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Research Paper

Negotiating Tradition and Islamic Norms: Muhammadiyah Leaders' Perspectives on Caci Dance in Wedding Rituals through the Lens of 'Urf in West Manggarai

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ABSTRAK

The interaction between Islamic reformist movements and local cultural traditions remains a complex and contested issue in contemporary Muslim societies. This study examines how Muhammadiyah leaders interpret and respond to the Caci dance tradition performed in wedding rituals in West Manggarai, Indonesia, through the lens of 'urf (customary practice) in Islamic law. While Muhammadiyah is often associated with a purifying approach to religion, local realities frequently require negotiation between doctrinal norms and deeply rooted cultural expressions. This research adopts a qualitative case-oriented approach, drawing on in-depth interviews, document analysis, and socio-religious observations to explore the perspectives of Muhammadiyah leaders in Tiwu Nampar Village. The analysis focuses on how 'urf is utilized as a conceptual framework to assess the legitimacy of the Caci dance within Islamic teachings. The findings reveal a spectrum of views, ranging from rejection based on concerns over elements perceived as inconsistent with Islamic values, to conditional acceptance that emphasizes cultural preservation as long as it does not violate core religious principles. Furthermore, the study demonstrates that 'urf serves as a mediating tool that allows for contextual interpretation of Islamic norms in relation to local traditions. Muhammadiyah leaders engage in a process of negotiation that reflects both their commitment to religious reform and their awareness of social cohesion within the community. This negotiation highlights the dynamic nature of Islamic

law, where cultural practices are neither wholly accepted nor rejected, but critically evaluated based on their alignment with ethical and religious objectives. The study contributes to broader discussions on Islamic reformism, legal pluralism, and the accommodation of local culture within Islamic jurisprudence. It argues that understanding the role of *'urf* is essential for bridging the gap between normative Islamic teachings and lived cultural realities. Ultimately, this research underscores the importance of contextual and dialogical approaches in addressing tensions between tradition and religious norms in contemporary Muslim communities.

Introduction

The interaction between Islamic reformist movements and local cultural traditions has long been a subject of scholarly debate, particularly in pluralistic societies such as Indonesia. As the largest Muslim-majority country in the world, Indonesia presents a unique socio-religious landscape where Islamic teachings coexist with diverse local customs and traditions. This coexistence often produces a dynamic negotiation between religious norms and cultural practices, especially in rituals that are deeply embedded in communal life, such as marriage ceremonies (Hefner, 2021; Hosen, 2022). One of the most prominent Islamic reform movements in Indonesia is Muhammadiyah, which is widely recognized for its commitment to purifying Islamic practices from elements considered inconsistent with the Qur'an and Sunnah. Muhammadiyah promotes a rational and modernist interpretation of Islam, emphasizing the importance of returning to authentic religious sources while rejecting practices categorized as *bid'ah* (innovation) and *khurafat* (superstition). However, this reformist orientation often encounters challenges when engaging with local traditions that have been historically integrated into the social fabric of Muslim communities (Burhani, 2021; Nashir, 2023).

In many regions of Indonesia, local customs (*adat*) continue to play a significant role in shaping religious practices, particularly in life-cycle events such as weddings, funerals, and communal celebrations. These traditions are not merely cultural expressions but also serve as mechanisms for maintaining social cohesion, identity, and continuity. As such, the relationship between Islamic reformism and local tradition cannot be understood solely in terms of conflict or rejection but must be examined as a process of negotiation and adaptation (Beatty, 2022; Bowen, 2023). The case of the Caci dance in West Manggarai provides a compelling example of this negotiation. The Caci dance is a traditional ritual performance that involves symbolic combat between two male participants using whips and shields. It is commonly performed during important ceremonies, including weddings, as a

representation of bravery, masculinity, and communal values. Beyond its aesthetic dimension, the Caci dance holds deep cultural and symbolic significance for the Manggarai community, making it an integral part of their cultural identity (Erb, 2021; Allerton, 2022).

However, from an Islamic perspective, certain elements of the Caci dance raise questions regarding its compatibility with religious norms. The presence of physical violence, symbolic meanings, and ritualistic aspects may be interpreted as conflicting with Islamic ethical principles. These concerns are particularly relevant for Muhammadiyah leaders, who are tasked with guiding the community in aligning their practices with Islamic teachings. As a result, the Caci dance becomes a site of contestation where religious and cultural values intersect (Hosen, 2022; Burhani, 2021). To understand this interaction, it is essential to consider the concept of *'urf* in Islamic jurisprudence. *'Urf* refers to customary practices that are recognized as a source of law, provided they do not contradict fundamental Islamic principles. This concept allows for flexibility in the application of Islamic law, enabling it to accommodate diverse cultural contexts. In this sense, *'urf* serves as a bridge between universal religious norms and local cultural realities (Kamali, 2022; Zuhdi, 2024).

The relevance of *'urf* becomes increasingly important in contemporary discussions on Islamic law, particularly in multicultural and pluralistic societies. Scholars argue that the incorporation of local customs into Islamic legal reasoning can enhance the relevance and adaptability of Islamic law, making it more responsive to the needs of society. However, the application of *'urf* is not without limitations, as it requires careful evaluation to ensure that cultural practices do not undermine core Islamic values (Auda, 2021; Hallaq, 2022). In the context of Muhammadiyah, the use of *'urf* presents both opportunities and challenges. On the one hand, it provides a framework for engaging with local traditions in a flexible and context-sensitive manner. On the other hand, it may be perceived as compromising the movement's commitment to religious purification. This tension highlights the complexity of applying Islamic legal principles in real-life contexts, where rigid interpretations may not always be feasible or effective (Nashir, 2023; Burhani, 2021).

Previous studies have shown that Islamic reform movements are not monolithic in their approach to local culture. Instead, they exhibit a range of responses, from outright rejection to selective adaptation and accommodation. These responses are influenced by various factors, including theological orientation, socio-political context, and community dynamics. As such, understanding the perspectives of Muhammadiyah leaders requires a nuanced analysis that takes into account both doctrinal and contextual considerations (Hefner, 2021; Bowen, 2023). Furthermore, the interaction between religion and culture in Indonesia must be understood within the broader framework of legal pluralism. Indonesia's legal system is characterized by the coexistence of state law,

Islamic law, and customary law, each of which plays a role in regulating social life. This pluralistic context creates space for multiple interpretations and practices, allowing communities to negotiate their identities and values in diverse ways (Bedner & Van Huis, 2022; Lindsey, 2023).

In this regard, the role of religious leaders becomes particularly significant. Muhammadiyah leaders act as intermediaries who interpret Islamic teachings and apply them within specific cultural contexts. Their perspectives are shaped not only by religious doctrine but also by their understanding of social realities and community needs. As such, their responses to the Caci dance reflect a complex interplay between ideology, pragmatism, and cultural sensitivity (Nashir, 2023; Hefner, 2021). Despite the growing body of literature on Islamic reformism and local traditions, there remains a gap in understanding how specific cultural practices are negotiated within Islamic legal frameworks. While many studies focus on general trends, fewer have examined the micro-level dynamics of interaction between religious leaders and local communities. This gap highlights the need for case-oriented research that explores how Islamic principles are interpreted and applied in specific cultural settings (Allerton, 2022; Bowen, 2023).

This study aims to address this gap by examining the perspectives of Muhammadiyah leaders on the Caci dance in wedding rituals in West Manggarai through the lens of *'urf*. By focusing on a specific case, the study seeks to provide a deeper understanding of how Islamic law interacts with local culture in practice. It also aims to contribute to broader discussions on the role of *'urf* in contemporary Islamic jurisprudence and its potential for mediating tensions between tradition and religious norms. In addition, this study contributes to the discourse on cultural sustainability and social cohesion. In many communities, traditional practices such as the Caci dance play an important role in maintaining cultural identity and social harmony. The challenge lies in balancing the preservation of these traditions with the need to ensure their compatibility with religious values. This requires a dialogical approach that involves continuous negotiation and mutual understanding between different stakeholders (Erb, 2021; Beatty, 2022).

Moreover, the findings of this study are expected to have practical implications for policymakers, religious leaders, and community members. By providing insights into how cultural practices can be evaluated and adapted within Islamic frameworks, the study can inform more inclusive and context-sensitive approaches to religious guidance. This is particularly important in regions where cultural diversity is a defining feature of social life (Zuhdi, 2024; Lindsey, 2023). In conclusion, the interaction between Muhammadiyah leaders and the Caci dance tradition represents a broader phenomenon of negotiation between religion and culture in contemporary Muslim societies. Rather than viewing these domains as inherently conflicting, this study adopts a perspective that emphasizes their potential for coexistence and mutual enrichment. Through the lens of *'urf*,

Islamic law can be understood as a dynamic and adaptive system that is capable of engaging with diverse cultural contexts while maintaining its core principles.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research design with a socio-legal and anthropological approach to examine how Muhammadiyah leaders interpret and negotiate the Caci dance tradition in wedding rituals through the lens of *'urf* (customary practice) in Islamic law. A qualitative approach is particularly appropriate for this research because it enables an in-depth exploration of meanings, interpretations, and social dynamics that cannot be adequately captured through quantitative methods. By focusing on lived experiences and contextual understanding, this study seeks to uncover how religious norms and local traditions interact within a specific community setting (Creswell & Poth, 2021; Denzin & Lincoln, 2023). The research adopts a case-oriented design, focusing on Tiwu Nampar Village in West Manggarai Regency, Indonesia. This location is selected purposively due to its strong adherence to the Caci dance tradition, particularly in wedding ceremonies, as well as the presence of Muhammadiyah members and leaders who actively engage with local religious and cultural issues. A case study approach allows for a detailed and context-specific analysis, providing rich empirical insights into the negotiation between Islamic norms and local customs (Yin, 2022; Stake, 2021).

Data collection in this study is conducted through multiple qualitative methods, including in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. First, in-depth interviews are carried out with Muhammadiyah leaders, local religious figures, cultural practitioners, and community members. These interviews aim to capture diverse perspectives on the legitimacy and practice of the Caci dance within Islamic frameworks. The use of semi-structured interviews allows for flexibility, enabling participants to express their views while ensuring that key themes are consistently explored (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2022; Tracy, 2023). Second, participant observation is employed to gain a direct understanding of how the Caci dance is performed in wedding rituals and how it is perceived by the community. Through observation, the researcher is able to examine not only the formal aspects of the performance but also the social interactions, symbolic meanings, and contextual factors surrounding the practice. This method is essential for capturing the lived reality of the tradition and its integration into communal life (Spradley, 2021; Flick, 2023).

Third, document analysis is used to examine relevant texts, including Muhammadiyah organizational guidelines, religious fatwas, local regulations, and academic literature on Islamic law and local traditions. Document analysis provides a broader context for understanding how the concept of *'urf* is articulated

and applied within both formal and informal frameworks. It also allows for triangulation with data obtained from interviews and observations, enhancing the credibility of the findings (Bowen, 2021; Silverman, 2025). The selection of participants follows a purposive sampling technique, focusing on individuals who possess relevant knowledge and experience related to the research topic. This includes Muhammadiyah leaders at the local level, community elders, cultural performers, and other stakeholders involved in wedding ceremonies. In addition, snowball sampling is used to identify additional informants based on recommendations from initial participants. This approach ensures that the data collected are rich, relevant, and reflective of the diversity of perspectives within the community (Etikan, 2023; Patton, 2022).

Data analysis in this study is conducted using thematic analysis, which involves identifying, organizing, and interpreting patterns within the data. The analysis begins with the transcription of interview data and field notes, followed by coding to identify key themes such as religious legitimacy, cultural identity, social cohesion, and the application of *'urf*. These themes are then analyzed to explore the relationships between Islamic norms and local traditions, as well as the factors influencing Muhammadiyah leaders' perspectives (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Nowell et al., 2023). To ensure the validity and reliability of the findings, this study employs several strategies, including triangulation, member checking, and prolonged engagement. Triangulation is achieved by comparing data from multiple sources and methods, such as interviews, observations, and documents. Member checking involves sharing preliminary findings with participants to verify the accuracy of interpretations. Prolonged engagement in the field allows the researcher to build trust with participants and gain a deeper understanding of the social context (Lincoln & Guba, 2022; Maxwell, 2023).

Ethical considerations are an integral part of this research. Prior to data collection, informed consent is obtained from all participants, ensuring that they are aware of the purpose of the study and their rights as participants. Confidentiality and anonymity are maintained by using pseudonyms and avoiding the disclosure of sensitive information. The researcher also adopts a respectful and culturally sensitive approach, recognizing the importance of local values and traditions in the research process (Israel & Hay, 2022; Orb et al., 2024). Despite its strengths, this study acknowledges certain limitations. As a case study focusing on a specific community, the findings may not be generalizable to other contexts. However, the depth and richness of the data provide valuable insights that can contribute to broader theoretical discussions on Islamic law, cultural practices, and legal pluralism. Additionally, the qualitative nature of the research means that the findings are interpretive and may be influenced by the researcher's perspective. Nevertheless, efforts are made to ensure transparency and reflexivity throughout the research process (Silverman, 2025; Tracy, 2023).

In conclusion, the methodological approach adopted in this study provides a comprehensive framework for examining the interaction between Islamic norms and local traditions. By integrating socio-legal and anthropological perspectives, this research offers a nuanced understanding of how Muhammadiyah leaders negotiate the legitimacy of the Caci dance through the concept of *'urf*. This approach not only contributes to the academic discourse but also provides practical insights for fostering dialogue and coexistence between religion and culture in contemporary Muslim societies.

Results and Discussion

Divergent Religious Interpretations: Between Rejection, Adaptation, and Accommodation

The findings of this study reveal that Muhammadiyah leaders in Tiwu Nampar Village do not hold a single, unified stance regarding the practice of the Caci dance in wedding rituals. Instead, their perspectives are diverse and can be broadly categorized into three interpretive orientations: rejectionist, adaptive, and accommodative. These variations reflect the broader dynamics of Islamic reformism when encountering deeply rooted local traditions. The rejectionist perspective is primarily grounded in a strict interpretation of Islamic teachings, emphasizing the need to purify religious practices from elements considered inconsistent with the Qur'an and Sunnah. Leaders who adopt this view argue that the Caci dance contains elements that may contradict Islamic values, particularly those related to physical violence, symbolic aggression, and ritualistic meanings that may carry pre-Islamic connotations. From this standpoint, maintaining religious orthodoxy is prioritized over cultural preservation, and practices that cannot be fully aligned with Islamic norms are viewed as problematic (Hosen, 2022; Burhani, 2021).

This position is consistent with Muhammadiyah's broader ideological framework, which has historically emphasized reform and purification. The movement's commitment to eliminating *bid'ah* and *khurafat* often leads to critical engagement with local traditions that are perceived as lacking clear scriptural basis. As such, the rejectionist stance reflects an effort to safeguard the integrity of Islamic teachings in the face of cultural influences (Nashir, 2023; Hefner, 2021). However, the study also finds that not all Muhammadiyah leaders adopt such a rigid approach. The adaptive perspective represents a middle ground, where leaders acknowledge the cultural significance of the Caci dance while seeking ways to modify it in order to align with Islamic principles. For instance, certain ritualistic elements may be removed or reinterpreted, transforming the dance into a purely cultural or artistic performance rather than a symbolic or ritual act. This approach demonstrates a willingness to engage with local traditions in a constructive manner, rather than rejecting them outright (Beatty, 2022; Bowen, 2023).

The adaptive stance highlights the flexibility inherent in Islamic jurisprudence, particularly through the application of contextual reasoning. Leaders who support this approach often emphasize that Islam does not seek to eliminate culture but to refine it in accordance with ethical and religious principles. By reinterpreting the meaning and function of the Caci dance, they attempt to preserve its cultural value while ensuring its compliance with Islamic norms (Kamali, 2022; Auda, 2021). The accommodative perspective goes further by emphasizing the importance of cultural preservation and social harmony. Leaders who adopt this view argue that the Caci dance is an integral part of the community's identity and should be maintained as long as it does not explicitly violate core Islamic principles. They often rely on the concept of *'urf* to justify their position, arguing that local customs can be recognized as valid within Islamic law if they are widely accepted and do not contradict fundamental teachings (Zuhdi, 2024; Hallaq, 2022).

This diversity of perspectives illustrates that Islamic reformism is not monolithic but characterized by internal debates and contextual adaptations. The variation in views among Muhammadiyah leaders reflects their differing interpretations of religious texts, as well as their sensitivity to local social dynamics. It also highlights the role of individual agency in shaping religious discourse, as leaders navigate the tension between doctrinal purity and cultural reality. Furthermore, the findings suggest that these differing perspectives are influenced by generational, educational, and experiential factors. Younger leaders with exposure to diverse intellectual traditions may be more open to adaptive or accommodative approaches, while older leaders with more traditional training may lean toward rejectionist positions. This generational dynamic adds another layer of complexity to the negotiation between religion and culture (Lindsey, 2023; Bedner & Van Huis, 2022).

'Urf as a Mediating Framework in Negotiating Islamic Norms and Local Tradition

One of the central findings of this study is the significant role of *'urf* as a mediating framework in the interaction between Islamic norms and local cultural practices. The concept of *'urf*, which refers to customary practices recognized within Islamic jurisprudence, provides a flexible and context-sensitive tool for evaluating the legitimacy of traditions such as the Caci dance. In classical Islamic legal theory, *'urf* is acknowledged as a secondary source of law, particularly in matters where there is no explicit textual guidance. Its application is based on the principle that customs widely accepted by a community can be incorporated into legal reasoning, provided they do not contradict the fundamental principles of Islam. This flexibility allows Islamic law to adapt to diverse cultural contexts while maintaining its normative foundation (Kamali, 2022; Auda, 2021).

In the context of this study, Muhammadiyah leaders who adopt adaptive and accommodative perspectives frequently invoke *'urf* to justify their acceptance of the Caci dance. They argue that the tradition, as practiced in contemporary settings, has evolved into a cultural expression that no longer carries elements of shirk (associating partners with God) or other prohibited practices. As such, it can be considered a permissible form of local custom that contributes to social cohesion and cultural identity (Zuhdi, 2024; Hallaq, 2022). The use of *'urf* in this context demonstrates the dynamic nature of Islamic law, which is capable of responding to changing social realities. Rather than imposing rigid rules, Islamic jurisprudence allows for contextual interpretation that takes into account the lived experiences of the community. This approach is particularly relevant in multicultural societies, where diverse traditions coexist and interact with religious norms (Auda, 2021; Bowen, 2023).

However, the application of *'urf* is not without challenges. One of the main issues is determining the boundaries of acceptable custom. Not all cultural practices can be accommodated, and there is often disagreement among scholars and religious leaders regarding what constitutes a valid *'urf*. In the case of the Caci dance, debates arise over whether certain elements—such as symbolic violence—can be reconciled with Islamic ethical principles (Hosen, 2022; Burhani, 2021). These debates highlight the need for careful evaluation and critical engagement with cultural practices. The application of *'urf* requires not only knowledge of Islamic jurisprudence but also an understanding of the social and cultural context in which the practice occurs. This underscores the importance of interdisciplinary approaches that combine legal, anthropological, and sociological perspectives (Furqani & Haneef, 2022; Hefner, 2021).

Moreover, the findings suggest that *'urf* functions not only as a legal concept but also as a social mechanism for negotiation. It allows different stakeholders—religious leaders, community members, and cultural practitioners—to engage in dialogue and reach a shared understanding of what is acceptable. In this sense, *'urf* contributes to the process of social integration by providing a common framework for resolving tensions between religion and culture (Beatty, 2022; Allerton, 2022).

Cultural Sustainability, Religious Authority, and Social Cohesion

The final major finding of this study concerns the broader implications of the negotiation between Muhammadiyah leaders and the Caci dance tradition for cultural sustainability and social cohesion. The interaction between religious norms and local traditions is not merely a theoretical issue but has practical consequences for community life. The Caci dance plays a significant role in maintaining cultural identity and continuity within the Manggarai community. As a traditional performance, it serves as a medium for transmitting values, strengthening social bonds, and reinforcing a sense of belonging. The potential rejection of such practices could lead to cultural erosion and social fragmentation,

particularly in communities where tradition is closely tied to identity (Erb, 2021; Allerton, 2022).

At the same time, religious leaders have a responsibility to ensure that community practices align with Islamic principles. This dual responsibility creates a complex balancing act, where leaders must navigate between preserving cultural heritage and maintaining religious integrity. The findings show that Muhammadiyah leaders are actively engaged in this process, using various strategies to reconcile these competing demands (Nashir, 2023; Hefner, 2021). One important aspect of this process is the exercise of religious authority. Muhammadiyah leaders do not simply impose their views but engage in dialogue with community members, taking into account their perspectives and concerns. This participatory approach enhances the legitimacy of their decisions and fosters a sense of collective ownership over the outcomes (Lindsey, 2023; Bedner & Van Huis, 2022). The study also highlights the importance of a dialogical approach in addressing tensions between religion and culture. Rather than adopting a confrontational stance, leaders who engage in dialogue are more likely to achieve sustainable solutions that are accepted by the community. This approach is particularly important in pluralistic societies, where diversity requires mutual understanding and respect (Beatty, 2022; Bowen, 2023).

Furthermore, the findings suggest that the negotiation between tradition and Islamic norms can contribute to the development of a more inclusive and adaptive form of religious practice. By recognizing the value of local culture and incorporating it into religious life, Islamic movements can enhance their relevance and resonance within the community. This, in turn, strengthens social cohesion and promotes a sense of harmony between different aspects of identity (Auda, 2021; Hallaq, 2022). In conclusion, the interaction between Muhammadiyah leaders and the Caci dance tradition illustrates the complex and dynamic relationship between religion and culture in contemporary Muslim societies. Through the application of *'urf* and the adoption of dialogical approaches, it is possible to navigate this relationship in a way that respects both religious principles and cultural heritage. This study underscores the importance of flexibility, contextual understanding, and inclusive engagement in addressing the challenges of cultural diversity in Islamic contexts.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the relationship between Islamic reformist thought and local cultural traditions is not inherently oppositional but characterized by ongoing negotiation, reinterpretation, and contextual adaptation. The case of Muhammadiyah leaders' perspectives on the Caci dance in wedding rituals in West Manggarai reveals that religious responses to local traditions are diverse and dynamic, rather than uniform. The findings identify three dominant

orientations—rejection, adaptation, and accommodation—each reflecting different approaches to balancing doctrinal commitments with socio-cultural realities. The persistence of these varied perspectives highlights that Islamic reformism, particularly within Muhammadiyah, cannot be reduced to a rigid purification agenda. Instead, it operates within a spectrum of interpretive possibilities shaped by theological understanding, social context, and community engagement. This plurality of views underscores the role of human agency in interpreting Islamic teachings, where religious leaders actively negotiate the boundaries of permissible practices in response to local conditions. A central contribution of this study lies in demonstrating the relevance of *'urf* as a mediating framework in this negotiation process. The concept of *'urf* enables a flexible and context-sensitive interpretation of Islamic law, allowing for the recognition of local customs as long as they do not contradict fundamental religious principles. In this regard, *'urf* functions not only as a legal tool but also as a socio-cultural bridge that facilitates dialogue between religious norms and cultural practices. Its application in the case of the Caci dance illustrates how Islamic jurisprudence can adapt to diverse cultural environments without losing its normative foundation.

Furthermore, this study highlights the broader implications of this negotiation for cultural sustainability and social cohesion. The Caci dance, as a cultural heritage practice, plays a significant role in maintaining community identity and social harmony. The ability of Muhammadiyah leaders to engage with this tradition in a dialogical and context-sensitive manner contributes to the preservation of cultural values while ensuring alignment with Islamic ethics. This balance is essential in pluralistic societies, where rigid approaches may lead to social tension or cultural alienation. The findings also emphasize the importance of inclusive and participatory approaches in exercising religious authority. Rather than imposing unilateral decisions, Muhammadiyah leaders who engage in dialogue with community members are more likely to achieve outcomes that are both religiously legitimate and socially accepted. This approach reflects a shift toward a more responsive and community-oriented model of religious leadership.

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