

Negotiating Identity Through The *Weh-wehan* Tradition: Cultural Values And Local Wisdom In Kaliwungu, Kendal

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Abstract: This study examines the transformation of the weh-wehan tradition in Kaliwungu, Kendal, as a cultural practice rooted in communal life yet confronted with the pressures of modernization. Using Talcott Parsons's functionalist framework and Anthony Giddens's theory of modernity, this research explores how weh-wehan continues to maintain its social functions while adapting to contemporary changes. The analysis shows that weh-wehan fulfills integrative and pattern-maintenance functions, reinforcing social solidarity and transmitting values of togetherness across generations. At the same time, modernization has altered its forms, shifting from agricultural products to modern commodities and from face-to-face invitations to digital communication. Urbanization and the dominance of nuclear families have reduced the intensity of the practice, but reflective adaptations, such as more structured organization and digital mediation, have preserved its relevance. In Giddens's terms, weh-wehan has undergone processes of disembedding and reembedding, illustrating that tradition can survive by being recontextualized rather than abandoned. These findings highlight weh-wehan as an example of cultural resilience and a dynamic institution that negotiates between tradition and modernity, showing that local heritage can endure by adapting to changing social conditions while retaining its core functions.

Keywords: *Weh-wehan* Tradition; Local Wisdom; Social Solidarity; Modernization; Cultural Resilience.

Abstrak: Penelitian ini mengkaji transformasi tradisi weh-wehan di Kaliwungu, Kendal, sebagai praktik budaya yang berakar dalam kehidupan komunal namun menghadapi tekanan modernisasi. Dengan menggunakan kerangka fungsionalisme Talcott Parsons dan teori modernitas Anthony Giddens, penelitian ini menelusuri bagaimana weh-wehan tetap mempertahankan fungsi sosialnya sekaligus beradaptasi dengan perubahan kontemporer. Analisis menunjukkan bahwa weh-wehan menjalankan fungsi integrasi dan

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pemeliharaan pola, memperkuat solidaritas sosial serta mentransmisikan nilai kebersamaan lintas generasi. Pada saat yang sama, modernisasi mengubah bentuknya, dari hasil bumi menjadi komoditas modern serta dari undangan tatap muka menjadi komunikasi digital. Urbanisasi dan dominasi keluarga inti memang mengurangi intensitas praktik, namun adaptasi reflektif, seperti pengorganisasian yang lebih terstruktur dan mediasi digital, membuat tradisi ini tetap relevan. Dalam istilah Giddens, *weh-wehan* mengalami proses *disembedding* dan *reembedding* yang menunjukkan bahwa tradisi dapat bertahan dengan *direkontekstualisasi*, bukan ditinggalkan. Temuan ini menegaskan bahwa *weh-wehan* merupakan contoh ketahanan budaya sekaligus pranata dinamis yang menegosiasikan tradisi dan modernitas, serta membuktikan bahwa warisan lokal dapat bertahan dengan beradaptasi terhadap perubahan sosial tanpa kehilangan fungsi dasarnya..

Kata Kunci: Tradisi *weh-wehan*; Kearifan lokal; Solidaritas sosial; Modernisasi; Ketahanan budaya.

Introduction

Culture functions as a framework that shapes social practices and religious expressions within a community. Understanding this relationship is crucial because local practices often determine how people interpret and reproduce religious teachings in everyday life.¹ Classical literature positions culture as the product of social learning transmitted across generations (Tylor; Horton & Hunt),² and the context of Kaliwungu illustrates this manifestation through distinctive language and pesantren traditions. Local expressions and customary practices provide empirical evidence that religious values are not only inherited textually but also embodied through rituals and social interactions.³ By situating the study at the intersection of culture and religious practice, this introduction establishes a clear theoretical foundation for focusing on the *weh-wehan* ritual. At the same time, it encapsulates the local background succinctly, preparing the reader to engage with the subsequent research questions.

The *weh-wehan* tradition, performed annually during the Prophet's Mawlid, represents a distinctive religious practice in Kaliwungu that has persisted to the present day. This ritual is regarded as significant because it reenacts the narrative of the Prophet's struggle while reinforcing the value of sharing within society. However, its legitimacy has often been debated theologically due to the absence of direct reference in the Prophet's time, leading some groups to categorize it as

¹ Penny Edgell, "A Cultural Sociology of Religion: New Directions," *Annual Review of Sociology* 38, no. July 2012 (2012): 247–65, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-soc-071811-145424>.

² Nguyen Minh Tri, "Culture as a Dynamic Product of Socially and Historically Situated Discourse Communities: A Review of Literature," *Ministry of Science and Technology, Vietnam* 66, no. 1 (2024): 121–28, [https://doi.org/10.31276/vmostjosh.66\(1\).121-128](https://doi.org/10.31276/vmostjosh.66(1).121-128).

³ C Munandar, N Lima, and T Costa, "Ritual and Religion: The Role of Cultural Practices in Identity Formation," *Journal of Humanities Research Sustainability* 1, no. 4 (2024): 198–207, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.70177/jhrs.v1i4.1797>.

bid'ah.⁴ Such debates highlight the tension between the normative authority of religion and the cultural legitimacy of local communities.⁵ The persistence of *weh-wehan* demonstrates strong social acceptance of practices considered beneficial, regardless of theological contestation. From this tension emerges the academic question of how communities negotiate the meaning of *weh-wehan* and incorporate it as part of local Islamic expression.

Several studies have examined the *weh-wehan* tradition in Kaliwungu as both a cultural and religious practice, revealing three main scholarly orientations. First, research highlights *weh-wehan* as a medium of social solidarity, emphasizing its role in strengthening kinship and neighborhood ties through food-sharing and communal gatherings.⁶ Second, scholars situate *weh-wehan* within the discourse of Islamic tradition, particularly as part of *Living Hadith* and the commemoration of the Prophet's birth, where local communities negotiate religious meaning through cultural expressions.⁷ Third, the practice has been contextualized within broader cultural and political narratives, particularly as a marker of local identity, an arena for interreligious tolerance, and a tradition recognized through cultural festivals in Kendal.⁸ While these studies have described the ritual form, its religious legitimacy, and cultural recognition, most remain descriptive and functionalist, without examining how *weh-wehan*

⁴ Muhammad Islahudin et al., "Makna Tradisi Weh-Wehan Dalam Perspektif Perdamaian Bagi Masyarakat Kaliwungu, Kendal," *Jurnal Studi Agama Dan Masyarakat* 18, no. 2 (2022): 94–101, <https://doi.org/10.23971/jsam.v18i2.3605>.

⁵ Mansur Ahmad et al., "Sociocultural Dynamics of Islamic Legal Reform Across Muslim-Majority Countries: A Comparative Perspective," *DIKTUM: Jurnal Syariah Dan Hukum* 23, no. 2 (2025): 214–31, <https://doi.org/10.35905/diktum.v23i2.13072>.

⁶ Fitri Ariana Putri, "Preservation of Ketuwinan Tradition to Establish Relationships between Communities in Kendal, Indonesia," *Prosperity: Journal of Society and Empowerment* 1, no. 1 (2021): 30–41, <https://doi.org/10.21580/prosperity.2021.1.1.7921>; Islahudin et al., "Makna Tradisi Weh-Wehan Dalam Perspektif Perdamaian Bagi Masyarakat Kaliwungu, Kendal."

⁷ Ghufron Hamzah and Iman Fadhilah, "Tradisi Teng-Tengan, Ketuwinan Dan Weh-Wehan Di Kaliwungu Kendal Jawa Tengah (Kajian Living Hadis Pendekatan Antropologi Interpretatif Simbolik)," *JASNA: Journal For Aswaja Studies* 2, no. 2 (2022): 55–68, <https://doi.org/10.34001/jasna.v2i2.3746>; Mohamad Nuryansah and Muhammad Izzul Haq, "Social Solidarity in The Moment of The Prophet's Maulid: A Living Hadith Study on The Weh-Wehan Tradition during The Celebration of The Prophet's Maulid in Kaliwungu Community," *Islamika Inside: Jurnal Keislaman Dan Humaniora* 9, no. 2 (2023): 162–79, <https://doi.org/10.35719/islamikainside.v9i2.207>.

⁸ Viro Dharma Saputra, "Membangun Literasi Budaya Lokal Kepada Generasi Z Melalui Tradisi Weh-Wehan Di Kecamatan Kaliwungu, Kabupaten Kendal," *PROMEDIA (Public Relation Dan Media Komunikasi)* 6, no. 1 (2020): 155–75, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.52447/promedia.v6i1.4086>; Naili Ni'matul Illiyyun and Adinda Rizqi Arbaningrum, "WEH-WEHAN TRADITIONAL AT KALIWUNGU KENDAL CENTRAL OF JAVA (Discourse Max Scheller's Philosophy Of Values)," *JURNAL YAQZHAN: Analisis Filsafat, Agama Dan Kemanusiaan* 9, no. 1 (2023): 1, <https://doi.org/10.24235/jy.v9i1.10156>.

operates as a site of identity negotiation where local wisdom interacts with evolving socio-religious discourses. This gap indicates limited scholarly attention to the dimension of identity formation through this tradition.

This research seeks to fill that gap by examining the cultural values embedded in the *weh-wehan* tradition of Kaliwungu and how these values reinforce local community identity. Three central foci guide the study. First, analyzing the practice and process of *weh-wehan* to reveal cultural values contained within, from communal cooperation (*gotong-royong*) to ritual prayers. This section outlines the structural basis that sustains the tradition as a medium of cultural transmission. Second, identifying the salient values manifested in the practice, namely reverence for ancestors, social solidarity, and the preservation of local culture, including the roles of traditional food, gamelan music, and customary symbols. Third, exploring contemporary challenges in sustaining the tradition, such as limited youth participation and the influence of global culture, as well as how collaboration among communities, cultural leaders, and government actors can ensure its continuity. These three foci aim to demonstrate how *weh-wehan* functions not only as a cultural ritual but also as a crucial medium for the people of Kaliwungu to negotiate identity and safeguard local wisdom amidst modernization.

This study employs a qualitative method to analyze the cultural values and local wisdom embedded in the *weh-wehan* tradition of Kaliwungu, Kendal. This approach was chosen because it captures the lived experiences of the community and uncovers hidden meanings behind a ritual that has endured over time.⁹ Two main sources of data were used: primary and secondary. Primary data were collected through participant observation during the performance of *weh-wehan* and in-depth interviews with key informants, including local residents, community leaders, and ritual practitioners who understand its history and meaning. Secondary data were obtained from related literature, including previous studies, local government reports, and media documentation highlighting the tradition's continuity. The data were analyzed using a triangulation model consisting of reduction, presentation, and inductive conclusion.¹⁰ Through this approach, the study aims to provide a comprehensive picture of how *weh-wehan* functions as a site of identity negotiation as well as a vehicle for preserving the cultural values of the Kaliwungu community.

Result and Discussion

The Cultural and Religious Dimensions of *Weh-wehan* in Kaliwungu

⁹ Norman K Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research* (United Kingdom: Sage Production, 2000).

¹⁰ Johny Saldana, Matthew B. Miles, A. Michael Huberman, *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook* (United State Of America: SAGE, 2014).

The term *weh-wehan* in Javanese literally means “to give,” a simple yet socially meaningful act. In practice, this tradition takes place when neighbors and family members share food with one another, often referred to as *ketuwinan*, which denotes visiting elders.¹¹ The lexical nuance is significant since Javanese language recognizes hierarchical speech levels; *ngoko*, *kromo madya*, and *kromo inggil*, that reflect politeness and social relations.¹² By using the word *tuwi* from *kromo madya*, the people of Kaliwungu emphasize human equality without creating social superiority. Consequently, *weh-wehan* is not merely understood as food exchange, but as a form of respect and mutual connectedness among community members.¹³

Local historical accounts suggest that this tradition can be traced back to the Islamic Mataram dynasty, initiated by Kyai Asy'ari, also known as Kyai Guru, who settled in Kaliwungu in the late 18th century. He is remembered as a moral exemplar, particularly for encouraging the celebration of the Prophet's birthday as an expression of gratitude and joy. This awareness formed a social norm where every household is expected to open its doors, prepare food, and welcome guests who come to share. The narrative is not merely mythical but functions as cultural legitimation that ties *weh-wehan* to Islamic teachings and the authority of local religious leaders. Thus, the tradition demonstrates a historical continuity between faith, local leadership, and social practice that remains observable today.

The ritual reaches its climax during the commemoration of the Prophet Muhammad's birthday, when all residents, regardless of age or status, prepare food to be shared. A variety of dishes, ranging from meatballs and noodles to local delicacies such as *sumpil*, are prepared with symbolic meaning. *Sumpil*, for instance, is a triangular pyramid-shaped dish made of rice and grated coconut wrapped in bamboo leaves, representing the balance of life: the apex symbolizes the vertical relationship between humans and God (*ḥablum minallāh*), while the sides symbolize horizontal relationships among humans (*ḥablum minannās*). This symbolism indicates that the tradition is not merely ceremonial but also serves as a vehicle for transmitting moral and theological values.¹⁴ Hence, *weh-wehan*

¹¹ Nikmatur Rosida and Bobby Rachman Santoso, “Variants Of Multicultural Da'wah: Ways Of Religion In Rural Communities In The Modern Era,” *Orasi: Jurnal Dakwah Dan Komunikasi* 14, no. 1 (2023): 70–89, <https://doi.org/10.24235/orasi.v14i1.13388.g5355>.

¹² Didik Rinan Sumekto et al., “Javanese Politeness Experience as Depicted in Its Speech Levels of the Transactional Communication,” *Jurnal Humaniora* 34, no. 1 (2022): 36, <https://doi.org/10.22146/jh.65058>.

¹³ Fitriyah Aini, “Kajian Etnomatematika Terhadap Tradisi Weh-Wehan Di Kecamatan Kaliwungu Kendal,” *Jurnal Pendidikan Matematika Raflesia* 06, no. 01 (2021): 50–59, <https://ejournal.unib.ac.id/index.php/jpmr>.

¹⁴ Modesta Amsikan, “The Role of Symbolism in Liturgical Rites: A Theological and Anthropological Perspective,” *The Journal of Academic Science* 2, no. 2 (2025): 695–703, <https://doi.org/10.59613/ces2qy04>.

functions as a bridge between religious ritual and the cultivation of spiritual awareness in daily life.

From an academic perspective, the practice can be examined through the *Living Qur'an* framework, which explores how Islamic teachings are embodied in social life.¹⁵ *Weh-wehan* represents the community's interpretation of the Prophet's birthday through concrete acts of sharing food, maintaining politeness, and strengthening social ties. This aligns with Talal Asad's concept of discursive tradition, where religious authority emerges not only from texts or scholars but also from lived practices negotiated within the community.¹⁶ The participation of children delivering food, adults preparing meals, and elders receiving visitors exemplifies intergenerational transmission of both religious and social values. In this sense, *weh-wehan* not only preserves Islamic teachings but also constructs a distinctly Javanese Muslim identity rooted in local wisdom.

The tradition of *weh-wehan* bears resemblance to the more widespread *slametan* ritual in Javanese culture. Both are grounded in ideas of food-sharing, solidarity, and social harmony.¹⁷ Yet while *slametan* is closely tied to life-cycle events such as birth, marriage, or death,¹⁸ *weh-wehan* is uniquely centered on the Prophet's birthday. This distinction suggests that the people of Kaliwungu negotiate their identity by foregrounding prophetic commemoration rather than cyclical social events. In doing so, *weh-wehan* assumes a more explicitly religious function while retaining its communal basis.

Comparisons with other *Maulid* celebrations across Indonesia further highlight its distinctive features. In Cikoang, South Sulawesi, the Prophet's birthday is celebrated through elaborate rituals involving decorated boats,¹⁹ while in Kaliwungu the practice remains intimate, confined to food exchanges among neighbors. This contrast reflects different cultural strategies: the Cikoang community emphasizes large-scale representation and public symbolism, whereas Kaliwungu prioritizes social intimacy and egalitarianism. Both,

¹⁵ Ahmad Rafiq, "Living Qur'an: Its Texts and Practices in the Functions of the Scripture Living Quran: Teks Dan Praktik Dalam Fungsi Kitab Suci," *Jurnal Studi Ilmu-Ilmu Al-Qur'an Dan Hadis* 22, no. 2 (2021): 2548–4737, <https://doi.org/10.14421/qh.2021.2202-10>.

¹⁶ Talal Asad, "The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam," *Archives de Sciences Sociales Des Religions* 180, no. 4 (2017): 117–37, <https://doi.org/10.4000/assr.29724>.

¹⁷ Hamdan Adib, "Potret Integrasi Islam Dan Budaya Nusantara Di Era Walisongo," *Risalah: Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Studi Islam* 7, no. 2 (2021): 239–51, https://doi.org/10.31943/jurnal_risalah.v7i2.179.

¹⁸ Mohammad Muafi Himam and Dina, "Islamic Review: Jurnal Riset Dan Kajian Keislaman Beyond The Kitchen: The Socio-Religious Authority of Women in Javanese Slametan," *Islamic Review: Jurnal Riset Dan Kajian Keislaman* 14, no. April (2025): 27–48, <https://doi.org/doi.org/10.35878/islamicreview.v14.i1.1578>.

¹⁹ Muhammad Adlin Sila, "The Festivity of Maulid Nabi in Cikoang, South Sulawesi: Between Remembering and Exaggerating the Spirit of the Prophet," *Studia Islamika*, 2001, <https://doi.org/10.15408/sdi.v8i3.680>.

however, stem from devotion to the Prophet Muhammad, shaped by local socio-cultural contexts.²⁰ Such variations illustrate the plural faces of Islam in the Indonesian archipelago, where religious expression is continuously negotiated through local traditions.²¹

Viewed through the lens of cultural hermeneutics, *weh-wehan* functions as a social text continually reinterpreted by its practitioners. The act of sharing food is not merely a reflection of generosity but a reaffirmation of collective Muslim Javanese identity built on mutual respect and solidarity. Unlike religious events organized formally by institutions, *weh-wehan* thrives organically through voluntary community participation. The egalitarian ethos embedded in this practice suggests that religiosity is cultivated not only through ritual obligations but also through collective awareness of harmonious coexistence. This is what sustains the tradition across generations, making it both spiritually and socially relevant to the community's needs.²²

The adaptability of *weh-wehan* is also evident in its accommodation of contemporary elements. Modern dishes such as noodles or meatballs are now included alongside traditional foods, showing that the practice evolves without losing its symbolic core of gratitude and devotion to the Prophet. This flexibility confirms Asad's view that Islamic traditions are not static but continuously renegotiated. By doing so, the community preserves continuity with its historical roots while embracing the dynamics of modern social life.

Taken together, *weh-wehan* embodies a negotiated cultural and spiritual identity. It preserves historical heritage linked to the Islamic Mataram dynasty and Kyai Asy'ari, while opening space for reinterpretation that resonates with contemporary realities. The values of solidarity, equality, and respect embedded within the tradition demonstrate that it is more than a food-sharing event; it is a collective strategy for nurturing togetherness. This explains why the tradition continues to thrive today: not simply as custom, but as a living forum where religious devotion and local culture converge across generations.

***Weh-wehan* as a Negotiated Form of Javanese Muslim Identity.**

The *weh-wehan* tradition in Kaliwungu is not merely an annual ritual but a cultural space where religiosity and local heritage intersect in meaningful ways. Clifford Geertz described Javanese rituals as "social texts" that are continuously

²⁰ M. Aqil Fahmi Sanjani, Basri Zain, and M Lutfi Mustofa, "Islam and Local Wisdom: Integration of Local Values in Islamic Thought," *Journal of Social Studies and Education* 2, no. 1 (2024): 27–43, <https://doi.org/10.61987/jsse.v2i1.567>.

²¹ Dewa Agung Gede Agung et al., "Local Wisdom as a Model of Interfaith Communication in Creating Religious Harmony in Indonesia," *Social Sciences and Humanities Open* 9, no. January (2024): 100827, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssaho.2024.100827>.

²² Lazarus Obed Livingstone Banda et al., "Preserving Cultural Heritage: A Community-Centric Approach to Safeguarding the Khulubvi Traditional Temple Malawi," *Heliyon* 10, no. 18 (2024): e37610, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2024.e37610>.

rewritten,²³ and *weh-wehan* fits well into this category. Through the exchange of food, the community reactivates collective memory of the Prophet Muhammad's birth while reinforcing social solidarity. Participation across generations demonstrates that this practice is more than symbolic; it is a lived experience that sustains communal values. In this sense, *weh-wehan* functions simultaneously as a medium of religious devotion and cultural continuity that remains relevant in a changing society.

The religious dimension forms the core of this practice and provides its enduring legitimacy. Celebrations coincide with the commemoration of the Prophet's birthday and are marked by collective prayers, recitations of *salawat*, and *dhikr*. Talal Asad's notion of discursive tradition helps to explain how Islam manifests through practices negotiated within the community.²⁴ Seen through this lens, *weh-wehan* is not a static custom but a dynamic interpretation of piety expressed socially and collectively. Vertical devotion to God is embodied in the horizontal act of sharing food with neighbors. This integration of spiritual and social dimensions allows religiosity to take root in everyday life rather than remain confined to ritual obligations.²⁵

Equally significant is the social value embedded in *weh-wehan*. Preparations and celebrations involve the entire community, carried out in the spirit of *gotong royong* -mutual cooperation- that Koentjaraningrat identified as the foundation of Indonesian culture.²⁶ Activities such as cooking, distributing, and exchanging food become occasions to strengthen social networks and reaffirm kinship bonds. The collective participation of different generations underscores that this tradition is a communal enterprise rather than an individual act of worship. Social interaction during the ritual also provides a space for exchanging stories, sharing experiences, and nurturing trust. Through this process, *weh-wehan* sustains harmony and demonstrates the social function of religion within local contexts.

Beyond its religious and social dimensions, *weh-wehan* also carries economic significance. In the days leading up to the celebration, demand for food ingredients, decorations, and traditional clothing increases, providing opportunities for local traders. James Scott's concept of the "moral economy" captures this phenomenon, where economic activities are embedded in ethical

²³ Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973).

²⁴ Asad, "The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam."

²⁵ Muhamad Ali, "Muslim Diversity: Islam and Local Tradition in Java and Sulawesi, Indonesia," *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies* 1, no. 1 (2011): 1–35, <https://doi.org/10.18326/ijims.v1i1.1-35>.

²⁶ James J. Fox, "KOENTJARANINGRAT MEMORIAL LECTURE: Koentjaraningrat's Legacy and Contemporary Anthropology in Indonesia," *Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology* 25, no. 1 (2024): 49–63, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14442213.2023.2284275>.

and communal frameworks.²⁷ In Kaliwungu, food distribution is not purely transactional but guided by values of solidarity and reciprocity. As a result, *weh-wehan* contributes to the resilience of local livelihoods while reinforcing collective bonds. The economic vitality generated by the ritual thus complements its spiritual and cultural functions.

Cultural symbolism enriches the practice further, particularly through cuisine and the arts. The triangular *sumpil* -a rice cake wrapped in bamboo leaves-carries theological meaning by representing the balance between human relations with God and with fellow beings. Geertz emphasized that cultural symbols serve as bridges of meaning, and in Kaliwungu, *sumpil*, gamelan music, and *hadrah* performances all serve as markers of identity. These elements transform the ritual into a celebration of both religious devotion and cultural heritage.²⁸ By sustaining these symbols, *weh-wehan* preserves the memory of the past while adapting it for present expression. This symbolic depth explains why the tradition resonates strongly with the local community.

The educational dimension of *weh-wehan* is equally important in transmitting values to younger generations. Children who deliver food to neighbors learn lessons of politeness, equality, and generosity through direct participation. Paulo Freire argued that authentic education arises from social praxis,²⁹ and *weh-wehan* exemplifies this principle in practice. Through repeated engagement, values are not only taught but embodied, shaping dispositions over time. Pierre Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* is useful here, as the ritual instills patterns of religious and social behavior that extend beyond the event itself.³⁰ This pedagogical role ensures that the tradition functions as a living school of cultural and spiritual values.

Ultimately, *weh-wehan* illustrates how Javanese Muslim identity is negotiated between tradition and modernity. The presence of modern dishes such as meatballs or noodles alongside traditional *sumpil* shows the community's creative adaptation to changing contexts. Homi Bhabha described this process as occurring in a "third space," where identity is constantly reconstituted through

²⁷ Melissa Beresford et al., "Moral Economies for Water: A Framework for Analyzing Norms of Justice, Economic Behavior, and Social Enforcement in the Contexts of Water Inequality," *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Water* 10, no. 2 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.1002/wat2.1627>.

²⁸ Simon Susen, "The Interpretation of Cultures: Geertz Is Still in Town," *Sociologica* 18, no. 1 (2024), <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.1971-8853/18664>.

²⁹ Maria Ceci Misoczky, "Paulo Freire and the Praxis of Liberation: Education, Organization and Ethics," *Management Learning* 55, no. 1 (2024): 124–40, <https://doi.org/10.1177/13505076231201734>.

³⁰ Alberta Adji, "Assalamualaikum Beijing Repackaged: Habitus, Symbolic Power and Indonesian Cultural Production," *Makara Human Behavior Studies in Asia* 23, no. 2 (2019): 161, <https://doi.org/10.7454/hubs.asia.1260619>.

dialogue between past and present.³¹ Compared with other Indonesian traditions such as the *slametan* or *Maudu Lompoa*, *weh-wehan* appears modest yet intimate, emphasizing egalitarianism and everyday solidarity. Its persistence reflects the community's ability to preserve heritage while embracing modern influences. For this reason, *weh-wehan* remains a vital cultural resource, one that binds people together through a convergence of faith, culture, and lived experience.

The Transformation of *Weh-wehan* in the Current of Modernity

The tradition of *weh-wehan* in Kaliwungu can be understood not merely as a local cultural practice but also as a social institution that plays a vital role in maintaining community integration. Talcott Parsons (1951), in *The Social System*, emphasizes that every social system depends on the functions of adaptation, goal attainment, integration, and latency (AGIL).³² Within this framework, *weh-wehan* fulfills the function of integration by reinforcing social cohesion through reciprocal exchange, and the function of pattern maintenance by transmitting values of solidarity and togetherness across generations. The continuity of this tradition demonstrates that the people of Kaliwungu possess stable social mechanisms to sustain systemic balance despite the pressures of modernity. Thus, *weh-wehan* is not merely a symbolic ritual but a structural element that supports the persistence of community life.

Modernization has brought significant changes to the material forms exchanged in the tradition, shifting from agricultural products and local foodstuffs to industrial and modern goods.³³ In Parsons's perspective, such changes reflect adaptation, the capacity of a social system to adjust to environmental transformations. As the community becomes increasingly connected to the global market, traditional food items are no longer the dominant symbols, replaced instead by packaged goods or modern commodities considered more practical and representative. Yet the latent function of *weh-wehan* as a unifying force remains intact, even within these new symbols aligned with contemporary patterns of consumption. This indicates that modernity does not erase the meaning of tradition; rather, it compels changes in form to ensure social relevance.

³¹ Abdullahi Dahiru Umar and Nuhu Lawan, "Critical Review of Postcolonial Theory of Homi Bhabha's Hybridity: A Study of 'The Location of Culture,'" *Middle East Research Journal of Linguistics and Literature* 4, no. 01 (2024): 15–19, <https://doi.org/10.36348/merjll.2024.v04i01.003>.

³² Richard Ormerod, "The History and Ideas of Sociological Functionalism: Talcott Parsons, Modern Sociological Theory, and the Relevance for OR," *Journal of the Operational Research Society* 71, no. 12 (2020): 1873–99, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01605682.2019.1640590>.

³³ Dandi, Andi Agustang, and A. Octamata Tenri Awaru, "Agricultural Modernization and Social Change in Farming Communities in Arokke Hamlet, Lili Riattang Village, Lappariaja District, Bone Regency," *HISTORICAL: Journal of History and Social Sciences* 2, no. 3 (2023): 129–41, <https://doi.org/10.58355/historical.v2i3.58>.

Anthony Giddens's (1990) analysis in *The Consequences of Modernity* helps to elucidate how *weh-wehan* undergoes symbolic transformation. Giddens describes modernity as characterized by processes of *disembedding*, where social practices are lifted out of their local contexts, and *reembedding*, where they are reintegrated into new frameworks.³⁴ In the case of *weh-wehan*, invitations that were once delivered face-to-face are now disseminated via digital platforms and social media, exemplifying *disembedding*. However, through *reembedding*, these practices are recontextualized as new forms of connectedness that preserve social solidarity. Thus, although modes of communication have shifted, the social functions of the tradition remain intact through reinterpretation. This illustrates that digital technology does not eliminate tradition but rather reshapes the way communities ascribe meaning to it.

Urbanization and shifting family structures present additional challenges to the continuity of *weh-wehan*. Parsons underscores the importance of pattern maintenance, which ensures the transmission of core values even amid structural change. As the nuclear family increasingly replaces the extended family, the frequency of *weh-wehan* risks decline due to limited time and mobility. Yet communities have responded by organizing the tradition in more structured and sometimes formalized ways, ensuring that the value of solidarity is preserved. This adaptation demonstrates that while modernity restricts traditional spaces of interaction, new mechanisms are developed to maintain cultural continuity. In this way, *weh-wehan* functions as a social institution that sustains collective identity despite the pressures of urbanization and social mobility.

From Giddens's perspective, this transformation can also be understood as part of the *reflexive project of the self*, whereby individuals and communities actively evaluate and select cultural practices deemed relevant. The people of Kaliwungu do not reproduce *weh-wehan* automatically; rather, they reflexively negotiate its forms and meanings to align with contemporary conditions. This reflexivity generates *cultural resilience*, ensuring that the tradition does not vanish but instead finds adaptive new expressions. Thus, *weh-wehan* exemplifies how local traditions can persist by negotiating with modernity while preserving their core social functions. The capacity for reflexivity highlights the community's agency in shaping cultural continuity.

Taken together, the transformation of *weh-wehan* reflects a productive dialectic between functionalist perspectives (Parsons) and the dynamics of modernity (Giddens). The tradition continues to integrate communities and maintain cultural patterns while simultaneously undergoing processes of disembedding and reembedding in response to modernization. Challenges such

³⁴ Zainal Abidin Achmad, "Anatomy of Structuration Theory and Ideology of the Third Way Anthony Giddens," *Jurnal Translitera* 9, no. 2 (2020): 45–62, <https://ejournal.unisablitar.ac.id/index.php/translitera/article/view/989>.

as consumerist shifts, digital communication, and urban mobility do not result in the disappearance of tradition but compel its reinvention. Consequently, *weh-wehan* should be regarded as a dynamic cultural heritage: it preserves elements of the past while also demonstrating the capacity of local communities to negotiate change. In academic terms, this tradition underscores that the relationship between tradition and modernity is not one of binary opposition but of dialectical interaction that enriches social continuity.

Conclusion

This study finds that the *weh-wehan* tradition in Kaliwungu embodies profound cultural and religious values, including solidarity, reverence for ancestors, and the preservation of local identity. The practice functions as both a medium of cultural transmission and a site of religious devotion, reinforcing communal bonds through food-sharing, ritual symbols, and intergenerational participation. Despite pressures from modernization, urbanization, and shifting family structures, *weh-wehan* demonstrates cultural resilience by adapting its forms—integrating modern commodities, digital communication, and structured organization—while retaining its core functions.

Beyond these analytical insights, the study carries practical implications. Cultural leaders and local governments can strengthen *weh-wehan* as an instrument of social cohesion and interfaith harmony by institutionalizing it through cultural festivals and educational programs. Integrating the values of reciprocity and togetherness into community-based education also provides a model for transmitting local wisdom to younger generations. Moreover, policymakers may draw lessons from *weh-wehan* as a framework for sustaining cultural heritage in the face of globalization, ensuring that local traditions remain relevant without losing their authenticity.

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