Tradition and Identity: a Study on Changes in Ritual Tradition to Honor the Deceased Spirits and It's Influence on the Changes in Local Cultural Identity

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ABSTRACT

This research focus is cultural life, the ritual tradition to honor the deceased spirits held by the community. This ritual tradition is called *tahlilan.* This research explores to uncover the process to accept community tradition to honor the deceased spirits. This research was conducted by a qualitative approach. The research data shows that before the *tahlilan* tradition was accepted by all villagers, community developed different traditions to honor the deceased spirits, namely *tahlilan* and *nyepaki.* In fact, they also developed different local cultural identities. The research results indicate that differences in traditions and local cultural identities likely originated from differences in residents' residential locations. Members of *wong njaba* community are also called *wong Loran* (people who live in northern part of village). Meanwhile, members of *wong njero* (and *wong mambu-mambu)* are also called *wong Kidulan* (people who live in southern part of village). Almost all villagers hold *tahlilan in* its development as the only ritual tradition to honor the deceased spirits. In turn, although it has not disappeared completely, identity of *wong njaba* and its supporting tradition, namely *nyepaki,* no longer appears on surface as before.

Key words : tradition, *tahlilan, nyepaki,* local cultural identity

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A.　INTRODUCTION:

This research was conducted in a village of East Java province, Indonesia. Specifically, the village administratively is within Jombang Regency, the birthplace of *Nahdlatul Ulama*. The village is flanked by two rivers, the Kali Centhing River flows at east of village, and Konto Wedok River flow at west of village.

The structure of village community in research location does not much differ from the structure that develops in Javanese villages. The structure of Javanese village society, according to Geertz and Geertz (1981), is generally under the joint influence of Islam and colonialism. Based on the cultural value system, Geertz (1960) said that Javanese society is classified into *santri, priyayi,* and *abangan*. However, this classification, according to Legge (in Muchtarom, 1988), have danger to confuse different categories, because in reality there are *santri-priyayi* or *abangan-priyayi.*The Javanese society is actually divided into two cultural parts, namely the *santri* group and *abangan* group*,* as McVey (1970) emphasized.

This study follows up Ridjal et al. (2019) which stated that santrinization has a spirit of egalitarianism. This santrinization relies on socialization of *tahlilan* tradition*.* Furthermore, Ridjal et al. (2021) revealed that successful socialization of *tahlilan* religious ritual tradition as a tradition to honor the deceased spirits is supported by authority relations. Alternatively, success of socialization of *tahlilan* ritual tradition is likely related to differences in social status between village groups.

The santrinization in this village prioritizes the socialization of *tahlilan tradition.* The residents of this research location had different local cultural identity backgrounds before this ritual tradition was fully accepted. Initially, this local cultural identity was related to kinship relations, ritual traditions of respect for the deceased spirits, and location of residents' residences. In other words, this local cultural identity shows the circle from where the individuals come, related to their residence or location, and ritual traditions developed to honor the spirits. There are three groups of local cultural identities, namely *wong njero, wong mambu-mambu* and *wong njaba.*

The *wong njero* is an identity symbol for members of village cleric's family and is considered a descendant of village's founder. Those from the *wong mambu-mambu* (people belonging to the *wong mambu-mambu)* consider themselves related to the *wong njero.* Meanwhile, those from the *wong njaba (*people belonging to the wong njaba*)* consider themselves not directly related to the other two groups, especially the *wong njero.*

There are differences in traditional ritual ceremonies to honor the deceased spirits. Among the *wong njero,* the ritual to pray the deceased spirit is called *tahlilan.* Among the *wong mambu-mambu,*due to their kinship with the *wong njero,* the traditions they have developed are not significantly different. Meanwhile, some members of *wong njaba* have developed a tradition to honor the departed through *nyepaki.*

In terms of residential location, members of *wong njaba* community initially occupied locations in northern part of village, so they are also called *wong Loran* (people who live in North). Meanwhile, members of *wong njero* (and *wong mambu-mambu)* live in the southern part of village and are also called *wong Kidulan* (people who live in South). These differences in residential location likely support the emergence of different traditions of rituals to honor the deceased spirits. Some members of *Wong Njaba* or *Wong Loran* community developed the *nyepaki* tradition. While the *wong njero* or *Wong Kidulan* community developed the *tahlilan* tradition.

The *santri* movement continue to progress, This village is known as a santri village. The emergence of santri village identity took place through various efforts, one of which was the socialization of *tahlilan* tradition. As the *tahlilan* tradition *became accepted* by almost all villagers, question arises: why did the local cultural identity of *wong njaba* and its supporting traditions cease to emerge?

B. FRAMEWORK OF THINKING

Habitat or social environmental is a condition where individuals as members of society live daily, or refers to the physical environment where an organism or group of humans lives (Clements and Shelford, 1939). Habitat conditions can influence habits, namely actions or habits that are carried out repeatedly, often without full awareness or a series of actions that are repeated by a person for the same thing and occur without a thinking process (Siagian, 2015). Aarts et al. (1997) added that habits are the result of automatic cognitive processes, developed through extensive repetition, well learned and it do not require conscious effort. Habits can be the rhythm of life or patterns of behavior and actions of individuals as members of society in their daily lives. The relationship between habitat and emergence of habits is not direct, but through the mediation of cognition within individuals. The emergence of habits depends on their thoughts about the habitat, or certain value orientations that are dominant in their daily lives, or a kind of habitus (borrowing the term from Pierre Bourdieu).

Habitus was a system of dispositions embedded in an individual that is formed through social experiences and interactions, which includes ways of thinking, feeling, acting, and assessing the social world (Pierre Bourdieu, 1992, 1994). Furthermore, Bourdeau (2000) added that habitus consists of hexis, a person's demeanor (posture) and speech (accent), and mental habits of perception, classification, appreciation, feeling, and action. In other words, habitus influences a person's perceptions, preferences, and actions, and helping to shape their social identity. The cognitive and emotional structures formed from social experiences will form the basis of a person's actions. It is the way society is embedded in a person, influencing how a person sees the world, makes choices, and interacts with others. The system of tendencies formed through social and environmental experiences can shape how an individual thinks, acts, and feels. It is an internalization of social structures and influences how a person sees the world, makes decisions, and behaves in social interactions.

There is difference between the three. Habitat is a place, habitus is an internal disposition, and habit is a repeated action. The three are interrelated and influence human life in society. The relationship between habitat, habit and habitus shows a mutually influencing relationship. Such a relationship was identical to that described by Bandura (1977) and Schunk, (2012) who call it an interlocking determinant. Thompson, et al. (1990) termed such a relationship as compatibility conditions, or each is related to mutually reinforcing. In other words, changes in one component are likely to affect changes in other components.

Related to this research, tradition and cultural identity are dialectically related (Ridjal, 2004). Green (1997) stated that tradition is a system of beliefs or behaviors (including customs) inherited within a group of people or society with symbolic or special meanings originating from the past. Tradition is an integral part of cultural identity. Tradition shapes the cultural identity and influences individual and collective values and beliefs. Through tradition, local communities can preserve ancestral heritage.

Cultural traditions and identity are important, interrelated concepts. Soekanto (1993) added that recurring traditions were not accidental or intentional. Meanwhile, cultural identity is an individual's or group's comprehension of themselves, influenced by cultural traditions and values. Tradition and identity have a dialectical relationship, meaning they influence each other and are formed through a dynamic process of interaction. Furthermore, Kleden (1986) stated that by relying on tradition and integration, a culture will maintain its identity and ensure its survival. Tradition, as a cultural heritage, shapes individual and group identities, while the identities held by individuals and groups also play a role in preserving and transforming traditions. Thus, changes in identity will change tradition, and conversely, changes in tradition are likely to change identity. This is in line with the view of Usborne and Sablonniere (2014) that cultural identity is a fluid process that continues to develop within discourse of social, cultural, and historical experiences.

C. RESEARCH METHODS

Following the views of Miles et al. (2014), Tracy (2013), and Yin (2011), this study uses a qualitative approach. Ridjal (2003) stated this type of study aims to explore or build a proposition or explain meaning of a reality. Through the self-intersubjective method, meaning of social phenomena is emphasized. Intersubjectivity is a concept that refers to shared comprehension, shared experiences, or mutual comprehension between individuals, especially in context of social interaction. It is not only about two or more people sharing the same experience, but also about how they influence each other, interact, and build shared meaning. Thomas Scheff (2015) defined *intersubjectivity* as the sharing of subjective states by two or more individuals. Furthermore, Seale (1998) added that *intersubjectivity* has also been used to refer to the shared, common-sense , and mutually understood meanings that people construct in their interactions with one another and use as everyday resources to interpret the meaning of elements of social and cultural life. If people share the same common sense, then they also share the same definition of a situation.

Ridjal (2003) reminded us that objective conditions of socio-cultural life as the object of this study cannot be ignored. Anderson and Jack's (1991) stated that nature and level of a community are largely about individual definition. Therefore, Anderson and Jack's views are also taken into account in this study. Thus, representative units of study that are emphasized in data collection here are the comprehension or meaning of individuals as members of society, namely their comprehension of village history journey, although the village history more emphasizes on oral history *(*Ritchie, 2004).

This study collects data by close attention to the application of congruence and consistency techniques in field. Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Merriam (1996) stated that congruence refers to the internal validity of data and consistency or dependability for data reliability. Therefore, data collection process involves a number of informants. The collected data were then interpreted by considering the comprehension of these informants.

Based on suggestions from Lincoln, Guba, and Merriam above, to achieve a high level of consistency and congruence, researcher followed the direction of Adler and Adler (1994) to use various data collection techniques from various sources, be involved in study location situation, use a multiple observers strategy, and conduct data relevance tests through discussions with colleagues. Meanwhile, data analysis model developed in this study is through the stages of flow model from Miles and Huberman (1994). stages of flow model are data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and data verification which run simultaneously, or take place simultaneously with the data collection process.

D. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This research was conducted at a village in Jombang Regency, East Java. In other words, this research location is synonymous with the term habitat. Clements and Shelford (1939) and Krausman and Morrison (2016) stated that habitat was the physical environment surrounding a species, population, group of species, or community. Therefore, habitat provides information about the series of observed events experienced by individual members of community. Habitat is an event occurred before the emergence of individual behavior or emotions, or is called a habit. Rosenthal (2011) stated that habit formation was the process where behavior becomes automatic. Alternatively, habit formation is the process where an action becomes unintentional (Yamada and Toda, 2023). Goal-directed behavior is controlled by its consequences, while habits are generated by a situation, not its consequences. Thus, habitat is not the cause of habit formation, but its emergence precedes habit.

The relationship between habitat and emergence of habits highly depends on cognitive mediation system. Habit is a product of human thinking about its habitat, or the meaning individuals give to the information available in habitat, where the study is called, borrowing a term from Bourdieu (1994), as habitus. How individuals think about the situation and conditions of their habitat based on their value orientations greatly determines the form of their reaction towards the habitat, or their habits within habitat. Therefore, level of change stems from the specific value orientations that develop within individuals. Changes in value orientations within individuals (habitus) will influence how they interpret the information available in habitat. These changes in turn can result in changes in habits, where in this study is their involvement in ritual tradition to honor the deceased, vice versa.

In relation to this research, tradition and identity are dialectically related, meaning they influence each other and are formed through a dynamic process of interaction. Tradition, as a cultural heritage, shapes individual and group identities, while individual and group identities also play a role in preserving and transforming traditions. Through tradition, important lessons, skills, and values are passed down from one generation to the next. This ensures the continuity of cultural knowledge and helps instill a sense of responsibility to preserve and build on legacy of previous generations. Traditions, both established and emerging, create a sense of continuity that connects individuals to their past, present, and future. This can be a source of strength, pride, and a deeper comprehension of one's place within broader human experience.

Traditions that endure over time include religious practices, social customs, family rituals, storytelling, artistic expression, and culinary practices. These traditions may differ across cultures and communities, but they all serve to connect individuals to their heritage and provide a sense of belonging. This study examined traditions related to rituals to honor the deceased spirits. Such ritual traditions developed in this research location are *tahlilan* and *nyepaki*. The emergence of highly varied religious expressions (in form of traditions) was an indication of dialectic phenomenon of religion and culture (Susanti and Rumondor, 2022). Furthermore, Effendi (2009) added that a tradition is useful to demonstrate the philosophical meaning of moral values that connect one person to another, containing deep spiritual elements.

Relying on tradition and integration will maintain a culture's identity and ensure its survival (Kleden, 1986). Tradition acts as a bridge to the past, allowing individuals to connect with the experiences, values, and knowledge of their ancestors. This connection can be a source of comfort, stability, and a sense of belonging. Although rooted in past, traditions are not static. They often adapt and evolve over time to remain relevant and meaningful in a constantly changing social context. This dynamic nature of tradition ensures that it continues to function as a living force in society.

Tradition plays an important role to shape individual and collective identity. Tradition defines what is considered important, meaningful, and worthy to preserve in a community, contributing to the richness and diversity of cultural expressions. Lecours (2000) stated that cultural identity was seen as a fundamental element that naturally shapes the identity of individuals and groups. Wan and Chew (2013) added that cultural identity develops through the stages of culture recognition, believing in its part, and building social relationships. Furthermore, Paleczny (2008) added that identity serves as a link between individuals and social and cultural environment where they exist.

At the early days of village's founding, there were differences in residential locations between the wong *njaba* and wong *njero*. Members of *wong njaba* community initially occupied locations in northern part of village, thus being referred to as *wong Loran*. Meanwhile, members of *wong njero* (and *wong mambu-mambu*) community lived in southern part of village and were referred to as *wong Kidulan*. These residential locations likely supported differences in ritual traditions to honor the deceased spirits. Some members of *Wong Njaba* or *Wong Loran* developed the *nyepaki* tradition, while *wong njero* or *Wong Kidulan* developed the *tahlilan* tradition. The relationship between residential location and cultural identity is very close. The residential location, as a place to live and a symbol, reflects and shaping the cultural identity of a community group. Housing can be a representation of values, customs, and lifestyle of community. Fisher (in Ernawati, 2014) stated that concept of place identity basically examines the relationship between "who we are" and "where we are", and "how our local environment (including geographical location, cultural traditions, cultural heritage, and so on) influences our lives".

Franco-Zamudio and Dorton (2014) stated that identity was a collection of qualities, beliefs, personality traits, and appearances that characterize a person or group. According to Peter Burke (2020) "Identity tells us who we are and announces to others who we are." Stuart Hall (1992) suggested to treat identity as a process to account for the diverse and ever-changing reality of social experience. Furthermore, Hall (1996) emphasized that identity is constructed or formed through shared origins within a community. This means that identity is not something given or even innate, but rather something that is continuously shaped through shared experiences, values, and narratives believed in within community. Furthermore, Relph (in Siregar et al., 2022) stated that place identity can bind the subject to the environment where he or she is located. Therefore, Usborne and Sablonniere (2014) added that cultural identity was a changing process and continues to develop in discourse of social, cultural, and historical experiences.

Studies on residential location and cultural identity show that residential location can reflect an individual's or group are cultural identity. Housing is not only a place to live, but also a manifestation of shared values, beliefs, and lifestyles. Residential space reflects a particular cultural identity, as well as how the interaction between residents and residential environment shapes or reinforces that identity. Cultural identity is an individual's awareness on the cultural characteristics in their group. It encompasses inherited values, beliefs, practices, and symbols to shape an individual's sense of belonging to the group. Cultural identity can also be defined as a sense of belonging to a group, often driven by shared birthplace, traditions, practices, and beliefs. Cultural identity is formed through shared characteristics such as language, traditions, beliefs, values, and norms that are passed down from generation to generation. Cultural identity plays a vital role in shaping how people perceive themselves and world around them.

Muliadi and Ilham (2020) emphasized the link between tradition and identity by stating that each individual's behavior or character is influenced by the characteristics of an identity. In turn, concept of social identity carries the same meaning as the concept of ethnic identity, namely, referring to all aspects of ethnic issues, such as beliefs, knowledge, culture, religion, language, and inherited customs (Aniek Rahmaniah, 2012).

Tradition can be understood as the past survival (Williams,1977). In other words, tradition is a collection of beliefs, customs, and practices passed down from generation to generation that continue to be

relevant and influential today. Tradition provides a sense of continuity, connects individuals to their cultural heritage, and shapes their comprehension of identity and belonging. The rural community of this research location has a ritual tradition to honor the deceased from their ancestral heritage in form of *tahlilan* and nyepaki. This society is characterized by an orientation towards the past (Langlois, 2001), not the future, with a dominant role in customs and habits. It is considered to have a strong collective memory supported by rituals (Beck et al., 1994), and has social guardians who ensure the continuity of communal practices. The guardians of *tahlilan* tradition in community come from the *wong njero* community and *nyepaki* tradition come from *wong njaba* community.

Tahlilan is a form of ancestral to honor tradition, also known as a collective thanksgiving (involving neighbors and relatives) to commemorate the death anniversary of a deceased family member. This tradition involves reciting verses from the Qur'an,*shalawat* (pray for prophet safety), *tahlil*, *tasbih, tahmid,* and performing Islamic prayers in congregation, and the rewards bestowed upon the deceased. The involvement of individual members of community in this *tahlilan* tradition builds collectivity and illustrates how strong people are bound together. On one hand, even though there are different and separate individuals, they have a common reason to stay together. They would stay together despite a sense of unity and connection. On other hand, they have a sense of connected identity, a deeper and more personal connection each others. They spend more time together and have stable relationships. In fact, the bond and caring in *tahlilan* tradition is not limited to life, but continues until death. Douglas (1978) and Thompson et al. (1990) stated this situation illustrates a strong group dimension.

The *nyepaki* ritual is performed individually, without involving other members of community. This tradition serves food and drink to the deceased spirit. Typically, this consists of a cup of water (or tea or coffee, depending on spirit's preferences while alive) and traditional snacks (pastries). These offerings are usually served at home of deceased's family. Performed individually, the *nyepaki* tradition does not support the building of collectivity.

Hall et al (2003) illustrated that role of ritual facilitates the change as well as continuity. Thus, process of identity construction is related to the background of developed traditions, vice versa and also its changes. Tradition of *tahlilan* initially was identical with *wong njero* and tradition of *nyepaki* was identical with some circles of *wong njaba.* The member of *wong njero* and *wong njaba* circles along with their supporting ritual traditions have built a local sub-cultural identity. This cultural identity may be the result of various conditions including: location, gender, race, history, nationality, religious beliefs, ethnicity, aesthetics, language, sexuality, and food (Siebenhütter, 2023).

The survival of a tradition as a survivor of past depends heavily on enculturation or socialization. Enculturation is not merely the inheritance of culture, but also the active process of learning and internalizing the values, norms, and behaviors that apply within a culture. This is a lifelong process of cultural learning, starting in family environment and extending to the wider society. The tradition survival as a preserved past depends heavily on socialization. Therefore, socialization of traditions is important to build cultural identity.

Ridjal et al (2022) stated that community at research location initially had a ritual tradition to honor the deceased spirits in form of *tahlilan* and *nyepaki.* In its development, enculturation or socialization of *tahlilan* became more effective because it was held collectively, differ with *nyepaki* which was only carried out personally or individually. In addition, socialization of *tahlilan tradition* was initially carried out by members of *wong njero* circle. The results of study by Ridjal et al (2023) showed that based on social stratification pattern in the research location village, members of *wong njero* occupied a higher social status than *wong njaba*. This was also supported by the ascribed status of *wong njero* due to their connection to the descendants of village founders.

Therefore, socialization of *tahlilan tradition* becomes more effective because it is supported by power relations, in this case the existence of differences in social status. Bottero (2005) stated that, ".…, power, or influence gives those who have it greater control over external forces that affect us all, and open doors that might otherwise be closed". Williams (1977) stated that tradition in practice is actually an expression of restrictions and pressures that are hegemonic and dominant. Ridjal (2004) who cited Witton's opinion (1986) stated that hegemonic ideology was a system of ideas that dominates the thinking patterns of society, but originates from, and benefits the upper classes of society.

The identity symbol construction of *santri* village is inseparable from the thought patterns socialized by the *wong njero*. Based on oral history of village's founding, members of *wong njero* community have declared themselves to become *santri.* In addition, their community has controlled most of values that are highly valued in society, especially education and mastery of Islamic religious knowledge. Referring to Weber's view (in Sanderson, 1995 and Ritzer, 2011), this element was one dimensions of social stratification system in society. Thus, *wong njero* occupy a high position in social stratification system of village society. Therefore, they have the power to determine the local cultural identity of Sumberarum as a *santri* village.

One priority strategy is through the socialization of *tahlilan* as a ritual tradition to honor the spirits, in addition to other supporting activities such as: religious studies, teaching to read the Qur'an, and so on. The socialization of this tradition is prioritized because the *tahlilan* rituals tradition is full with spiritual, religious and collectivity nuances. Ridjal et al. (2024) showed that *santrinisasi* in this village relies on its ritual traditions, one of which is the *tahlilan* tradition. In its development, reality in field shows that almost all villagers, including residents of *wong njaba* class, hold *tahlilan* as the only ritual tradition to honor the deceased spirits. With the acceptance of *tahlilan, nyepaki* ritual tradition is no longer practiced by villagers, especially among the *wong njaba* class. In turn, although not completely lost, identity term *wong njaba* no longer surfaced as before, or as it did in past. This is in line with the view of Assmann and Czaplicka (1995) that a person's identity was formed through a process of socialization and traditions that support the preservation of cultural identity from one generation to the next. Moreover, as stated by Cohen (1993), identity also plays a role in shaping norms and behaviors that are considered appropriate within a culture.

E. CONCLUSION

The residence location or the social environment where individuals as members of society live daily is not only a physical environment, but also includes social and cultural aspects to shape the life of a group. This can become a reflection of a person's or groups cultural identity, as well as a representation of values, customs, and lifestyle of a community group. This condition influences actions or habits carried out repeatedly, which can become the rhythm of community members life in their daily lives. Such conditions, in turn, will build a tradition, namely a behavior pattern, beliefs, or practices that are passed down from generation to generation in a society or group. Traditions often have important symbolic meanings or cultural values.

Traditions are an integral part of cultural identity. They shape cultural identity and foster community cohesion. Traditions also influence individual and collective values and beliefs. Therefore, cultural traditions and identity are important, interrelated concepts. Cultural traditions are forms of behavior that are inherited and repeated within a community, while cultural identity is an individual's or group's comprehension of themselves, influenced by cultural traditions and values.

The practice of *tahlilan* tradition initially was held by members of wong njero (and wong mambu-mambu) community who lived in southern part of village or wong Kidulan. Meanwhile, nyepaki tradition was carried out by several members of wong njaba who lived in northern part of village or wong Loran. However, in its development, identity of wong njaba no longer emerged as they abandoned the nyepaki tradition and replaced it with the *tahlilan* tradition. Tradition and identity have a dialectical relationship, meaning that both influence each other and formed through a dynamic interaction process. Tradition, as a cultural heritage, shapes individual and group identities, while the identities held by individuals and groups also play a role to preserve and changing traditions. Thus, changes in tradition have a significant influence on changes in local cultural identity.

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Glossary

Tahlilan :   *The* ritual tradition to honor the deceased spirits

Nyepaki :   (Preparing the offering for the deceased spirit)

Wong njero: *People who have blood relationship with the village founder, or* people belonging to the *kyai* kindship

Kyai :   Islamic religion leader.

Wong mambu-mambu: Wong njaba who become family member of *wong njero*

wong njaba: indigenous people outside the *wong jero* circle

Wong Kidulan: People who live in southern part of village.

wong Loran :   People who live in northern part of village

Nahdlatul Ulama: The largest Islamic organization in Indonesia.

Santri: Islamic boarding student.

Priyayi: Nobleman

Abangan: Combination of *santri* and *priyayi*

Tahlil: words of God oneness

Tasbih: words of God hollyness

Tahmid: words of God gratitude

Shalawat: pray for prophet safety