

NEGOTIATING THE PAST-IMAGINING THE FUTURE The Qur'an and the Ritual of Saminism¹

Ali Ja'far | UIN Sunan Kalijaga, Yogyakarta – Indonesia and STAI Al-Anwar,
Sarang-Rembang – Indonesia

Ahmad Rafiq and Moch. Nur Ichwan | UIN Sunan Kalijaga, Yogyakarta –
Indonesia

Corresponding author: ali.jafar@staialanwar.ac.id

Abstract: This paper investigates how far the Qur'an penetrated into the ritual of Samin people in Central Java. Taking their conversion to Islam and the politics of religion as point of departure, this paper argues that the attempts of Samin people to negotiate their previous belief to the present involve their unique interpretation of the Qur'an in their religious tradition. For the young Saminist it is a strategy to shape new morality and materiality of being a Muslim. The present ritualistic tradition among Saminist then comes up with complexity; it is by maintaining the locality and adopting the new element for their ritual. Such negotiation was due to massive political project of *santrinizasi* in contemporary Indonesia and vast decline of *abangan* community. In this context, the Qur'an and the produced religious ritual at certain tradition among Saminist are discursive in which the Samin community rationalize the new ritual based on their understanding about Islam rooted on their historical narrative.

Keywords: Qur'an, Ritual of Saminism, Islam in Java.

Introduction

Located on the frontier of Muslim World, the history of Islamization and the practice of Islam in Java is complex. Many believe that Java was Islamized by Muslim preachers with the nine saints

¹ I would like to thank Beasiswa Indonesia Bangkit (BIB) of Indonesia Endowment Fund for Education (LPDP) from the Ministry of Finance Republic Indonesia for granting the scholarship and supporting this research

(Walisongo) being the most well-known,² well known from their town burial location instead of their proper name. Although it is still debated where the saints come from and how Javanese convert to Islam, the practices and the geographical location of Java is significant to understand the variety of Islamic tradition across the worldwide.³ Unlike in the Middle East and the Horn of Africa considered as the “center of Islam”, Islam in the non-Arabian speaking community was often studied as a “peripheral” not only in term of geographical location but also on the issues of its authenticity.⁴ In fact, not only Java, elsewhere in Indonesia shows similar trends.⁵

The various practices of Islam in Java were seen to be syncretic form as it was bounded to their local tradition.⁶ Such distinction attracted many scholars to observe the different practice of Islam in Java and the Islamic world. Geertz compares Islamic practices in Indonesia and Morocco to distinguished Islam practiced in the Muslim world. In Morocco, Islam is a source of normativity while in Indonesia; it is source of spiritual-mystical practices.⁷ Geertz works on comparison linked to his idea on the polarization of Javanese religion and the perception that the majority of Islam in Java was *abangan* inclined to ritualistic tradition instead of normativity of Islam.⁸ This uniqueness is reflected in many religious expressions, including marriage.⁹

² Lukman Thahir, “Islam of the Archipelago: Cosmopolitanism of Islamic Civilization In Indonesia,” *Jurnal Ilmiah Islam Futura* 21 (2021), 23, doi.org/10.22373/jiif.v0i0.5794.

³ Robert W. Hefner, *Civil Islam: Muslims and Democratization in Indonesia*, *Civil Islam: Muslims and Democratization in Indonesia* (2011) doi.org/10.2307/3557788.

⁴ William R Roff, “Islam Obscured?: Some Reflection on Studies of Islam and Society in Southeast Asia,” *Archipel* 29, 7 (1985).

⁵ Abdul Halim, Abd. Basyid, and Prihananto Prihananto, “Religious Identity Transformation: Cultural Interbreeding Between Dayak Indigenous Culture and Islam,” *Journal Of Indonesian Islam* 15, 1 (2021).

⁶ Nor Hasan et al., “Tradition, Social Values, and Fiqh of Civilization: Examining the Nyadran Ritual in Nganjuk, East Java, Indonesia,” *Samarah: Jurnal Hukum Keluarga Dan Hukum Islam* 7 (2023), 1778, doi.org/10.22373/sjhk.v7i3.20578.

⁷ Clifford Geertz, *Islam Observed; Religious Development in Maroco and Indonesia*, 1st ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968).

⁸ Clifford Geertz, *The Religion of Java* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1976).

⁹ Muchimah et al., “Legal Culture and the Dynamics of Religious Interaction in Ritual Practices among Interfaith Marriage,” *Al-Manahij: Jurnal Kajian Hukum Islam* 18, 2 (2024), 333–348.

In modern Indonesian context, Islamist groups had successfully shaped religious-cultural practices widely. Such cultural practices were massively mediated during the late of New Order. Anna noted that in the 1990, the *Adzan* (Calling to pray), Islamic song, *Sari Tilawah* and series of *Pengajian* (religious preaching) were massively aired in the national television, and radio. Further, series of Qur'anic preaching is aired in the prime time, transmitting not only knowledge but also a sense of Islamic community.¹⁰ Indeed, religious expression publicly were more visible than before.¹¹ In the national and private television, reading the Quran with melodious voice was contested, made as daily quote, and even organized and practiced within a community member such as in ODOJ (One Day One Juz).¹²

As Islam becomes dominant and state mediates its expression, it is interesting to investigate the current Muslim community with *adat* as the background. Oktafia investigate the harmony of Saminist and Islamic teaching. She finds that Saminist way of life such as living in modesty, honest and friendly are also in accordance with the basic teaching of Islam.¹³ In education, Kholiq investigates the model of National Educational Law (Sisdiknas) toward Saminism and argues that the system was disadvantaging the Saminist for unaccommodating the tribal (*adat*) model of education.¹⁴ Interestingly, the resistance to modern system was not only in education, but also in the marital and family Law for Saminist's marriage and family was based on the customary law.¹⁵

¹⁰ Anna M Gade, *Perfection Makes Practice: Learning, Emotion and the Recited Qur'an in Indonesia*, 1st ed. (Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press, 2004).

¹¹ Greg Fealy and S. White, *Expressing Islam: Religious Life and Politics in Indonesia* (Singapore: ISEAS, 2008).

¹² Eva F. Nisa, "Social Media and the Birth of an Islamic Social Movement: ODOJ (One Day One Juz) in Contemporary Indonesia," *Indonesia and the Malay World* 46, 134 (2018), 24–43 doi.org/10.1080/13639811.2017.1416758.

¹³ Renny Oktafia and Imron Mawardi, "Islamic Values In The Tradition of Samin Community In East Java," *Qudus International Journal of Islamic Studies* 5, 1 (2017), 97–114.

¹⁴ Abdul Kholiq, Agus Mutohar, and Bambang Sumintono, "The Tribal Education in Indonesia: Detribalization Challenges of Samin Tribe," *Cogent Education* 9, 1 (2022), doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2022.2136861.

¹⁵ Nur Wakhidah et al., "The Legal Culture of Samin Community of Family Law in Central Java," *Al-Ibkam: Jurnal Hukum & Pranata Sosial* 19, 1 (2024), 125–50.

Unlike these previous researchers, this study investigates the contemporary debate on the idea of being a Saminist Muslim in Rembang, Central Java by relooking at their present ritual. This is by investigating how the Qur'an performed in the heartland of commoner (*abangan*) in Indonesian modern Muslim.¹⁶ The ritual is a significant point of departure in seeing the continuum of syncretic Islam and how the community negotiates their past identity as Samin and the present identity as a Muslim. Specifically, this study will examine how the Qur'an used in the community daily life and in certain religious ritual to explain the profound the model of negotiation. Such selection has much to do with the idea that the Qur'an is the central book for Muslim. Muslim obligated to read the Qur'an during the *shalat*, and to read the Qur'an as devotion. Therefore, such the idea of how Muslims perceiving, performing and reasoning to the performance remains relevant for the current academic investigation.

Studying the ritual of Saminism is significant to understand the current academic debate in positioning the community crosses their boundaries, embracing a new religion without really leaving their past. Richard¹⁷ and Minako¹⁸ argue that there are various factors in the process of adaptation of Islamic tradition from politic, social and economic changes. The agency of local community's play's important role in the process of adaptation, also the local ruler and the political condition forced the community to cross the boundaries and shaping the new identity. In the case of crossing boundaries, the community's tradition remains ambiguous for their perception to religion, and their position as citizen.¹⁹

In dealing with the issues, Eickelman²⁰ propose to seek the "middle ground" of Muslim. Meaning, it is not by confronting, the true

¹⁶ Amanah Nurish, "When Abangan Embraces Sufism: Religious Phenomenology to Counter Radicalism in Contemporary Java," *Teosofi: Jurnal Tasawuf Dan Pemikiran Islam* 11 (2021), 20–45 doi.org/10.15642/teosofi.2021.11.1.20-45.

¹⁷ Richard Maxwell Eaton, *The Rise of Islam and The Benggal Frontier 1204-1706*, 1st ed. (United States of America: University of California, 1993).

¹⁸ Minako Sakai, *Kacang Tidak Lupa Kulitnya: Identitas Gumay, Islam Dan Merantau Di Sumatra Selatan*, 1st ed. (Jakarta: Yayasan Pustaka Obor Indonesia, 2017).

¹⁹ Howard de Nike, "The Multicultural Riddle: Rethinking National, Ethnic, and Religious Identities," *Journal of Anthropological Research* 56 (2000), doi.org/10.1086/jar.56.-2.3631378.

²⁰ Dale F Eickelman, "The Study of Islam in Local Context," *Contribution to Asian Studies* 27, 1 (1982), 16.

vis a vis false Islam, or high versus the low Culture. Such dichotomy will neglect the heterogeneity, the discursive tradition and the comprehension of how locality influence Islam and how Islam practiced locally. Criticizing the debate, Asad also argues that a community is part of whole society and thus the historical condition must be examined to see the maintained and the discursive tradition. Negotiating the debate, Fadil²¹ insisted to see the Muslim and its complexity, such as the contradistinction and ambiguity to see the 'everyday Islam'. Through this perspective, Muslim cultural tradition is not fixed, but in continuum of dialectic between the present and their history.

The Constructed Identity of Saminism

To what extent Islam had entered the center of Java by the early twentieth century is still up for debate. According to Ricklefs, who cites European sources, Javanese society during the early nineteenth century was largely unified in terms of its religious identity, called as the "mystic synthesis" among both commoners and aristocracy. However, Islam as an identity rises in the beginning of 19th century where Javanese religious traditions were started to be polarized. It was marked with strong rejections against Dutch and their extension. It was followed by a strong Islamic movement, and peasant revolts against Dutch. Ricklefs linked the opponent with the growth of two aspects; first is the growth of Middle-class Muslim noticeable with the number of *hajj* to the Mecca and the massive growth of Muslim settlement around the great Mosque, well known as Kauman.²²

Later, the pious Muslim settlement becomes hub for reformist Islam in studying Islamic literature, especially the Qur'an, as also a place to undergo strategy of Muslim against Dutch and the alliance. Second is the massive revolt from the peasant against Dutch and against the Javanese elite. Here, he mentioned that in Java about the 1850s²³, and possibly elsewhere. Javanese society underwent religious

²¹ Nadia Fadil and Mayanthi Fernando, "Rediscovering the Everyday Muslim Notes on an Anthropological Divide," *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 5, 2 (2015), 59–88, doi.org/10.14318/hau5.2.005.

²² Mitsuo Nakamura, *The Crescent Arises over the Banyan Tree: A Study of the Muhammadiyah Movement in a Central Javanese Town* (Yogyakarta: Gadjah Mada University Press, 1983).

²³ M. C. Ricklefs, *Islamisation and Its Opponents in Java: A Political, Social, Cultural and Religious History, c. 1930 to the Present* i (Singapore: NUS Press, 2012), 1.

polarization between the pious adherents of Islam and the group who unwilling to accept more demanding version of Islam (non-standard Islam).

Such religious polarization also distinguished the model, characteristic, the affiliation and the strategy to rebel against Dutch. Among the model is the massive peasant revolt-agitation emerged in the late 19th century. Such revolt is the process of several social elements struggling for the distribution of authority. According to Justus cited Colonial Office, numerous peasant uprisings and attempts at insurrection had caused by social instability and upheaval from messianic and millenarian movements.²⁴ Although it was multiplying massively, Sartono noted the characteristic of peasant revolt in the late 19th century is unstructured and even suicidal as it had happened elsewhere in Java. Peasant movements in Java also become a semi religious movement which was followed by the emergence of messianic figure for social justice and the equality.²⁵

Underlining the messianic figures and peasant revolt in the late of 19th century is the Samin-Samat in Rembang (North-Central Java). Samin, previously named as Raden Kohar from Blora initiated revolt against Dutch by refusing to pay tax and to obey the colonial ruler. Together with his follower, he had declared as Javanese messiah entitled Prabu Panembahan Suryangalam in 1907s.²⁶ The messiah also spread the religious movement with Samin as Ratu Adil (King of Justice) and the follower called as Sedulur Sikep (loosely translated as a true brotherhood). Samin had successfully influenced their follower to establish mystical religious brotherhood to revolt again Dutch and to resist against Islamic agents. However, by the instruction of Dutch Government, Samin then exiled to Padang, Sumatra Barat, but the religious teaching has been spreading out to Rembang, Blora, Pati and Bojonegoro.

In Rembang, it is interesting to see the note from Benda²⁷ that in the 1907 the regent of Rembang calculated that there were 772

²⁴ M van der kroef Justus, "Javanese Messianic Expectations: Their Origin and Cultural Context. Comparative Studies in Society and History," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 1, 4 (1959), 299–323.

²⁵ Sartono Kartodirdjo, *Peasant's Revolt of Banten in 1888; Its Condition, Course and Sequel*, 1st ed. (Amsterdam: Springer Science Business Media Dordrecht, 1966).

²⁶ Justus, "Javanese Messianic Expectations.

²⁷ Harry J. Benda and Lance Castles, "The Samin Movement," *Bijdragen Tot de Taal-, Land- En Volkenkund* (1969), 218–40.

Saminist in Rembang. They lived exclusively in the southern Rembang. Until in the late 1950s, Mbah Suro (Surohidin) as son in law of Samin Surosentiko still becomes a prominent figure in the southern Rembang to spread Samin's teaching. Benda also noted that in 1906 onward Samin also in conflict against *pengulu* and *naib* for they were accused as 'heretic'. In the early Indonesia, in 1960s, still they did their resistance is by refusing the coming of *penghulu* in the marriage and in the burial of Saminist although they were officially identified as a Muslim.²⁸

Within the Saminist, the problem of identity occurred during massive Islamization politically and culturally. The political context happened during the 'agamatization' or religionization in Indonesia which during the formation of the state, the government had been drafting the constitution by adopting Islam as worldview (*weltanschauung*) and common platform.²⁹ Such draft was under the pressure of Santri's group who insisted to formulate the first principle of Pancasila (five tenets) as an obligation for Indonesian to belief in God.³⁰ The first principle is a substitution for Jakarta charter stating that "The Indonesian State is based on belief in the One and Only God with the obligation for Muslims to live according to Islamic law," that demanded by Muslim *santri* to perform Islamic principle strictly. Although the last seven words were eliminated, and the phrase "Only God" substituted with "Yang Maha Esa" or "One Supreme God", it remains an obligation for all Indonesian to embrace the officially recognized religions. However, in the New Order Indonesia officially-administratively only recognize five religions. The consequences on the politic of religion is the idea of citizenship. Indonesian citizen must embrace one of recognized religions to be fully recognized and to get their basic right as Indonesian.³¹

Following the politic of religionization, In the Suharto era the government continues to develop modern Indonesian through utilizing religious issues and religious institution as an instrument of control its

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Robert W Hefner, "Public Islam and the Problem of Democratization," *Sociology of Religion* 4, 62 (2001), 491–514.

³⁰ Zainal Abidin Bagir, "Advocacy for Religious Freedom in Democratizing Indonesia," *The Review of Faith & International Affairs* 12, 2 (2014), 27-39.

³¹ Michel Picard and Remi Madinier, *The Politics of Religion in Indonesia Syncretism, Orthodoxy, and Religious Contention in Java and Bali*, 1st ed. (London: Routledge Taylor and Francis Group, 2011).

citizen.³² Religious education becomes a mandatory subject for elementary education. Precisely in the 1966, religious educations were not only to strengthen religious belief, but also to protect and to prevent the infiltration of communism in Indonesian education.³³ Efforts were also made to create harmonious relationship among adherents of different religions.³⁴ For Saminist, such political context has a lot of consequences such as the enforcement of religious education in the public school and negative image of their local practices.³⁵ Otherwise politically there were massive discrimination and bearing social pressure as they were called as Islam KTP (Muslim by Identity card) as their religiosity and commitment to Islam is considered false and superficial.³⁶

As the upland of Rembang is the enclave of non-standard Islam, the Islamic organizations such as Nahdatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah have also appeared as facilitator in the up-growing of religious education, establishing *madrasa* and religious school. In the Tegaldowo, Timbrangan and Pasucen where many Saminist resides in Rembang, the autonomous body of NU such as Muslimat, Fatayat and Ansor plays significant role in the Islamic activities of *selapanan* (Islamic preaching for women). Religious education also thrives, and NU's affiliated institution facilitates crowd funding for the establishment of *madrasa* and *langgar* as well as providing the religious teachers in the areas and elsewhere.³⁷ Within the condition, the Saminist could no more resist in sending their children to the provided educational institution as well as following the moral and material culture of Islamic community.

³² Hefner, *Making Modern Muslim: The Politic of Islamic Education in Southeast Asia* (Honolulu, United States of America: University of Hawai'i Press, 2009).

³³ Suhadi and Mohamad Yusuf, *The Politics of Religious Education, The 2013 Curriculum, and the Public Space of the School*, ed. Zainal Abidin Bagir (Yogyakarta: Center for Religious and Cross-cultural Studies, 2015).

³⁴ Fawaizul Umam and Mohamad Barmawi, "Indigenous Islamic Multiculturalism: Interreligious Relations in Rural East Java, Indonesia," *Ulumuna* 27, 2 (2023), doi.org/10.20414/ujis.v27i2.752.

³⁵ Kholiq, Mutohar, and Sumintono, "The Tribal Education in Indonesia.

³⁶ Robert W. Hefner, "Islamizing Java, Religion and Politic in Rural East Java," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 46, 3 (1987).

³⁷ Ali Sodiqin and Roehana Rofaidatun Umroh, "Towards an Interreligious Fiqh: A Study of the Culture-Based Religious Tolerance in the Kaloran Community, Central Java, Indonesia," *Al-Jami'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies* 61, 1 (2023), 159–80.

Negotiated Identity and a Continuum Tradition

Rembang is typically the home for santri's communities. As coastal city and the main road of Java (Pantura), Islam spread more easily rather than in the south.³⁸ In the North, the grave of Sunan Bonang in Lasem and Putri Cempa as a marking point where Islamization had grown since the beginning of Islam arrived in Java. Although the idea that the maritime culture is more Islamized than in agrarianism is still problematic and debated³⁹, in the context of Rembang, it confirmed by the historical figures buried in the northern areas as well as more Islamic educational institution.

Beside economic issues, the southern Rembang has different religious and cultural backdrop. Living side a side to teak tree forest, in the mountainous area and the dry limestone with tropical climate where the rain-fed drives human seasonally, the community is still monoculture. Geographically-historically, the teak forest becomes barriers for penetration of Islam in the areas as well as isolating the place from administrative government. However, in the late of New Order, there is massive deforestation and land conversion for national development, changing geographical landscape of modern Indonesia and making the remote areas accessible. In parallel to the geographical change, the religious tradition had also endured massive process of *santrinizatio*n.

For the present Muslim in Rembang, being Saminist is rather negative and depreciatory for it is linked with coarse farmer, unwilling to perform Islamic tenets and resisting from any development and change. However, in the south, Samin remains a respected and admired as local hero and historical figure of peasant. Recently, the identity Saminist belief that they must build interpersonal relation with the ancestral belief, but they also believe that all are by the will of Allah. For scholars working on Samin like Korver⁴⁰, Victor⁴¹ and

³⁸ Nur Syam and Wahyu Ilaihi, "Institution of Islam Java: Coastal Islam, Local Culture, and the Role of Sufism," *Islamica: Jurnal Studi Keislaman* 17, 2 (2023), 189–213.

³⁹ Azyumardi Azra, *Islam in the Indonesian World: An Account of Institutional Formation*, 1st ed. (Bandung: Mizan, 2006).

⁴⁰ A Pieter E Korver, "The Samin Movement and Milleniarism," *Bijdragen Tot de Taal-, Land- En Volkenkunde* 132, no. 2/3 (1976), 249–66.

⁴¹ VVictor T King, "Some Observation on the Samin Movement of North-Central Java: Suggestion for the Theoretical Analysis of the Dynamic of Rural Unrest," *Bijdragen Tot de Taal-, Land- En Volkenkunde* 129, 4 (1973), 457–81.

Benda,⁴² they still consider Samin's practices as syncretic form of religion for mixing the Samin's and Islamic belief. However, I presume that these scholars only look the salient aspect of Samin which are different from Islam and neglecting the local contest of Islamic practices in the local context as a continuum tradition.

To avoid the debate, I identify the relationship between Samin and Islam into a spectrum. The different levels of spectrum based on their perception on themselves and the other, as well as how they relate to their community. Here defining the spectrum of Muslim-Samin is obviously problematic and contestable. Indeed, it is depending on the point of view and the purpose. Within the spectrum, I located the community into two characteristic to portray the complexities; the first is exclusive Saminist and the second is the Muslim-Samin (Saminist). The first refers to community identifies themselves as a 'Samin' in their daily religious practices. Some of them accept Islam on their identity and some of them left it blank for it was useless. They perceive that Samin and Islam have different epistemological values and practices, and they noticed the differences. Some of them do not send their children into public school, as well as having a strong affiliation to *adat* community.

While the second spectrum is Muslim-Samin (I called them Saminist) which refers to Muslim, practicing both Islamic and Samin tradition. They sent their children to the public school and madrasa celebrate Islamic tradition such as *ied fitri* although they were neither fasting nor praying. The Saminist in this respects were mostly unable to read the Qur'an, but they were allowing their children to learn the Qur'an. Within two spectrums, there are still complex undefined characteristic. However, recently the exclusive Samin is declining while the second is rising.

There are three principles of Saminist that I classified them different from ordinary Javanese *Abangan* and different from Javanese Islamic tradition or Santri. First is the role of women in certain religious ritual. For the Samin, man has no child, but woman has and woman are significant in their religious life for it resemblance physically to the Mother Nature. Second is a strong tradition based in the rite of passage such as birth, marriage and death which is representing the sacred cycle of human life. According to Saminist, man had created by God from the soil, and therefore being peasant is

⁴² Benda and Castles, "The Samin Movement.

being maintaining to where they come from. It indicates a strong intimate relationship between the human and the local landscape such as water, forest, mountain and land, all of them are sacred.

These communities maintain their collective memory and tradition in strongly respecting the mother-Nature. They have the shared knowledge, information, emotion, imagination and worldview that shape group's identity. Surely in the context of identity, a group shares the history and memory among the members and it possessed significant common characteristics. A group of community or a person may have more than one layer of identity at once time, either mixed or contested, but there will be one or two significant identities which is apparently noticeable than the others. The collective memory also embodied into the symbol, the narrative, and the myth in the community daily life. The symbol used in certain ritual gives the meaning for them to engage and to recognize the community religious relation. Therefore, the historical question on how Islam becomes religious identity in the context of Saminist as their local belief is significant to see the layers of particular Islamic community as Indonesian, Muslim and Samin. Such layers also mark the transition of certain cultural tradition and society.

The continuity tradition produced collective meaning and collective memory about people history and memory. The collective memory is reflected through the characteristic of their religious life which is more bounded to agrarian culture. During my visit to Timbrangan and Tegaldowo, and Pasucen, various *selamatan* as ritual practices held in order to respect the Mother Nature, such as Sedekah Bhumi and Temon Banyu as a communal rite. In the rite, people both men and women gather in the water spring called as Pasucen (which is also a name for a village) bringing foods and flowers to the spring. The local Imam recited the prayer in mixed Arabic-Javanese. The rite continued in the Langgar(s) (prayer), while the local religious man is reciting the Qur'an and they would eat the food together. Attending in the rituals are men, women and the children.

Following the rite of *Sedekah Bhumi*, there will be recitation of Qur'an followed by Javanese *du'a*. The Qur'an as the element of ritual is an interesting to see the multi layering communities. Meaning the spectrum of being Muslim and being Samin are varied. It portrays the complexity and the heterogeneous Islamic tradition and the relationship between the ideas of being a Muslim that relates to the

most sacred object, Qur'an in a local way. Such definition is also an effort to describe how the local community negotiates their previous identity with the new one, remembering their past for the present ritual.⁴³ All of them are in the "Middle ground" which neither exclusively Samin nor exclusively Muslim. All the identities are multi layering and all are encompassing. Meaning, for the community, their cultural and religious understanding perceives that Islam and Saminist are not in contrary and indeed it is complementary.

Beside *Sedekah Bhumi*, the Saminist was also performing *wayang* and in the story of local peasant against Dutch and the story of Sunan Kalijaga protecting the spring. In the rite of passage (birth, marriage and death), the Saminist will invite a *santri* to recite the Qur'an to get blessing. Here I would argue that the syncretic idea on believing the Mother Nature, respecting it through *Sedekah Bhumi*, *wayang* and accepting Islam is presented through various rituals as continuum of Saminist tradition. Although Islamization had gradually changed the element of religious ritual, narrative and worldview, the preserved tradition still linked them to the previous tradition. Here, the Saminist resistance is consist of defying daily enforcement of *santri*'s hegemonic tradition. Saminist attempts to negotiate their own version of Islam and reproducing their own ritual as mean of maintaining their collective memory and identity. In this sense, identity is not a rigid category; it is fluid and depending on the relation to other and the recognition to the self.

The Qur'an in the Ritual

Samini is non-scriptural religious tradition. The knowledge, history and the collective memory to understand their root were transmitted through their oral tradition and ritual. Therefore, it is difficult to explain Samini's religious teaching textually. The community maintains the ritual and the tradition to continue the connection between the present and their past experience. Within the ritual, such as in a *sedekah Bhumi*, the community would gather, delivering their purpose and finally they chant, reciting the prayer in Javanese. All the prayers were memorized, and there is no written text on it. Here the role of memory is vital in shaping religious identity, and the way individuals and

⁴³ Danièle Hervieu-Léger, *Religion as a Chain of Memory*, ed. Simon Lee, *Nova Religio*, 1st ed., vol. 8 (Boston: Boston University, 2005).

communities construct their religious and spiritual beliefs in a social landscape.⁴⁴

Dealing with the scripture, Van Voorst noted that religious community is not only utilizing the scripture as cognitive but also for non-cognitive purpose. In the cognitive use, the scripture was used by religious expert to build an argument and to find the information based on the textual sources. Indeed, in the non-cognitive use the scripture was utilized by the believer for stressing the 'magical power' and to gain blessing. The use of the scripture in this context is emphasizing the imagination and emotion than to logical reason.⁴⁵ Based on this typology, the Saminist is out of categories for they were not in the direct relation to the Qur'an neither they use it in a cognitive nor non-cognitive purpose. Meaning they had nothing to do with the scripture, as the Qur'an is completely a stranger, but they want to approach the book.

The condition is different among the young generation. Although their encounter to the Qur'an was relatively new, they invited the local *santri* (mostly the *tahfidz*) from outside the village to read the Qur'an in their house for multiple purposes, such as during *selamatan* for their marriage or death. A procession that was completely new compared to their elder generation who refuse to invite *pengulu* (Muslim leader) in their religious ritual. Historically, the refusal is not only religious based, but also economical in which inviting the *pengulu* will cost more money than they earn in their everyday life.⁴⁶ Unlike the elder, the current Saminist had prepared sum of money to invite the *santri* reading the Qur'an in their house as well as preparing full cooked roaster to get a blessing from the Qur'anic reading.

The ideas for seeking a religious bless from the Qur'an during the rites are common among the *santri*'s religious community as well as preparing the roaster as a dish. It was taken from the story of Sufi master, Syeikh Abdul Kadir Jailani. The mystical narration was well circulated within the *santri*'s oral tradition. Interestingly, such idea was also accepted among *abangan* and Saminist in the Southern Rembang as local *santri* becomes visible in the areas. In addition, the local *santri* also plays as religious preachers and specifically as Qur'anic preachers. In

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Robert E Van Voorst, *Anthology of World Scriptures*, ed. wort Hawes, 1st ed. (Michigan: western Theological Seinary, Holland, Michigan, 2008).

⁴⁶ Justus, "Javanese Messianic Expectations."

doing so, some of Saminist children are actively studying to read the Qur'an in the madrasa and in *langgar* of local *keiai/santri*. The children also wear the hijab during their school, literate to both Roman alphabets and Arabian script. Phonetically the children could differentiate between /â/ from pharyngeal and /ʔ/ from pharyngeal fricative. Such phonetic distinction is showing that the some Saminist children were well-trained in reading Arabic alphabet properly although mostly are not.

Such shifting elements of ritual language, pronunciation are reflecting the complex relation between the Saminist and the Qur'an and to Islam. As non-scriptural religious belief, the current Saminist negotiated their religiosity by performing, negotiating and adapting Muslim's tradition into their own discursively. For the elderly, there was still strong resistance against the penetration of the Qur'an in their ritual. The resistance is unique for there was no open confrontation between the Samin and Muslim. Indeed, it was typically a silent resistance in which the Samin disagree but remains silent for the penetration of Qur'an in their religious ritual. The silent resistance must be understood as imbalance power politically-economically as well as Samin's strategy to resist against the unfortunate condition,⁴⁷ it also could be understood as continuum of power relation in the production of knowledge in the certain social condition.

The obvious form of power in the ritual is the present of *santri* reciting the Qur'an in the Saminist house. Although the Saminist are mostly illiterate to the Qur'an, but involving the Qur'an in their ritual is appropriating their identity as a Muslim. Saminist attempts to negotiate their belief and to live in mutual co-existence with Muslim. Such negotiation is important in the context of modern Indonesia in which the Islamic traditions in any form had appeared more vividly. Under the condition, the Saminist involved the Qur'an to copy the idea of being a Muslim properly. In addition, it is interesting also to see that in the everyday practice on the relationship between the Muslim and the Saminist as part of exercising the power in their everyday life. In the context of religious life in the southern Rembang, the superiority of Islam in the Saminist villages had unintentionally shaped moral and material reality among the Saminist. The reciting Qur'an is a sign of new power that Muslim hegemonies the local ritual. Under the

⁴⁷ James C Scot, *Weapons of the Weak; Everyday Form of Peasant Resistance* 1st ed. (London: Yale University Press, 1985).

circumstances, the Saminist redefines their role in the community as well as the main symbol of Islam appropriated within the element of their ritual.

The Qur'an and the Present Saminist ritual

Recently, Islamic group had enjoyed certain degree of prestige. The preaching of Qur'an, Islamic music and cinema was aired every day and becomes more intense during Ramadhan.⁴⁸ Feally⁴⁹ investigates the expression through intense growing of middle-class Muslim performing *hajj*, sending their children to Rumah Tahfidz, or expensive Islamic integrated school. Heffner⁵⁰ and Bruinessen⁵¹ look the rise though close relation between state and Islamic educational institution which made Muslim expression be more visible in the public life and severe decline of *abangan* religious group⁵².

The social-political condition is the nature of Indonesian in the post reformation era. The liberal democracy and the politic electoral allows the Islamic group to take chance for the political contestation. In the local and national context the religious figures had successfully placed into the strategic position in the government. The local religious figures (*kiai*) which was previously as a cultural broker and had the cultural influence then transformed into both cultural and political influence.

In Rembang, the condition is similar in which the political support of *kiai* had successfully established the massive project of Islamization as well as cultural and political economy. For the example of government economic decision is converting the forest into industrial mining which caused serious rejection among Saminist in surrounded areas.⁵³ According to Saminist, land conversion will threat their

⁴⁸ Andre Moller, *Ramadan in Java*, 1st ed., vol. 53 (Sweden: anpere.net, 2007).

⁴⁹ Fealy and White, *Expressing Islam: Religious Life and Politics in Indonesia*.

⁵⁰ Robert W. Hefner, "Where Have All the Abangan Gone?: Religionization and the Decline of Non- Standard Islam in Contemporary Indonesia," in *The Politics of Religion in Indonesia Syncretism, Orthodoxy, and Religious Contention in Java and Bali*, ed. michel picard, 1st ed. (2011), 74, doi.org/10.4324/9780203817049.

⁵¹ Farish A Noor, Yoginder Sikand, and Martin Van Bruinessen, *The Madrasa in Asia Political Activism and Tr Ansnational Link Ages* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2020), 304.

⁵² Hefner, "Where Have All the Abangan Gone?."

⁵³ Dewi Candraningrum, "Politik Rahim Perempuan Kendeng Menolak Tambang Semen," *Jurnal Perempuan* (2014).

livelihood as being peasant as well as destroying the memory of being Saminist, destroying the connection to their identity and the place of origin.

In the religious issues, the rise of Islamic group and the growth of orthodox Islam in the post Indonesian *reformasi* had successfully raised the religious political issue of being Indonesian and Muslim politically. Such politic are that Indonesian must follow the recognized religion, following religious education in the public school, massive funds for religious institution and granting the growth of Qur'anic learning in every corner of Muslim settlement. Such politics of religion were followed with religious orthodoxy producing the negative stigmas against local religious tradition. The narrative belief about the mother-nature (*Ibu Bhumih*) and the *Danyang* living in the water were seriously challenged and negotiated. Among the Saminist, the massive growth of Santri learning in pesantren in the surrounded areas had contributed to the spread of learning the Qur'an and Islamic tradition within the life of Saminist. Although the Saminist still practicing their religious ritual in respecting their ancestral, but their relation to the Qur'an shapes new religious tradition among them. As they allowed their children to study the Qur'an, and involved the reading into element of their ritual, the Saminist redefine their moral community and the nature of Samin communication to the ancestral world.

Conclusion

This article analyzed the problem of Islamization in Indonesia and the use of Qur'an, as an element of ritual in the certain religious tradition of Saminism. As Saminist professes to be Muslim and the conversion is based on politic of religion in Indonesia, their identity is problematic which is neither fully Muslim nor fully "Samin". However, for Saminist in Rembang, being a Muslim and being Samin is not in contrary, all of them are completing each other. Therefore, this paper argues that there was misconception in understanding their religious ritual as both syncretic and heretic. To construct the argument, this paper argues that religious some religious ritual among Saminist is to celebrate the continuum tradition and those practices are objectives to reconstruct their collective identity as part of Saminist. Identity matters and knowledge transmission are embedded in their oral stories and daily activities. However, for the recent Saminist, it is also a pleasure to

get bless by involving the Qur'an in their important ritual, such as during marriage and death.

The conception that the Qur'an has an ability to give blessing has much to do with their relation to local *santri* in their daily activities. The relationship between the Saminist and Muslim becomes more intense as the government had controlled the forest and paved the road for economic development. Indeed, the government had facilitated the growth of religious organization and Islamic educational institution which affected to the strong penetration of Islam within the community. Surely there were still resistance among them, but the Saminists was reasoning that their religious tradition is part of copying the morality and materiality of being Muslim without really abolishing their past memory as Saminist. []

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