a motivation within the Magetan community to perform the slametan ritual (*ruwatan*), within the confines of religion. There is also motivation to maintain the (*nguri-uri*) old tradition, which Indonesians generally still want to be a part of.

According to interviews with P1 and P4 (P1, August 2024; P4, September 2024), *ruwatan* for ancient people has a deep meaning from the spiritual, social, and ritual aspects. And while it was quite different in Java during the Hindu and Buddhist periods, the monotheism advocated by Islam would warrant changes within *ruwatan*. Therefore, according to him, in Islam, the name should not be *ruwatan*, but rather *lida'fil bala'* (initiative taken to reject bad omen/calamity). From the spiritual aspect, it is a means of helping people with restless hearts into calm and peaceful states, from difficult life positions which are full of obstacles to positions of life that are clear of difficulty. From the social perspective according to Interview P2 (Interview P2, September 2024), *ruwatan* actually educates people in high social circles, to get closer to God (as money and earthly wealth can distract people from spirituality) and being closer to God also positively improve relations with others (especially the needy) when these god-fearing believers commit to charity.

Based on the acknowledgement of several informants (random interviews) that the researcher met in the *pageran/ruwatan* event and who had undergone *ruwatan*, it can be concluded that *ruwatan* has a number of meanings: *First*, the majority of people who have been questioned say that *Ruwatan* is a process to get rid of bad luck from within themselves, so that they can live their lives without obstacles and without the stress that comes with challenging obstacles.

Ruwatan is part of the *slametan* tradition in Java, while the highlight of the *slametan* event is *ruwatan*. *Ruwatan* means a ritual of salvation where the bad luck attached to someone is removed. When viewed from the perspective of religious sociology, the meaning of *ruwatan* as a ritual of salvation can be understood as a way of adjusting human beings to outside forces as well as a way to overcome the tensions they experience.⁴³

Second, *ruwatan* means giving alms to others. This belief is expressed by people who intend to do *ruwatan* in the village of Janggan, Magetan (interviews with the *dalang* and the 4 *peruwat*). In their eyes, the *ruwatan* they do leads them to the giving of alms to others. In the *ruwatan* ritual, especially with the increasing influences of Islam, the emphasis is on the giving of alms (usually food) to the neighbors. After carrying out the *ruwatan*, they believe that the difficulties of life (life complexities) will reduce God-willing. Providing alms in the form of food can also certainly strengthen the bonds and social solidarity of the Magetan (Muslim) community. Therefore, from the perspective of religious sociology, *ruwatan* as a phenomenon and religious tradition that can function

⁴³Elizabeth K. Nottingham, *Religion and Society: An Introduction to the Sociology of Religion*, trans. Abdul Muis Naharong (Raja Grafindo Persada, 2002), 53.

in a manner in which it unites the Magetan Muslim community and become the spirit of prophetic education. This socio-religious reality is in line with the opinion of Nottingham (2002) who states that religion creates a bond between members of society and unites them. According to Piliang,⁴⁴ the *ruwatan* extends from the meaning aspect where it now relates to feelings and emotions, apart from the much discussed cultural and ideological values. Based on this, the problem of retaining *ruwatan* within the traditions of the Javanese community becomes even more convincing despite the fact of an increasing number of far-right Islamists who would rather see it in a different way. These Muslims (considered the purists) belonging to the *Hanafi* sect and in organizations such as *Muhammadiyah*, *PERSIS* and *MTA* reject *ruwatan* as they believe that it opposes the concept of *Tauhid* (oneness in God), which is very much emphasized in Islam. The followers of the *Hanafi* sect have in fact stated as their goal, the purification of Islam.⁴⁵ They reject any form of amalgamation of Islam with Javanese culture, Buddhism and Hinduism. Syncretism of any form is immediately rejected. For the majority Javanese Muslim community, however, *ruwatan* mythologically has a special meaning for its presence because it symbolically represents the people's trust for a particular purpose. Their encouragement to keep to tradition also comes in the form of support from the *Shafii* sect, who belong to organizations such as the *Nahdlatul Ulama* (NU). The NU encourage acculturation of Islam into traditional Javanese culture (and vice versa) as they believe in the strengths of both.

The spread of Islam in Java was carried out by figures known in history as Walisongo, referred to as guardians. The term guardian according to Adnan as quoted by Effendi Zarkasyi, is “a person who is authorized to administer a country.” According to him this meaning is more in accordance with the position of the Walisongo in the Demak era, because the jobs which were handed to him in addition to managing matters concerning Islam, also included matters of government, and regulating the almanac (Javanese calendar –it has to be adjusted to the Arabic calendar⁴⁶ concluded that the increasingly strong presence of Islam in the homeland, especially in Java, gave birth to the *santri* movement which had a profound effect on religious, community and political life. There seemed to be people advocating purity in Islam.

With a variety of methods, Islamic preachers in Java called Walisongo (considered guardians in Java) have carried out massive Islamization without significant turmoil. The guardians (there were 9) have succeeded in harmonizing Islamic teachings and the great culture that is Javanese,⁴⁷ The old traditions and beliefs were not eradicated radically and frontally, but what they removed were things that were contrary to the teachings of Islam. This is where acculturation and syncretization between local traditions and beliefs occur on the one hand, with Islamic teachings and culture on the other hand (Interview P3, September 2024). The *dalang* and the four *peruwat* in a focus group session likened this to an empty bottle containing liquor, its contents discarded and replaced with fresh water that is refreshing and *halāl*. Although the Javanese tradition still appears by birth, the contents of the tradition have been adapted to the basic teachings of Islam (confirmed during focus group session by all the members, the *dalang* (D1), 4 *peruwat* (P1, P2, P3, P4), *ruwat* patient (R1) and elderly participant (E1).

⁴⁴Yasraf Amir Piliang, *The Folded World: A Journey Beyond Cultural Boundaries* (Yogyakarta: Jalasutra, 2004), 18.

⁴⁵Jocelyne Cesari, "Civilization as Disciplinization and the Consequences for Religion and World Politics," in *A Quarter Century of the "Clash of Civilizations"*, ed. Jonathan Fox and Shmuel Sandler (New York: Routledge, 2021), 24–44, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15570274.2019.1570753>.

⁴⁶H. J. Benda, *The Crescent and the Rising Sun: Indonesian Islam under the Japanese Occupation, 1942–1945* (The Hague: W. van Hoeve, 1958).

⁴⁷Muqoyyidin, "Dialectics of Islam and Local Javanese Culture." *IBDA: Journal of Islamic and Cultural Studies* 11, no. 1 (2013): 1–18.

The process of cultural accommodation in Java can be seen in the ability of Islam in Indonesia to adapt to local traditions and customs and maintain Islamic core values. The accommodation has become the acculturation of Islamic culture with the local culture of the archipelago as it has happened in other regions outside Java, such as in West Sumatra, Aceh, Makassar, Kalimantan, and North Sumatra ⁴⁸ In the process of adjustment, it appears that Islam not only did the "taming" (domestication – this was repeated several times by all the participants of the focus group sessions, D1, P1, P2, P3, P4, R1, E1) of itself but also succeeded in accommodating as far as possible the elements of local traditions that can be adjusted to the necessities of orthodox Islamic values. In this process, Islamic propagators utilize local institutions as infrastructure to grow Islamic traditions. The acculturation process mentioned above gave birth to what is known as local genius. Successful acculturation is the success in developing something new without removing most parts that are important in both religion and culture (Interviews P1, August 2024; P4, September 2024)

According to all the interviewees, one of the Javanese traditions that has successfully experienced acculturation with Islam is *Ruwatan*. For Javanese people, especially from Magetan, *ruwatan* is a tradition and has become a container of mysticism ⁴⁹. *Ruwatan* is not only done by people considered '*kejawen*' (Javanism – typically Indonesian Islam, which keeps aspects of animism, Hinduism, and Buddhism) but also by the purists within the Magetan community (the *santri* community). In the practices of *Ruwatan* in the Magetan community, several things indicate the existence of acculturation between Islam and Javanese culture: First, the use of white cloth (*mori*) worn by *ruwatan* participants, according to Muslim *Peruwat* (Interviews P1 (August 2024), P2 (August 2024), P3 (September 2024), and P4 (September 2024), is influenced by Islamic traditions. In the past, yellow seemed to be the color of preference of the Hindus – and this was followed through by the Javanese, even after they had converted to Islam (Interview D1, September 2024).

In Islam, white cloth is very closely associated to the practice of worship. In the report of the life of the Prophet, the white cloth is the cloth favored by the Prophet Muhammad *pbuh*. *Ihram* clothing for Muslims who perform hajj or *umrah* is also white cloth. The shroud used to drape the body of the dead is also white cloth. Rasulullah said: Wear white clothes because it is better, and upon death, let your body be covered by it.⁵⁰ The white cloth is associated with the greatness of Islam, which promotes cleanliness both within and externally. The use of white cloth can be interpreted as a symbol of purity, and *ruwatan* participants with white clothes are expected to come out of contamination and attain purity. The Javanese people believe in the existence of active spirits that can harm their lives, and white is a constant reminder that they need to purify their bodies to be protected from evil. Furthermore, according to Imam Bukhari, clothes are a symbol to remind people of the need to get closer to God Interviews D1 (September 2024), P1 (August 2024), P2 (August 2024), P3 (September 2024), P4 (September 2024), E1 (October 2024), and R1 (October 2024). Through these white clothes, Javanese are also taught to be always careful in their lives so that they are not stained, just as they have to be cautious in guarding the white cloth because the characteristics of the fabric make it easy for it to become stained.

⁴⁸ Leonie Schmidt, "Aesthetics of Authority: 'Islam Nusantara' and Islamic 'Radicalism' in Indonesian Film and Social Media," *Religion* 51, no. 2 (2021): 237–58, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0048721X.2020.1868387>.

⁴⁹ Kastolani dan Abdullah Yusof, "The Relationship Between Islam And Local Culture: A Study of the Nyadran Tradition in Sumogawe Village, Getasan District, Semarang Regency," *Kontemplasi: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Ushuluddin* 4, no. 1 (August 4, 2016): 53–74, <https://doi.org/10.21274/kontem.2016.4.1.53-74>.

⁵⁰ Hadīth, narrated by An-Nasa'i no. 5326 and Al-Hakim, *al-Mustadrak* 1/406.

Furthermore, according to the *Peruwat* (Interviews P1 (August 2024), P2 (August 2024), P3 (September 2024), and P4 (September 2024)), *ruwatan* itself, in its fundamentals, has evolved to, in a way, correct wrong perceptions of life and how it should be led from the perspective of Islamic teachings. It is no longer the old *ruwatan*. Instead, it is now referred to as *pageran*. The concept of *sukerto* (bad luck) does not exist in Islamic teachings, as all events (both pleasant and sad) that happen to humans are because of God, and everything comes from God (Focus Group sessions). Humans must always accept all this gracefully. One way to avoid danger and unhappiness is by doing charity. Because with alms, God will keep the doer away from danger. With *pageran*, the concept of removal of bad luck within the *ruwatan* tradition changed to one which asked the participants to make offerings to Gods to one that required them to be involved in charity for people in need. This was confirmed by the interview with the Javanese elder (Interview E1, October 2024). In the old Javanese traditions (Interviews P1 & P2, August 2024; P3 & P4, September 2024), there are more than sixty kinds of *sukerto* to avoid, and this complicates the situation as the ceremonies may be different based on the type of *sukerto* that needs to be removed. The acculturation of Islam into the *ruwatan* tradition and the belief that only God has the power to protect and remove obstacles in life makes it clear to Javanese that the only way to avoid *sukerto* is through the Islamic way, which is through charity. This message is reinforced when the rich and those who have been successful are constantly reminded that wealth and happiness can only be sustained if taking comes with giving. So *pageran* (formally *ruwatan* in concept) encouraged charity (Interview P4 September 2024).

Ruwatan uses puppet performances with the *murwakala* play and this must be interpreted as an expression of gratitude to God. Rather than use the occasion to ask for some gain from God (which has Hindu leanings), the participants take part to show appreciation to God through verses of praise from the Qur'ān. "*Ruwatan* is interpreted these days as showing gratitude to God for having given a couple a child, even though only one, as there are many other people who are not blessed with children" (Interview, August 2024). So while *ruwatan* in the early days was carried out in some cases to seek some gain (like a childless couple asking for a child), it is now done even by childless couples to show gratitude that while they do not have children, they are still healthy. This shows the strong influences of Islam, which have changed people's perception from seeking gain to showing gratitude for what they have been bestowed with.

Third, the readings in the *Ruwatan* procession had a greater degree of Islamic influence, which, according to those interviewed, is a sign of positive acculturation between Islam and Javanese traditions. The Mantra or recitation of prayers (which date back to the Animist, Hindu, and Buddhist eras) have, in present times, had the insertion of the *basmalah* (Islamic verse to praise God) at the beginning. Before performing *ruwat*, usually, the *kyai peruwat* utters *bismillahirrahmanirrahim*, and only after that do they commence with the mantras or prayers in Arabic. The prayers are closed with the *shahada* verse "*Asyhadu an la ilaha illa Allah wa asyhadu anna Muhammadan al rasulullah*" (praise to Allah and the holy Prophet).

The readings of the al-Qur'ān and the readings from hadīth clearly indicate that the practice of *ruwatan* that is carried out by the Javanese people currently has Islamic elements. The values propagated show God's control in every activity undertaken. In addition, the readings uttered, which extoll and acknowledge the oneness of God and the acceptance of Muhammad as Prophet, show that while the rituals performed are typical of ancient Javanese culture, the community has allowed for Islamic influences to dictate, in some ways, the approach and to ensure it does not contravene Islamic ways. According to a *peruwat* (Interview P3, September 2024), the readings of al-Qur'ān, blessings, and *tahlīl* in *ruwatan* rituals indicate the existence of the gentle 'Islamization' of *ruwatan*. This is because there is a 'spiritual need,' namely spiritual duty for the *dalang* (*peruwat*) and the person who is *ruwat*, to adhere to Islamic beliefs.

Fourth, *Sadaqah*^{51*}. People who have intentions of undergoing *ruwatan* are obliged to give alms. Giving alms is usually done by gathering neighbors and having a feast. At the end of this feast, the neighbors bring home the alms offered by the host. This is a blessing for everyone attending, as prayers are offered before the feast and the handover of the alms. This *Sadaqah* (charity) is an essential aspect of Islamic teaching as the religion says that the best way to keep out of harm and earn the blessings of God is through involvement in charitable acts. The Prophet explained that giving alms can remove obstacles from a believer's path. In this context, charity is substantially one of the values of Islam in *ruwatan* because the essence of *ruwatan* is to avoid misery, misfortune, and disaster that may arise. The acculturation processes that involved religion and tradition were never really at odds with each other.

Ruwatan is, in present times, a form of acculturation of Islam and Javanese culture. Sociologically, acculturation is a social process that arises due to social interaction. Acculturation itself is categorized as an associative social process.⁵² The associative process referred to in this context is the integration of dialectics between Islamic teachings and Javanese culture. The ability of the Muslim community exponents who are accommodating towards Indonesia's local culture makes Islam become more able to present the face of Islam in the archipelago that is more humanistic and truly nuanced and follows Indonesian culture.⁵³ This social process leads to multiple forms of cooperation and the creation of community oneness where religion coexists within pre-Islamic traditions.

Ruwatan has become an educational institution that can be derived in curriculum design, teaching materials, supporting materials, and good quality teachers, as well as the arrangement of the micro-environment in schools and the macro-environment in the broader community's habitat. Therefore, educational institutions with the spirit of *ruwatan* culture are at least related to awareness of protecting natural ecosystems and environmental management supported by infrastructure and academic institutions, both formal and non-formal.

The results of this study indicate that *ruwatan* in Magetan has undergone a strong acculturation between Islam and local Javanese culture. Elements of old rituals, such as the use of cloth colors, mantras, and *sukerto* symbols, are adapted to Islamic values, for example, by replacing yellow cloth with white cloth, which symbolizes purity in Islam. In addition, basmalah and shahada have been embedded in prayers. Finally, the ritual is currently emphasised on charity as the core of salvation.

This acculturation process is selective, eliminating elements that contradict *tauhid* while maintaining sociocultural forms that do not contradict. Another interesting finding is that the acculturation occurs by taming local culture, which is performed by religious figures such as *peruwat*, *kyai*, and puppeteers who utilize Javanese social institutions to convey Islamic values. Using Kuntowijoyo's prophetic theory, the results of this acculturation can be read as a form of humanization (maintaining the social values of cooperation and solidarity), liberation (releasing society from fatalistic beliefs about *sukerto*), and transcendence (strengthening the vertical relationship to God through prayer and gratitude). This acculturation is also in line with Nottingham's view of the function of religion as a unifier of society, because *ruwatan* in its new form strengthens social cohesion while maintaining the purity of Islamic teachings amidst the diversity of local cultures.

⁵¹Sadaqah: voluntary almsgiving in Islam, replacing offerings in Islamized *ruwatan*

⁵²Soerjono Soekanto, *Sociology An Introduction* (Jakarta: Raja Grafindo Persada, 1995), 78.

⁵³Mukhibat Mukhibat, "Reaffirming Islamic Boarding School Culture in Weaving Locality, Nationality, and Globality," *KARSA: Journal of Social and Islamic Culture* 23, no. 2 (2015): 177–192, <https://doi.org/10.19105/karsa.v23i2.717>.

5. Conclusion

Ruwatan is a sacred rite rooted in religious and social reflection. Its purpose is to aid those afflicted with *sukerto* by organizing a communal ritual to release them from it. In doing so, *ruwatan* embodies communal solidarity: protecting one individual becomes a shared responsibility of the entire community.

The contemporary Magetan Muslim community has had the term *ruwatan* replaced with *pageran* (which emphasizes charity). This was not an outright rejection of the past but rather a gentle way of realigning motives from the "offerings" to Gods and spirits to "charity," which Islam prescribes as a means of warding off misfortune. When viewed from the perspective of religious sociology, this is a way of adjusting human beings to unknown forces and overcoming the problems they experience. *Ruwatan* is also a religious phenomenon connected to tradition, functioning in uniting the Magetan Muslim community. The acculturation process is complex. Traditional puppeteers (*dalang*) without formal Islamic training are increasingly being replaced by puppeteers who also hold diplomas in religious studies. Sociologically, this reflects an associative social interaction: a sustained integration and dialogue between Islamic teachings and Javanese culture.

Sociologically, the theo-cultural reality confirms that Islam's successful spread into regions like the Southern Hemisphere depended on cultural accommodations that allowed Islam to be received as a "new value" without erasing indigenous traditions. Furthermore, *ruwatan* can be considered as ritual communication because it is related to the identity of the religious system and people's beliefs. More than that, *ruwatan* has been transformed into something associated with a place of friendship, a vehicle for social glue, a means of building a national identity, and a sense of nationalism. Thus, the *ruwatan* rite is an intangible cultural heritage owned by the Indonesian people and needs to be protected and preserved.

Authors' Contribution

M Mukhibat: Any communication about the article throughout the submission, peer review, production, and after publication. The corresponding author signs the publishing agreement on behalf of all the listed authors. **M Sutoyo:** Have drafted or written, substantially revised, or critically reviewed the article, Collaborators share perspectives and score relatively high, Collaborate as a Contributor to conceptualization. **Nurul Azizah:** Reviewed and agreed on all versions of the article before submission, during revision, the final version accepted for publication, and any significant changes introduced at the proofing stage

Conflict of Interest

The authors of the manuscript have no financial or non-financial conflict of interest in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

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