

# Tolak Bala and Islamic Aqidah Understanding: Revealing Dilemmas in the Religious Practices of Javanese Moslem Society

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## Abstract

The practice of rejecting reinforcements is an important part of religious traditions that often involve rituals that developed locally. This research aims to investigate the dilemma that arises in Javanese Muslim religious practices related to the concept of rejecting evil and understanding Islamic aqidah. The method used in this research is qualitative, where data is collected through interviews with informants, and is supported by the relevance of related literature. The research results show that in daily religious practice, the Javanese Muslim community often faces a dilemma between the concept of repelling evil and understanding fundamental Islamic beliefs. Although generally accepting the concept of Islamic aqidah, some traditional practices such as rejecting reinforcements are still maintained in Javanese culture. This research contributes to the literature on religion and culture, by describing the complexity of religious practices in Javanese society and the conflicts that arise between local traditions and Islamic religious teachings. In addition, this research also provides a basis for further reflection on how Islam is interpreted and practiced in diverse local cultural contexts.

**Keywords:** Rejecting reinforcements, Islamic Aqidah, Dilemma.

## 1. Pendahuluan

The tradition of rejecting reinforcements is a ceremony held when people face the season of disasters (Nurhikmah et al., 2021). This belief is rooted in the view that Allah SWT sends various kinds of reinforcements to earth. Disasters in the view of Javanese people who have been influenced by Islamic values, are seen as a consequence of human actions that deviate from religious rules or exceed the limits set by sunatullah that occur in nature (Mustaqim, 2015). In the practice of rejecting reinforcements, there is a belief in the existence of ancestral spirits and spirits (Karlina & Eriyanti, 2022). Carrying out the banishment ceremony is a preventative effort to avoid various types of disasters and epidemics that can threaten society (Pramayoza, 2022). So it can be understood that rejecting reinforcements is a form of ritual that people use to overcome or reduce the impact of a disaster or epidemic that has occurred.

Since the spread of Islam on the island of Java, the concept of repelling reinforcements has been passed down through the teachings of ulama and religious figures (LoisChoFeer & Darmawan, 2021). Rejecting reinforcements reflects efforts to maintain the integrity of the Islamic religion in various aspects of life, including local customs and traditions (Fatanti et al., 2019). Over time, repulsion became an integral part of the Javanese Muslim community's way of life, confirming the existence of Islam as the main pillar in forming moral norms and values. <sup>†</sup>Thus, the rejection of reinforcements reflects the desire to maintain the authenticity of Islamic teachings in the context of Javanese culture, while establishing harmony between local traditions and religious values.

Several studies related to Islam and repulsion of evil have been carried out by researchers in the last ten years. Wahab, Hariansyah and Nurhatyati stated that the Malay people believe that the month of Safar is considered a month full of bad luck or heat. This belief is strengthened by historical records from previous scholars which stated that the month of Safar was considered a source of bad luck throughout the year (Wahab et al., 2020). Furthermore, Gustiranto concluded that the ritual of repelling reinforcements carried out in Betung Village has strong traditional roots, inherited from generation to generation as a form of respect and fulfillment of promises to ancestors. The

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Betung people believe that through this ritual, they can distance themselves from potential disasters, disturbances from jinns and spirits (Gustiranto, 2017). Meanwhile, Triwahyuni, Hasanah and Sulaiman in their writing discuss the tradition of rejecting reinforcements in Banyuasin, where people give alms in the belief that this can foster a spirit of mutual help, remembering Allah SWT, and strengthen relationships between people (Triwahyuni et al., 2020). Another study conducted by Madriani stated that the Muslim community in Parit Setia Village carries out the tradition of repelling reinforcements with Islamic values in it, namely to relate to nature, maintain ties between people, ask for safety and as a form of gratitude to Allah SWT (Madriani, 2021). Several studies that examine the ritual of rejecting reinforcements can be taken as a synthesis, namely that they reveal a lot about the practices, beliefs and strategies used by the community to fight or avoid disaster outbreaks (bala).

This article aims to reveal the importance of harmony between local traditions and fundamental values in Islam. This article seeks to provide a deeper understanding of the challenges in combining traditional beliefs with pure religious teachings. The gap that emerges is the emergence of a dilemma in religious practice that collides with the principles of Islamic faith. A devout Muslim should understand that prayer to Allah is the main step to avoid disaster outbreaks (bala). However, under certain circumstances, there are those who continue to practice the tradition of repelling reinforcements from generation to generation.

### *1.1. Tradition of Rejecting Reinforcements and Religious Practices in Indonesia*

Tradition is a description of human attitudes and behavior that develops over time and is passed down from generation to generation starting from previous generations (Porpora & Sekalala, 2019). When tradition has become entrenched, it will become a source of moral and ethical values within a person. In simple terms, a tradition or habit is something that has been done for a long time, is an integral part of the life of a group of people, generally related to the same country, culture, time or religion (Priatna, 2019). The most basic thing about tradition is the transmission of information from one generation to the next, either through writing or orally, because without this a tradition can disappear. In addition, traditions also include shared habits in society that automatically influence daily actions and responses (D.E. & Kartika, 2022). So it can be understood that traditions are inherited values and practices that form cultural identity, playing an important role in preserving and passing on heritage from generation to generation.

As part of tradition, repelling reinforcements is an antidote to disaster (danger, disease, and so on) with a mantra (kenduri) (Susanti & Mun'im, 2020). Like repelling reinforcements which means preventing unwanted events such as various kinds of natural disasters, disease outbreaks, and avoiding interference from supernatural beings. The ritual of rejecting evil among the Javanese Muslim community is not something new, most people are actually very familiar with this kind of ritual. There are so many forms of rituals for rejecting reinforcements in society, so that whatever is predicted to have a high chance of getting reinforcements, a ritual for rejecting reinforcements is first carried out (Putri Agviolita, 2021). So it can be understood that repelling reinforcements is a tradition of preventing disaster that has been passed down from generation to generation, reflecting people's efforts to protect themselves from dangers that might come.

Indonesia's culturally diverse society is a unity that integrates differences as a means of creating close social relations and as the foundation of Indonesian national identity (Setyowati, 2022). National identity reflects unique cultural values that are passed down from generation to generation. Likewise, Javanese society, various traditions have been passed down from generation to generation by their supporters with motivations and goals that are closely related to the Javanese people's outlook on life in general. The specialty of Javanese culture lies in its extraordinary ability to absorb cultural influences from outside, while still maintaining its authenticity and distinctive identity. (Fitriandini, 2020). The Reject Bala tradition among Javanese people emerged because of the ancestral heritage that is held firmly by the community. Factors in the emergence of this tradition were also influenced by the cultural combination of Islam and Hinduism as well as the lack of public knowledge so that people participated in the implementation of the Reject Bala Tradition.

Traditions of repulsion and religious practices have an important role in building cultural identity and spirituality of society (Jumadi et al., 2022). Even though it is rooted in religious beliefs, the tradition of repelling reinforcements is more preventive in nature, while religious practice places more emphasis on the individual's relationship with the Creator. Both reflect the complexity and diversity of beliefs and values passed down from generation to generation.

### 1.2. Acculturation of Islamic Aqidah and Culture in Indonesia

Acculturation is a social process that arises when a group of people with a particular culture is confronted with elements of a foreign culture in such a way that the elements of the foreign culture can gradually be accepted and processed into their own culture without erasing the authenticity of the culture itself (Muasmara & Ajmain, 2020). The arrival of Hindu-Buddhist culture to Indonesia was not just accepted for granted but went through a process of adaptation and adjustment to the realities of Indonesian society, but still maintained the uniqueness of the original elements (Idris et al., 2020). This social process has certainly been part of the history of human cultural diversity since ancient times. Every society with its own unique culture has neighboring groups who bring different cultures. On the borders of the areas where these groups live, there are individuals who are influenced by elements of neighboring cultures, creating various acculturation processes (Nurrahmah Laili et al., 2021). Culture itself has several meanings, including thought, reason, reason, while culture refers to the results of human inner activities and creations such as beliefs, art, customs, and so on.

In connection with the issue of acculturation of Islam with culture, elements of Islamic culture spread in Java along with the arrival of Islam in Indonesia. As a group, in Javanese society elements of Islamic culture have been strong since the establishment of relationships with traders who also played a role as preachers in the early stages of the spread of Islam (Setyaningsih, 2020). In addition, various Islamic religious terms and practices are often adopted into local language and culture and create a kind of unique harmony (Sobarudin, 2019). Although there are variations in religious practices between regions, this acculturation reflects tolerance and harmony between religious communities in Indonesia. The strong local culture is still respected, while Islamic values remain the main basis in everyday life. This is what makes Islam in Indonesia unique and is reflected in the diversity of cultures and religions that are accepted by society peacefully.

The acculturation process between Islamic teachings and local culture is the integration of these religious teachings into language, art, including carving and sculpture, as well as creativity in the form of crafts, architecture, monuments, calligraphy and mosaics that decorate the interior of buildings such as houses or mosques (Ani Nafisah et al., 2021). Something interesting about the occurrence of cultural mixing is that Islamic beliefs and worship (rituals) which are strictly regulated in the Al-Qur'an and Hadith do not recognize cultural mixing, because both must be followed strictly in accordance with the teachings and instructions received from the Prophet Muhammad SAW. and determined through its decisions (Panggabean et al., 2022). So that there is harmony between the mixture of cultures and strict provisions in carrying out aqidah and worship.

### 1.3. Understanding the Islamic Aqidah of Javanese Muslims

In Arabic, Aqidah can be explained as *al-'aqdu* which means bond, *at-ta'utsiiqu* which refers to strong belief or belief, *al-ihkaamu* which means to establish, and *ar-rabthu bi quwwah* which describes strong binding. In simple terms, Aqidah includes what a person believes. Aqidah is an act of the heart that involves belief and justification for a belief (Angrianti, 2015). So it can be understood that Islamic Aqidah is the legal foundation or basic principles in carrying out the teachings of the Islamic religion. Islamic Aqidah is explained as a number of concepts that must be believed sincerely by the heart and are able to provide peace of mind without doubt. This statement also reflects a similar meaning to the definition of faith in Islamic teachings.

Every religion generally has fundamental aspects related to belief, especially in things that are considered sacred, sacred or unseen (Surya & Purna, 2017). In Islam, this aspect is formulated in terms of aqidah or faith, which includes the pillars of faith as a guide to belief for a Muslim. The Islamic religion also encourages its followers to involve themselves in certain ritualistic activities as reflected in the pillars of Islam (Rosydiana, 2023). For Javanese people, life is full of ceremonies, including those related to the human life cycle starting from pregnancy (known as brokohan and sepasaran), birth, to subsequent stages, as well as ceremonies related to daily activities in earning a living. and others. This kind of phenomenon also occurs and is encountered by followers of the Islamic religion on the island of Java known as Walisongo, especially Sunan Kalijaga (Nurul Syalafiyah & Budi Harianto, 2020). After witnessing the condition of the community, he chose to be active in encouraging the acceleration of the transformation of Islamic values by combining local elements (local culture) to support technical and operational effectiveness (Vindalia et al., 2022).

To strengthen the basis of aqeedah, Muslims must believe in Islamic aqeedah. If there are still doubts, it can be concluded that the basis of the faith is not yet strong, perhaps not even formed. The presence of Islamic aqidah is important for Muslims as a basis for not feeling doubtful and indecisive in their spiritual journey. A strong aqidah not

only provides clarity in understanding religious principles, but also creates inner calm and stability in living daily life. Therefore, the role of Islamic aqidah is not just as a belief, but as a solid foundation that provides a strong foundation for the spiritual life of Muslims.

## 2. Metode Penelitian

This article uses a qualitative method with a phenomenological approach. This approach focuses on the phenomenon of repulsion and the dilemma of Javanese Muslim religious practices. The procedure used in this article is to make observations and is supported by literature, scientific journals and other publications that are suitable as reference sources for research related to the phenomenon of repulsion. The data collection techniques used were interviews and observation. This research was conducted in one of the districts in Central Java which still practices rejecting reinforcements. Structured interviews are used to seek information from participants. Those involved: religious leaders, community leaders and Javanese Muslims who still practice rejecting reinforcements. This research is also accompanied by documentation data to document all research activities that have been carried out (Sugiyono, 2020).

Data collection methods were obtained from direct observation and interviews with two women and three men as research participants. Initially, the researcher explained in detail the purpose of this research, then opened space for open discussion regarding the issue of repulsion and underlined the importance of each participant's participation. When negotiations took place around the questions to be asked, taking into account the sensitivity of each participant, the researcher emphasized confidentiality of identity and provided assurances that their responses would be processed anonymously. Researchers also understand the need to create a supportive environment, ensuring that each participant feels comfortable sharing their views. In researching the phenomenon of repulsion among Javanese Muslims, determining participant criteria is an important focus to detail the religious and cultural dimensions that may influence this practice. These criteria may include individuals who are still actively carrying out or engaging in the practice of rejecting reinforcements.

After the interview data was collected, data analysis was carried out by transcribing the interviews and identifying patterns or themes that emerged related to the rejection of evil and aspects of Islamic faith in the Javanese Muslim religious context. Then carried out an in-depth analysis of the data, focusing on revealing dilemmas in their religious practices and reviewing the meanings that emerged from the experience and understanding of Islamic faith expressed by the participants. In addition, consider cultural and local factors that may influence their perceptions of Islamic teachings and beliefs. Next, synthesizing these findings to produce a rich and contextual interpretation, presents dilemmas that may arise in Javanese Muslim religious practices in relation to the practice of rejecting reinforcements and understanding Islamic aqidah.

## 3. Hasil dan Pembahasan

### 3.1. *Contemporary Javanese Muslim Society's Understanding of Islamic Aqidah*

As part of Indonesian society which has cultural and religious plurality, the Javanese Muslim community has developed a unique approach to Islam that reflects their diverse identities. Islamic faith in the understanding of the Javanese Muslim community is still based on basic Islamic principles such as the oneness of Allah, the prophethood of Muhammad, the holy book Al-Quran, angels, the Day of Judgment, and destiny. However, their understanding is often influenced by Javanese cultural values that have existed for a long time. For example, the concept of the oneness of Allah can be understood in the context of Javanese philosophy which emphasizes the unity and existence of God in all things.

To assess how strong a person's faith is, we can pay attention to both their physical appearance and their inner core. This belief will influence most of his activities, so it is hoped that all his actions will be worthy of worship (Novendri S et al., 2022). Measuring a person's level of faith can be observed phenomenally through their worship practices as mentioned in Surah Al-Mu'minun verses 1-6, which states that believers are those who are devout in prayer, avoiding useless actions and words, pay zakat, and maintain personal purity, both towards their spouses and the slaves they own, and those who do so will not be disgraced.

Meanwhile, in terms of essence, we can understand a person's belief in Allah SWT and His Almighty existence, without associating anything with Him, as stated in Surah Al-Ikhlas verses 1-4. This verse emphasizes that Allah is the Almighty, the place to ask for help, is childless and unbegotten, and there is nothing equal to Him. Based on these

two verses, we can understand that to achieve perfect faith, we need to realize and practice this belief in everyday life. In this way, we can become complete Muslims and will gain happiness in this world and the afterlife.

The Javanese Muslim community believes that disasters are a test from Allah that must be faced with fortitude and patience. They believe that Allah is the regulator of all things, including natural disasters, and every trial given has wisdom and a certain purpose. Understanding Islamic beliefs in this case plays an important role in shaping attitudes and responses to disasters. However, the Javanese Muslim community also believes in efforts to protect themselves from disasters. They practice religious practices such as dhikr, prayer, almsgiving, and certain rituals which are believed to be able to ward off or reduce the bad effects of disasters. This approach reflects a belief in spiritual strength in facing life's trials.

Apart from that, in Javanese culture there is also a belief in the existence of supernatural beings such as jinn or evil spirits which are believed to be the cause of disasters, so that Javanese Muslim people often practice Javanese traditional ceremonies or traditions which aim to appease the anger of supernatural beings or ask for protection from them. . This shows a subtle adaptation between religious teachings and local culture to create harmony and strength in their religious practices. Understanding of religious concepts is often interpreted through local stories and legends passed down from generation to generation (Karomi et al., 2022). This interpretation enriches understanding of faith and devotion to Allah in the context of Javanese culture.

The importance of values such as mutual cooperation, respect for others, and other local wisdom also influences the way the Javanese Muslim community understands Islamic beliefs. They believe that practicing Islamic teachings also means living side by side with Javanese cultural values that are deeply rooted in everyday life. Thus, the contemporary Javanese Muslim community's understanding of Islamic aqeedah shows that religion and culture can complement and enrich each other. They maintain their Islamic identity while remaining connected to their cultural heritage, creating a strong foundation for tolerance, harmony and diversity in a multicultural society like Indonesia.

### *3.2. Dilemmas in Javanese Muslim Religious Practices*

Every religion teaches actions that its followers must follow. Without religious practice, religion will feel empty and without meaning. Embracing Islam means obeying the pillars of Islam, such as saying the shahada, praying, fasting, paying zakat, and undertaking the pilgrimage for those who are able (Nurjannah, 2014). Adherents of Islam must believe in the perfection of this religion and apply it in social life. Islamic Sharia must be fully implemented, as is done by traditional institutions which also contribute to the implementation of Islamic Sharia (Ikromatoun, 2017). Carrying out Islamic teachings is an absolute obligation for every Muslim.

Religion is explained as a system of norms and rituals that regulate human behavior. Understanding religion requires a careful set of thinking frameworks because a dichotomy of revealed religion and cultural religion will always arise (Marzali, 2017). For a Muslim, revealed religion refers to the teachings revealed in the Koran which includes Magi, Judaism, Christianity and Islam. These three heavenly religions have a relationship based on revelation, even though they have different concepts (Nurmajah, 2020). Meanwhile, Islam and repulsion of reinforcements do not have any historical touch.

Javanese Muslim communities who still practice the practice of rejecting reinforcements often see it as part of their important cultural and spiritual heritage. They believe that the use of certain materials in these practices has symbolic value and deep meaning that not only protects them from harm, but also connects them to their ancestral heritage and religious traditions. The prayers offered in this practice, such as the shahada, sholawat, Al-Fatihah, and other prayers for salvation, are considered as a means of obtaining help and protection from Allah SWT. This reflects how the Javanese people integrate Islamic religious elements with their local belief practices, creating a continuity between religion and culture in their daily lives.

A culture of good manners or high ethics is a value adhered to in Islam, which is passed on to its followers through the practice of the values of the Koran. The concept of Islam Nusantara which is characteristic of Indonesian society integrates local culture in its religious practices Lestari (2019) but does not lead to justification for the identity or ideology of certain sects that claim to be part of Islam. The spirituality manifested in the practice of repulsion reflects cultural diversity in the search for different identities from each other. Even in modern times, there are still individuals who claim to have supernatural powers, either through alliances with supernatural beings or through belief in special powers, as believed by the Javanese Muslim community who still practice rejecting evil. Therefore, the government is still considering regulating religious identity so that it is not misused.

Dilemmas related to religious practices often arise due to the duality between traditional beliefs and Islamic teachings (Khoiruddin, 2016). There is a strong belief in the effectiveness of certain traditional ceremonies and rituals which are an integral part of Javanese cultural heritage. As a religion, Islam emphasizes strict monotheism (Hakim, 2016). This term in Islamic teachings is known as monotheism, namely belief in one God, Allah SWT without associating partners with Him with anything. In fact, Javanese Muslims often face a moral dilemma about how far they can maintain traditional practices that may conflict with Islamic teachings. Some may feel that relying on traditional ceremonies is a form of shirk or polytheism, while others see it as an expression of their important cultural identity.

The dilemmas arising from Javanese Muslim religious practices reflect the struggle between preserving local cultural heritage and following fundamental Islamic religious teachings. Thus, the Javanese Muslim community is often faced with a dilemma between maintaining local traditions inherited from generation to generation as part of their cultural identity or purifying their religious practices in accordance with pure Islamic teachings. Some individuals feel that the practices of repulsion are an effective way to protect themselves and their families from harm, while others may feel that it goes against fundamental Islamic principles.

In the form of efforts made to overcome this dilemma, some Javanese people may try to find a middle ground by strengthening their Islamic religious beliefs while still respecting and appreciating their local traditions. They may choose to adapt their practices to conform to Islamic principles or use the rejection of reinforcements as symbolism or metaphor, rather than a literal belief. In this way, they create a unique form of spirituality that combines cultural roots with religious values, allowing them to celebrate their identity authentically while also honoring their religious beliefs.

The dilemma in religious practice experienced by perpetrators of rejecting reinforcements is part of the process of searching for and developing self-identity. Deep interaction and dialogue with religious figures or ulama/kiai can be a solution that allows individuals to avoid confusion and anxiety. Dilemma is a common experience for every individual, but in the context of religious practice, it is important to reflect or introspect on spiritual awareness rather than cultural awareness. Even though religion and culture are related, spiritual awareness is essential because through religion individuals can discover spiritual dimensions that can change their outlook on life.

#### 4. Kesimpulan

The practice of rejecting reinforcements has deep roots in local Javanese traditions and is often linked to certain beliefs that flourish in society. The practice of rejecting reinforcements is carried out as an effort to avoid all forms of danger led by traditional leaders. The Javanese Muslim community's understanding of Islamic Aqidah is still relatively low because it is still very attached to beliefs in Javanese culture, both in the form of behavior and certain rituals. Religion and spirituality complement and strengthen each other, because in Islam there are spiritual values that are an integral part for its adherents. The dilemma arises when the Javanese Muslim community tries to achieve a balance between maintaining its cultural heritage and understanding Islam purely. It is important for individuals to maintain their religious existence and expression, but for the Javanese Muslim Community there is a dilemma when pursuing these two things. Firmness and strong belief in facing dilemmas motivates us to carry out these two things, because the Javanese Muslim community realizes the importance of achieving prosperity and spiritual balance. Islam and traditional practices are not just an escape from life, but rather a way of life that carries meaning and positive direction.

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