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Traditional Performing Arts and Islamization: Ricklefs' Framework Amid Historical Discontinuity in Sleman, Yogyakarta

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Abstract

This research aims to explore the portrayal of Javanese traditional performing arts within Merle Calvin Ricklefs' work on the history of Islamization in Java, recognized as one of the most comprehensive historical accounts on this subject. Ricklefs' trilogy includes "Mystic Synthesis in Java: A History of Islamization from the Fourteenth to the Early Nineteenth Centuries" (2006), "Polarising Javanese Society: Islamic and Other Visions, C. 1830-1930" (2007), and "Islamisation and Its Opponents in Java: A Political, Social, Cultural, and Religious History, C. 1930 to Present" (2012). The arts are an integral part of spiritual life within Islam, flourishing among Muslim societies worldwide, including among the Javanese. One form of the arts is the performing arts, encompassing music, dance, and theater. Studies on this form of art are a crucial means of uncovering the multifaceted dynamics of Javanese society. This research employed the Foucauldian concept of historical discontinuity, utilizing content analysis as the methodological approach. This research argues that Javanese society's articulation of its arts and performances, as seen through the historical discourse of Islamization, demonstrates a dynamic evolution. Whilst continuously reinterpreting the idea of Java. To contextualize the historical account, this research examines the empirical findings among PASER (Paguyuban Seni Relijius), a performing arts group organization based in Sleman, Yogyakarta.

Keywords: Arts, Discontinuity, Islam, Java, Performances

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I. INTRODUCTION

Throughout history, Islam in Java has been closely intertwined with traditional performing arts. These various forms of artistic expression are integral to human culture, including among Muslims. Despite ongoing debates within Islamic law regarding the permissibility of arts, including performing arts, these creative expressions have thrived throughout Islamic civilization.[1] They represent essential avenues of aesthetic expression that have also become integral to the lives of Javanese Muslims to varying degrees.

In Islam, a diverse array of artistic expressions thrives not just as a cultural facet but also as manifestations of inner spiritual depth, as highlighted by Nasr. He characterized Islamic art as originating from inspiration rooted in Muhammadan blessings and guided by wisdom found within the inner depths of the Noble Quran.[2] Al Faruqi similarly affirmed that Islamic arts can be appropriately labeled as Qur'anic arts.[3] Islamic civilization fosters artists and their artworks that celebrate the greatness and holiness of the Divine.[4]

Performing arts, also known as '*seni pertunjukan*' in Indonesian, constitute a fundamental category of artistic expression. Alongside the visual arts, media arts, and literary arts, the performing arts encompass a diverse range of forms, including music, dance, theater, and opera.[5] Within the Javanese Muslim community, a rich tradition of performing arts exists that incorporates Islamic themes and motifs.[6] These artistic expressions not only celebrate cultural heritage but also are vital means of conveying spiritual and moral values within the community.

This research aims to explore the account of Javanese traditional performing arts within the influential historical analysis of Islam in Java by Merle Calvin Ricklefs. His work is presented in three key books: *Mystic Synthesis in Java: A History of Islamization from the Fourteenth to the Early Nineteenth Centuries* (2006), *Polarising Javanese Society: Islamic and Other Visions, circa 1830-1930* (2007), and *Islamisation and Its Opponents in Java: A Political, Social, Cultural, and Religious History, circa 1930 to Present* (2012). In the preface of the final volume, Ricklefs himself refers to this trilogy as a series focused on the history of Islamization among the Javanese people.[7] Studying the performing arts is valuable for understanding and influencing the world, as they often serve as significant catalysts for social change.[8]

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[1] Lois Ibsen al Faruqi, 'Music, Musicians and Muslim Law', *Asian Music* 17, no. 1 (1985): 27.

[2] Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Islamic Art and Spirituality* (State University of New York Press, 1987), 13.

[3] Isma'il R. Al-Faruqi and Lois Ibsen Al Faruqi, *Cultural Atlas of Islam* (Macmillan, 1986), 180.

[4] Saifullah and Febri Yulika, *Sejarah Perkembangan Seni Dan Kesenian Dalam Islam (Seri Kesenian Islam Jilid 1)* (ISI Padangpanjang Press, 2013), 8.

[5] Kevin F. McCarthy et al., *The Performing Arts in a New Era* (Rand, 2021).

[6] Kuntowijoyo et al., *Tema Islam Dalam Pertunjukan Rakyat Jawa: Kajian Aspek Sosial, Keagamaan, Dan Kesenian* (Departemen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, Direktorat Jenderal Kebudayaan, Proyek Penelitian dan Pengkajian Kebudayaan Nusantara (Javanologi), 1987).

[7] Merle C. Ricklefs, *Islamisation and Its Opponents in Java: A Political, Social, Cultural and Religious History, c. 1930 to the Present* (NUS Press, 2012), xviii.

[8] John Blacking, 'Introduction', in *The Performing Arts: Music and Dance*, ed. Joann W. Kealiinohomoku (Mouton Publishers, 1979), xxi.

Therefore, analyzing the role of performing arts in the history of Islamization in Java can enhance our understanding of social transformations within Javanese Muslim societies.

Regarding Javanese traditional performing arts, much research has focused on specific types of Islamic-themed forms of art rather than approaching them comprehensively from a historical perspective. Some analyses of Ricklefs' work on the history of Islamization in Java exist, but they do not specifically address traditional performing arts. For example, Yusuf's study emphasizes historical validity and completeness,[9] while Faruk explores the concept of metaphysical anthropology.[10] Moreover, both studies primarily draw on the final volume of Ricklefs' trilogy.

To contextualize the findings from Ricklefs's trilogy, this research also examines field data from the PASER community in Sleman, Special Region of Yogyakarta. PASER, an acronym for *Paguyuban Seni Religius* (Community of Religious Arts), is the largest organization for religious performing arts groups in the Sleman Regency. Most of its members are from Islamic groups, although there are also non-Islamic performing arts groups. By choosing PASER as the object of contextualization, this research aims to explore how Ricklefs's historical account aligns with the empirical findings in a specific place and time.

This research is conducted within the Foucauldian theoretical framework of discontinuity, which involves concepts such as threshold, rupture, break, mutation, and transformation. Discontinuity is a crucial aspect in the exploration of the history of thought, knowledge, or philosophy. According to Foucault, historical practice previously involved collecting monuments to transform them into documents, whereas contemporary historical practice operates in the opposite direction: collecting documents to transform them into monuments. For him, contemporary history encompasses a multitude of elements that must be grouped, made relevant, and placed in relation to one another to form totalities.[11]

To explore the concept of discontinuity, this research employs qualitative content analysis. This method can be applied to various forms of communication, including textual sources, to identify categories relevant to the research question.[12] It involves classifying text based on similar meanings, encompassing both precise definitions and connotations.[13] In this study, text classification involves examining all texts related to the concept of Javanese traditional performing arts. The other method employed here is documentation and interviews, which are used to correlate findings in the texts with reality within the society.

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[9] Choirul Fuad Yusuf, 'Islamisasi Di Jawa: Kritik Atas Islamisation and Its Opponents in Java, Karya Ricklefs', *Jurnal Lektur Keagamaan* 12, no. 2 (2014): 441–64.

[10] Ahmad Faruk, 'Manusia Jawa Dalam Islamisasi Jawa Refleksi Filsafat Antropologi Metafisik Terhadap Temuan Ricklefs', *Kodifikasia* 10, no. 1 (2016): 133–61.

[11] Michel Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge* (Pantheon Books, 1972), 5–7.

[12] Udo Kuckartz and Stefan Rädiker, *Qualitative Content Analysis: Methods, Practice and Software* (SAGE, 2023), 21.

[13] Robert Philip Weber, *Basic Content Analysis*, Second Edition (SAGE, 1990), 12.

II. RICKLEFS' HISTORICAL ACCOUNT OF ISLAM IN JAVA AND THE NOTION OF PERFORMING ARTS

Java has been a center of Islamic civilization, marked by the emergence of the Sultanate of Demak in the late 15th century AD. According to Pigeaud and de Graaf, this sultanate had a background involving Muslims of Chinese origin.[14] Another account suggests that in the early part of that century, Chinese Muslims were present in Semarang, a port city in central Java near Demak.[15] Since then, alongside various societies in Southeast Asia, the predominantly Muslim Javanese have constituted an Islamic sphere extending far eastward from its origins in Arabia.

The Javanese are inhabitants residing in the regions of central and east Java, which are considered their place of origin. Accordingly, according to cultural consensuses, people from the western part of Java are not typically classified as Javanese; the term "Java" predominantly refers to the geographical area inhabited by the Javanese. Therefore, the term "Islam in Java" technically refers to Islam in the land occupied by the Javanese, rather than Islam across the entire island of Java.

Some scholars have conducted research on Islam in Java from various perspectives. Geertz was among the early scholars who provided a comprehensive description of Islam among the Javanese in Mojokuto, East Java, during the 1950s, the first decade of Indonesian independence under its first president.[16] In contrast, during the New Order under the Suharto regime, which began in 1979, Woodward conducted research on Islam in the vicinity of the Sultanate of Yogyakarta.[17] Echoing Geertz, Beatty conducted ethnography among Javanese Muslims in Banyuwangi, East Java, during the final decade of the Indonesian New Order.[18] Healey, focusing on the area of the Sultanate of Surakarta, depicted the practice of Islam among the Javanese, beginning with ethnographic work as early as 1973 and continuing into the Reformation Era of the early 2000s following the fall of the New Order.[19]

There are various perspectives on the examples mentioned earlier, as well as on the other studies that explore Islam in Java, not discussed here. However, these works are primarily ethnographies that focus on specific locations within Javanese society, spanning periods ranging from a few years to several decades. In contrast, Ricklefs' historical approach differs significantly, encompassing diverse aspects of Javanese life and spanning centuries up to the first decade of the new millennium. His influential work is distinguished by its wealth of references, observations, and interviews, making a

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[14] Theodore Gauthier Th Pigeaud and H. J. de Graaf, *Islamic States in Java 1500–1700: Eight Dutch Books and Articles by Dr H.J. de Graaf* (Martinus Nijhoff, 1979), 7.

[15] Slamet Muljana, *Runtuhnya Kerajaan Hindu-Jawa Dan Timbulnya Negara-Negara Islam Di Nusantara* (LKiS, 2005), 61.

[16] Clifford Geertz, *The Religion of Java* (The Free Press, 1960).

[17] Mark R. Woodward, *Islam in Java: Normative Piety and Mysticism in the Sultanate of Yogyakarta* (University of Arizona Press, 1989).

[18] Andrew Beatty, *Varieties of Javanese Religion: An Anthropological Account* (Cambridge University Press, 1999).

[19] Stephen C. Headley, *Durga's Mosque: Cosmology, Conversion and Community in Central Javanese Islam* (ISEAS Publications, 2004).

substantial contribution to the wide range of discourses within research on Islam in Java.[20]

Ricklefs explored the Islamization of Java from the 14th century AD to the 1930s in his first two books of the trilogy: *Mystic Synthesis in Java: A History of Islamization from the Fourteenth to the Early Nineteenth Centuries* (2006) and *Polarising Javanese Society: Islamic and Other Visions, circa 1830-1930* (2007). He began by examining gravestones in Tralaya and Trowulan, East Java, which bear Arab-Islamic inscriptions alongside Hindu Majapahit Kingdom symbols dating back to the 14th century AD. Ricklefs chose not to delve deeply into the Islamic gravestone of Leran from the 11th century AD, noting that it does not belong to a local Muslim.

After discussing the early arrival of Muslims in Java, Ricklefs unfortunately omitted the earlier local Islamic dynasties and proceeded directly to elaborate on the 17th-century AD Mataram Sultanate's Sultan Agung. Yet, from Rickles' perspective on Javanese society, it appears that the notion of traditional Javanese performing arts was not prominent until the time of the Yogyakarta Sultanate. This sultanate, along with the Surakarta Sultanate, is the successor of the Mataram Sultanate, resulting from its division into two following the *Giyanti* Treaty in 1755.

Rickles, in his first book, mentions that traditional Javanese performing arts are associated with dance, *wayang,* and *gamelan*. *Wayang* involves puppetry, primarily using leather puppets played by a *dhalang* or puppeteer, accompanied by a *gamelan* orchestra comprising musicians and singers. *Gamelan* refers to the metallophone instruments used to accompany *wayang*, as well as various dance, theatrical, and vocal performances. It can also be performed independently for musical purposes.

In the late 18th century AD, Mangkubumi, also known as Hamengkubuwana I, the first ruler of the Yogyakarta Sultanate, was reportedly fond of *wayang* and dance after his nightly religious services.[21] His successor, Hamengkubuwana II, who reigned from the late 18th to the early 19th century AD, was responsible for the writing of the *Serat Surya Raja*. This literary work features a fictional account of a court festival involving dance and *wayang* performances held before an army departed for a holy war against infidels.[22] Additionally, *serat* is a literary work often written by royal artists who can write about reality metaphorically; this writing ability is achieved by combining the literary capacity and the depth of the writer's spirituality.

In 1757, a treaty emerged from a period of rebellion, leading to the establishment of the new principality of Kadipaten Mangkunegaran. Its first ruler was the former rebel Raden Mas Said, then known as Prince Mangkunegara I, who was widely regarded as

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[20] Riwanto Tirtosudarmo, 'From Geertz to Ricklefs: The Changing Discourse on Javanese Religion and Its Wider Contexts', in *Framing Asian Studies: Geopolitics and Institutions*, ed. Albert Tzeng et al., Lectures, Workshops, and Proceedings of International Conferences (ISEAS–Yusof Ishak Institute, 2018).

[21] Merle Calvin Ricklefs, *Mystic Synthesis in Java: A History of Islamization from the Fourteenth to the Early Nineteenth Centuries* (EastBridge, 2006), 159.

[22] Ricklefs, *Mystic Synthesis in Java: A History of Islamization from the Fourteenth to the Early Nineteenth Centuries*, 161.

the most publicly pious among the Javanese Muslim rulers of his era. [23] To commemorate his birthday, the court conducted a ceremony featuring Quran recitations by hundreds of *santri*,[24] followed by a *wayang* performance.[25]

Serat Centhini, which presumably started to be written in 1815 under the patronage of the future Susuhunan Pakubuwana V (reigned from 1820 to 1823) of the Surakarta Sultanate, highlights the presence of *wayang* during the era of *Wali Sanga*, the Nine Saints who were early proponents of Islam in Java. Despite its fictional nature, which includes the presence of the Indic figure of Yudhistira, the narrative conveys the significance of *wayang* within the Muslim court of that era.[26]

The second book of Ricklefs', *Polarising Javanese Society: Islamic and Other Visions, C. 1830-1930*, portrayed Java after the Java War, in the time when puritan and pan-Islamism emerged along with the rise of global nationalism. In the mid-19th century AD, following the Java War, a division emerged among Javanese Muslims into two groups: *putihan* (the white) and *abangan* (the red). *Putihan* are the devout Muslims, and *abangan* are the likely nominal ones.

Regarding traditional arts, there exist contrasting views between the two Muslim groups mentioned earlier. Ricklefs noted that while the *Putihan* group *read Arabic texts and engaged in discussions on Islamic affairs, the abangan watched wayang performances and attended lascivious entertainments*.[27] These entertainments also include *tandhakan*, *tayuban*, and *ludrukan*, which, for *putihan, are* considered immoral. In 1883, Bramartani, a newspaper of Javanese elites, reported that the *putihan* claimed that gamelan was *haram* or forbidden according to Islamic law.

As previously discussed in the book, *wayang* narratives, which blend elements of Indic literature, served as a principal source of Islamic mystical synthesis for the Javanese court. However, a new group of Muslims emerged who viewed *wayang* as incompatible with Islamic teachings. The emerging modernist Muslims in Java opposed what they viewed as innovative and impure Islamic rituals and teachings, termed *bid'ah*, as well as traditions influenced by Hindu practices, including *gamelan music*.[28]

A contrasting perspective emerged from a member of the *Sarekat Islam* organization of Blora, who criticized Javanese individuals who favor European customs and lack proficiency in playing gamelan.[29] However, the predominant view among the *Putihan* Muslims was that they opposed Javanese traditional performing arts. In 1891, these arts were prohibited from being performed in the Muslim area of Kauman Surakarta. Despite this, the *Putihan* Muslims did not wholly abandon all forms of art; they

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[23] Ricklefs, *Mystic Synthesis in Java: A History of Islamization from the Fourteenth to the Early Nineteenth Centuries*, 165.
[24] *Santri* can be translated to the Muslim religious students or as a category of devoted Muslims.
[25] Ricklefs, *Mystic Synthesis in Java: A History of Islamization from the Fourteenth to the Early Nineteenth Centuries*, 168.
[26] Ricklefs, *Mystic Synthesis in Java: A History of Islamization from the Fourteenth to the Early Nineteenth Centuries*, 199.
[27] Merle Calvin Ricklefs, *Polarising Javanese Society: Islamic and Other Visions, C. 1830-1930* (NUS Press, 2007), 102.
[28] Ricklefs, *Polarising Javanese Society: Islamic and Other Visions, C. 1830-1930*, 221.
[29] Ricklefs, *Polarising Javanese Society: Islamic and Other Visions, C. 1830-1930*, 241.

continued to play percussion instruments, such as tambourines, drums, and bamboo instruments, during *selawatan*, which are religious Islamic songs dedicated primarily to the praise of the Prophet Muhammad.[30]

In *Islamisation and Its Opponents in Java: A Political, Social, Cultural and Religious History, c. 1930 to the Present* (2012), Ricklefs extensively explores the cultural wealth of traditional Javanese arts in both courtly and rural settings. He started with drawing heavily from Theodore G. Th. Pigeaud's influential 1938 work, *Javaanse Volksvertoningen* (Javanese Folk Performances). This final book of Ricklefs' trilogy is the most comprehensive in the exploration of the arts compared to the previous two volumes.

Pigeaud observed *selawatan* as a prominent form of Javanese arts linked to Islamic devotion, especially among adherents of traditional Islamic practices.[31] During these rituals, men sang narratives of the Prophet's life in either Arabic or Javanese, accompanied solely by tambourines, in the distinctive Javanese musical tradition. Ricklefs added that those traditional adherents must be like the *Nahdlatul Ulama* (NU) organization. Within the Javanese court, the mystical synthesis continued to thrive through the *bedhaya* dance, which was performed as a tribute to the Goddess of the Southern Sea.[32]

The tension between *putihan* and *abangan* reached a peak in post-independence Indonesia with the emergence of the PKI, the Indonesian Communist Party. The PKI, aligned with the abangan group, utilized local Javanese performing arts as a political tool. They employed various forms such as *angklung*, *reyog*, *ludruk*, and even staged a *kethoprak* theater production titled '*Patine Gusti Allah*' (The Death of God Allah). There was antagonism between *Lekra* (Organization of People Culture-Lembaga Kesenian Rakyat), the cultural arm of the PKI, and Lesbumi (Muslim Arts and Culture Organization-Lembaga Seni Budaya Muslimin Indonesia), the equivalent board of NU. Among NU members, the arts flourished in forms rooted in Islamic traditions, such as *rebana* or *hadrah*, which exclusively utilize percussion instruments.[33]

After the downfall of the PKI in 1965, Indonesia entered the New Order era under the Suharto regime. The traditional performing arts, once associated with the abangan or PKI, experienced a decline as the PKI was viewed as a major adversary of the New Order regime. The regime would utilize these arts for its political campaigns, but only after purging elements associated with the PKI from the arts groups.[34]

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[30] Ricklefs, *Polarising Javanese Society: Islamic and Other Visions, C. 1830-1930*, 244–45.
[31] Ricklefs, *Islamisation and Its Opponents in Java: A Political, Social, Cultural and Religious History, c. 1930 to the Present*, 34.
[32] Ricklefs, *Islamisation and Its Opponents in Java: A Political, Social, Cultural and Religious History, c. 1930 to the Present*, 42.
[33] Ricklefs, *Islamisation and Its Opponents in Java: A Political, Social, Cultural and Religious History, c. 1930 to the Present*, 103–5.
[34] Ricklefs, *Islamisation and Its Opponents in Java: A Political, Social, Cultural and Religious History, c. 1930 to the Present*, 126.

Even though the PKI has disappeared, tensions between *abangan* and *putihan* arts continue to exist within society. Surprisingly, certain *pesantren* Islamic schools affiliated with NU have organized events that include elements previously labeled as abangan. One notable example is *Pesantren Tegalreja* in Magelang, Central Java, which initiated this trend in 1979 with performances of *jathilan*, *reyog*, *kethoprak*, and even popular *dangdut* music.[35] Despite opposition from other NU *santri* communities at the time, this tradition has persisted to the present day. On the other hand, the modernist Islamic organization *Muhammadiyah*, such as in Lamongan, maintained a negative view towards Javanese arts, even including those Islamic ones associated with NU, such as *selawatan.*[36]

The Reformation era began with the end of the Suharto regime in 1998. During this period, young members of *Muhammadiyah* developed closer ties to Javanese local arts, including in their schools.[37] Despite an incident in 2010 where hardline Muslims in Surakarta attacked some *wayang* performances,[38] the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS), Indonesia's leading Islamist party, conducted a campaign featuring traditional Javanese dance in 2011.[39]

In Yogyakarta, Sultan Hamengkubuwana X, who also serves as the governor of the province, actively supports the preservation and development of various forms of performing arts, including both traditional and Islamic ones. Since 2005, every village has been encouraged to foster its own creativity in these arts.[40] Unfortunately, there is a tendency of decline from certain traditional performing arts, such as *wayang*, *kethoprak*, and *wayang wong* (human puppetry). This decline was not primarily due to religious reasons but rather stemmed from technical challenges in organizing these performances.[41]

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[35] Ricklefs, *Islamisation and Its Opponents in Java: A Political, Social, Cultural and Religious History, c. 1930 to the Present*, 235–36.
[36] Ricklefs, *Islamisation and Its Opponents in Java: A Political, Social, Cultural and Religious History, c. 1930 to the Present*, 362.
[37] Ricklefs, *Islamisation and Its Opponents in Java: A Political, Social, Cultural and Religious History, c. 1930 to the Present*, 404–5.
[38] Ricklefs, *Islamisation and Its Opponents in Java: A Political, Social, Cultural and Religious History, c. 1930 to the Present*, 401.
[39] Ricklefs, *Islamisation and Its Opponents in Java: A Political, Social, Cultural and Religious History, c. 1930 to the Present*, 432.
[40] Ricklefs, *Islamisation and Its Opponents in Java: A Political, Social, Cultural and Religious History, c. 1930 to the Present*, 392–93.
[41] Ricklefs, *Islamisation and Its Opponents in Java: A Political, Social, Cultural and Religious History, c. 1930 to the Present*, 394–95.

III. PASER AND THE CONTINUITY OF ISLAMIC ARTS IN JAVANESE MUSLIM SOCIETY THROUGH RICKLEFS' LENS

The study of Islamic arts in Javanese Muslim society has been an ongoing exploration, with scholars such as Ricklefs offering insightful perspectives on the interaction between Islam and local traditions in Indonesia, particularly in Java. One such lens through which this interaction can be analyzed is the Paguyuban Seni Religius (PASER), a cultural organization in Sleman, Yogyakarta, established in 2003.

PASER serves as a hub for various religious arts, incorporating Javanese cultural expressions into spiritual practices. The development of PASER over the years, alongside its active role in preserving religious and cultural arts, presents a significant case study in understanding the role of Islamic arts within Javanese society. By examining PASER, one can connect it to Ricklefs' observations about the synthesis of Islamic identity with Javanese traditions, particularly in the arts domain.

Ricklefs, in his studies, has focused on the complex relationship between Islam and Javanese culture. He points out how the adoption of Islam in Java led to the blending of Islamic values with pre-existing cultural expressions, including art forms. This fusion produced distinctive artistic expressions that carried Islamic messages through the lens of Javanese traditions. In this context, Islamic arts in Java are not merely religious artifacts or rituals but are interwoven with social, cultural, and political elements of Javanese life. Ricklefs emphasizes the fluidity and adaptability of Javanese Islam, where local customs, such as dance, music, and theater, have been infused with Islamic values. These art forms serve as vehicles for transmitting religious teachings, reflecting the spiritual and social dynamics of the community.

The origins of PASER are deeply connected to the growth of religious arts in Sleman Regency, which includes music, dance, drama, and other artistic expressions infused with spiritual elements. These elements range from costumes and instruments to props and lyrics. Religious arts have spread across various districts in the western, northern, and eastern parts of Sleman.[42]

As these artistic traditions flourished, a local artist, Sancoko, envisioned creating an organization dedicated to supporting the arts in religious contexts. This idea led to the formation of the Religious Arts Association (PASER) in 2003, initiated by a group of artists and cultural enthusiasts. The first meeting to establish PASER took place in Sancoko's home in Seyegan, attended by local cultural figures and art supporters. Initially, PASER's scope covered just seven districts in Yogyakarta: Seyegan, Moyudan, Godean, Gamping, Sleman, Turi, and Tempel.

Over time, PASER was revitalized, and on 15 June 2013, it was officially recognized by the Dewan Kesenian Sleman (DKS), the Sleman Cultural Council, as the primary organization for overseeing religious arts throughout the region. From its inception, PASER's mission was to assist religious art groups in obtaining legal

[42] Nabila Khoerunnisa, 'Agama, Seni, Dan Dakwah: Kiprah Paguyuban Seni Religius (PASER) Di Kabupaten Sleman Tahun 2003-2021 M.' (undergraduate thesis, UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta, 2022), 72.

recognition, such as the Nomor Induk Kebudayaan Daerah (NIKD), or Regional Cultural Identification Number, and to help preserve the rich variety of religious arts in Sleman.

Over its two decades of existence, PASER has experienced significant growth. This reality includes not only the revitalization of the organization but also the creation of a more effective management structure. Furthermore, PASER expanded its network of collaborations with various institutions, thereby strengthening its role in Sleman's cultural landscape. These developments demonstrate PASER's enduring presence in the region.

PASER's contributions are visible through its active involvement in organizing various cultural events and supporting religious art groups by providing opportunities to perform in both government-led and independent events. In addition, PASER plays a crucial role in conveying religious teachings through the arts, promoting values such as tolerance, solidarity, and unity among people. The content of artistic performances, such as lyrics, often includes messages that encourage spiritual mindfulness and the fulfillment of religious duties, including prayer, fasting, and charity. These performances are hoped to influence the community's way of thinking and living gradually. The organization has faced challenges, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic from 2020 to 2021. Despite these difficulties, PASER adapted by continuing its activities both online and offline, ensuring its survival and the continuation of its scheduled events.

Amid these challenges, PASER has also found new opportunities. The advancement of technology, primarily through social media platforms, has allowed PASER to expand its reach, gaining recognition beyond Sleman. This technological shift not only helps promote PASER but also raises awareness of religious arts, contributing to their growing popularity. In turn, PASER's sustained presence and increasing recognition may serve as an inspiration for similar initiatives in other regions.

By the end of 2024, PASER had officially registered 383 religious performing arts groups.[43] The most significant number of groups was in the *Hadrah* music category, with 173 groups. The second largest group was the *kobra siswa*, with 23 groups, followed by *sholawatan* with 22 groups and *badui* with 21 groups. Other forms of performing arts had fewer than ten groups, including *kasidah*, *rebana*, *rodat*, *karawitan*, *angklung*, *calung*, *klotekan*, *macapat*, *topeng ireng*, and *uyon-uyon.*

According to some chairmen of the PASER executive board, the number of groups does not fully represent all the religious performing arts groups in Sleman Regency. There are also active groups under PASER that have not renewed their membership with the new board, so they do not appear on the list.[44] According to the vice secretary of PASER, there were 135 groups registered when he joined the organization; however, the number of members has since grown.[45] Although PASER's name reflects a focus on religious arts, it also includes non-Muslim performing arts groups. Nevertheless, the majority of groups under PASER are from an Islamic background.

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[43] Table of PASER membership of goups.
[44] Interview with Heru Kusriyanta, secretary of PASER, 9 February 2025.
[45] Interview with Agus M. Ali, vice secretary of PASER, 12 February 2025.

"The arts under PASER are likely considered folk arts, as Sleman consists of many rural areas, which distinguishes them from the more refined Javanese court arts. Most folk arts utilize simpler forms of gamelan instruments, unlike those found in the court tradition. There is no presence of *wayang*, as noted by Ricklefs in the history of Islamic courts in Java. The only form that somewhat resembles the sophisticated gamelan tradition is *karawitan*, but it is a relatively small category within PASER.

Among the groups under PASER, the largest is the *Hadrah* music ensemble. This group typically features tambourines, which are played alongside religious songs, mostly consisting of *shalawat* or praises to the Prophet Muhammad in Arabic. Most *hadrah* performances do not include other musical instruments, such as traditional Javanese gamelan. *Hadrah* performances typically feature a group comprising vocalists and traditional instrument players, notably the tambourine (*rebana*) and drums.[46] The *hadrah* often covers aspects of literature, dance, and music that are intertwined with religious rituals of the Indonesian Islamic community. The literary elements are reflected in the verses sung, which praise Allah and the Prophet Muhammad, and are based on the teachings of the Qur'an.[47]

The second largest group of PASER is of *Kobra siswa*, a type of performance art that combines dance with a militaristic style, incorporating percussion and elements of simple gamelan music. At times, it also includes modern instruments such as drums, guitar, and keyboards.[48] The repertoire encompasses a diverse range of songs, spanning from traditional to contemporary pop music. However, in its traditional form, the performance is accompanied by Islamic religious songs. The performances incorporate Islamic teachings through songs and poetry (*syi'ir*) that convey moral and religious messages. These elements are often based on the Quran and Hadith, providing spiritual guidance and promoting Islamic values during the performances.[49]

Following *Kobra Siswa*, *Sholawatan* or *Selawatan* is the third-largest form of performing arts group in Paser. The term *sholawatan* comes from the Arabic word *shalawat*, meaning praise, particularly for the Prophet Muhammad. *Selawatan* incorporates Islamic teachings by expressing devotion and reverence for the Prophet Muhammad through its lyrics and melodies, fostering a sense of community and spirituality among participants.[50]

In Javanese tradition, *sholawatan* is similar to *hadrah*, but differs in the use of drums. Traditional *Sholawatan* incorporates simple metal gamelan instruments, which are less sophisticated than those used in *karawitan* or *wayang* performances. Gamelan is an

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[46] Agus Iswanto, 'Understanding Hadrah Art as The Living Al-Qur'an: The Origin, Performance and Worldview', *El Harakah: Jurnal Budaya Islam* 21, no. 2 (2019): 225.
[47] Iswanto, 'Understanding Hadrah Art as The Living Al-Qur'an: The Origin, Performance and Worldview', 231.
[48] Ahmad Ubaidillah Ma'sum Al-Anwari et al., 'Study of Living Hadith Towards Kubro Siswo ARTS as Islamic Syi'Ar', *Jurnal Living Hadis* 6, no. 2 (2021): 238.
[49] Al-Anwari et al., 'Study of Living Hadith Towards Kubro Siswo ARTS as Islamic Syi'Ar', 246.
[50] Andre Indrawan, 'Selawatan Sebagai Seni Pertunjukan Musikal', *Resital: Jurnal Seni Pertunjukan* 11, no. 2 (2010): 101.

ensemble of traditional Indonesian instruments, primarily consisting of metallophones, gongs, and drums, which plays a significant role in various cultural performances, including *selawatan.*[51]

Following *Sholawatan*, *Badui* is the fourth-largest performing arts group in PASER. Badui is a form of performance that combines dance and percussion instruments. It features singers who perform songs with Islamic themes or non-Islamic songs that carry positive messages. Instrumentation in *badui* folk performance includes traditional musical instruments such as *rebana*, *bedug,* and *jidur*, which play a significant role in religious events like *hadrah* or *selawatan*.[52] *Badui* art has its roots in rural communities and serves to spread Islam through performances known as religious *selawatan*, thereby categorizing it as a form of folk art. The performances incorporate elements of Arab culture, including dance, music, and costumes, reflecting Islamic teachings and customs.[53]

The other performing arts groups are fewer in number, less numerous than the four previously mentioned forms. This does not mean that these different forms are less critical; however, the focus of this analysis is on the dominant forms of art in terms of their representation within PASER. The four primary forms are *hadrah, kobra siswa, sholawatan, and badui.* This evidence shows that the majority of the arts under PASER are rooted in rural and folk styles of Javanese performing arts. The presence of gamelan instruments in their simpler form, not as complex or sophisticated as those used in *wayang* performances. The Islamic performing arts in the court of the Yogyakarta Sultanate include *wayang* (leather puppet show), *wayang golek* (wooden puppet shows), *wayang wong* (traditional Javanese dance-drama), and various ritual dances such as *bedhaya* and *golek menak*.[54]

What is found in Ricklefs' trilogy is the tension between the more pious Javanese Muslims and the less devout ones. The dichotomy between *abangan* and *putihan* is associated with a distinct preference for artistic and aesthetic experiences. In the early period of Islam in Java, Islamic courts incorporated the arts of gamelan into their Islamic religious practices. *Gamelan Sekaten* is an example of how the Javanese Islamic court incorporated the *gamelan* as an integral part of *Sekaten,* a religious festival commemorating the Prophet Muhammad's birthday.

What is found in Ricklefs' trilogy is the tension between more pious Javanese Muslims and those of lesser piety. The dichotomy between *abangan* and *putihan* aligns with distinct preferences for artistic and aesthetic experiences. During the early period of Islam in Java, Islamic courts incorporated gamelan music into their religious life.

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[51] Indrawan, 'Selawatan Sebagai Seni Pertunjukan Musikal', 102.
[52] Benny Harminto, 'Hubungan Kesenian Folklasik Badui Bertajuk Religi Di Kabupaten Sleman Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta', *INVENSI* 8, no. 1 (2023): 50.
[53] Harminto, 'Hubungan Kesenian Folklasik Badui Bertajuk Religi Di Kabupaten Sleman Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta', 52.
[54] K. R. T. Sunaryadi Maharsiworo, 'Islam in The Javanese Cultural Pluralism and The Keraton Performing Arts', *Al-Albab* 2, no. 1 (2013): 51.

Gamelan Sekaten is an example of how the Javanese Islamic court used gamelan as an integral part of Sekaten, a religious festival commemorating the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad, in early times.[55]

According to Ricklefs, the tension between the *abangan* and *putihan* communities makes it unlikely that the abangan community and the Javanese court primarily preserved the *gamelan* instruments. On the other hand, the *putihan* community mostly used percussion instruments, which were more widely accepted by Muslim jurists in terms of Islamic law. Using Geertz's trichotomy, it can be said that the gamelan was more preserved by the *priyayi* and *abangan* communities, but not by the *santri*.

Examining the PASER community and its religious arts, it is evident that the presence of *gamelan* is not dominant. The performing arts groups under PASER are primarily Islamic groups that predominantly use percussion instruments, with a minor presence of *gamelan*. The Hadrah group represents the most significant percentage of PASER's members, as it is an art form that predominantly features frame drum percussion instruments and is primarily performed in an Islamic context, mainly in Arabic. *Hadrah* is closely associated with the *santri* community and the *pesantren* institutions, which are Islamic educational institutions that teach Islamic sciences through authentic sources.

Although in his latest trilogy, *Islamisation and Its Opponents in Java: A Political, Social, Cultural, and Religious History, C. 1930 to Present* (2012), Ricklefs mentions the presence of reconciliation between *abangan* and *putihan* in relation to aesthetic experience, the conflict persists. Through the examination of PASER as a representation of the Islamic performing arts community in rural Java, the limited presence of gamelan among the arts groups highlights how these Javanese musical instruments are not considered an essential part of Islamic aesthetic expression among the Javanese.

Gamelan, which was once an integral part of commemorating Prophet Muhammad's birthday in early Javanese Islamic courts, is no longer a significant element of this celebration among rural Javanese Muslims. Hadrah has now become the most performed form of aesthetic expression during *Mawlid*, the commemoration of the Prophet's birthday. Traditional Javanese *selawatan*, such as *laras madya* or *santiswaran*, may incorporate gamelan, but in a very modest way, not as complex as the gamelan performances in *wayang*

It is believed that the *Wali Songo* (the Nine Saints) used *gamelan* as a medium for spreading Islam in early Java. While many Muslims in the *santri* community and rural areas accept this historical account, they do not choose *gamelan* as the primary medium for their Islamic aesthetic experience. This reflects the trajectory of Islamic aesthetic expression among Javanese Muslims, as noted by Ricklefs.

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[55] Ahmad Mulyana, 'Sekaten Tradition: The Ritual Ceremony in Yogyakarta as Acculturation Reality of Javanese Culture in Indonesia', *International Journal of Humanities & Social Science Studies (IJHSSS)* 4, no. 2 (2017): 55.

This research is not intended to analyze whether the tension still exists. While Ricklefs found that by the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century, there was a tendency for reconciliation between *abangan* and *putihan*, in the local context, this reconciliation in the sphere of aesthetic expression remains uncertain. There is a possibility that the reconciliation of aesthetic expression remains uncertain, indicating that further research is needed on this topic.

IV. DISCONTINUITY IN JAVA'S ARTS AND PERFORMANCES CONTESTATION

In this context, the concept of Foucault's discontinuity can be observed in the shift from gamelan to *hadrah* as the preferred form of religious artistic expression. Historically, the *gamelan*, a traditional ensemble of musical instruments, was widely used in spiritual celebrations, including the commemoration of the Prophet Muhammad's birthday, known as *Sekaten*. *Gamelan* was seen as an integral part of the cultural and spiritual life of both the Javanese *abangan* community, which practices a more syncretic form of Islam, and the Javanese courts. Nonetheless, with the rise of more pious, *santri*, or conceptualized into dominated Islamic communities, there was a shift towards artistic forms more aligned with Islamic teachings. This transition represents a discontinuity in aesthetic practices, as *gamelan*, with its complex and often elaborate instruments, was gradually replaced by *hadrah*, a simpler and more accepted form of artistic expression.

Hadrah, a form of Islamic art that primarily features drumming and vocal recitations of prayers (such as *shalawat*), became more prominent in the religious practices of *santri* communities. This shift reflects a more profound change in both cultural and spiritual preferences, where Islamic principles that emphasized simplicity and the avoidance of potentially controversial musical instruments took precedence. The discontinuity between gamelan and *hadrah* is not simply an aesthetic shift but also reflects broader changes in the way Islamic law and culture were interpreted and practiced in rural Javanese society. While gamelan was once a part of Islamic ritual, particularly in the *Sekaten* festival, its role diminished as *hadrah* became the dominant form of Islamic musical expression, more in line with the values of the pious *santri* community.

This transition illustrates Foucault's concept of discontinuity, where cultural practices and knowledge evolve not through a continuous, linear progression but through ruptures and shifts influenced by changing social, political, and religious power structures.[56] The rise of *hadrah* over gamelan marks a clear break in the aesthetic practices surrounding religious life, shaped by a new interpretation of Islamic teachings and the desire to align artistic expression with these values. In Foucault's archaeological framework, such shifts reveal how discourse—in this case, religious discourse on

[56] Richard Shusterman, 'Foucault and Somaesthetics: Variations on the Art of Living', *Foucault Studies* 36, no. 1 (2024): 142–69.

permissible arts—restructures the entire epistemic field, determining what becomes visible, speakable, and legitimate within a particular historical moment.[57]

The displacement of gamelan by *hadrah* represents more than a simple substitution of one musical form for another; it signifies an epistemological rupture in how Javanese Muslims conceptualize the relationship between aesthetic expression and religious devotion. Gamelan, deeply embedded in pre-Islamic Javanese cosmology and court traditions, carried associations with Hindu-Buddhist spirituality and syncretic practices. The emergence of *hadrah*, rooted in Middle Eastern Islamic traditions, introduced a new aesthetic vocabulary that positioned itself as more authentically Islamic. This rupture did not occur through gradual evolution but through deliberate interventions by religious authorities, Islamic educational institutions, and community leaders who sought to purify religious practice from what they perceived as cultural accretions incompatible with Islamic orthodoxy.

Following Foucault's insights on power-knowledge relations, this aesthetic shift cannot solely be understood apart from the reconfiguration of religious authority in contemporary Java. The legitimization of *hadrah* and the delegitimization of *gamelan* in religious contexts emerged through specific networks of power, such as *pesantren*, or Islamic boarding schools. *Santri* that trained as a new generation in reformist interpretations, transnational Islamic movements that connected local communities to global discourses of Islamic authenticity, and state policies that either facilitated or constrained certain forms of religious expression. These power structures generated new forms of knowledge about what constitutes proper Islamic art, disseminated through sermons, religious education, media, and community practices. The result was not merely a change in preference but a fundamental reorganization of the categories through which Javanese Muslims understood and evaluated aesthetic practice.

This Foucauldian discontinuity reveals the non-linear nature of cultural change in Java, where multiple temporalities and knowledge systems coexist in tension rather than smooth succession. The persistence of gamelan in specific contexts alongside the dominance of *hadrah* in others demonstrates how these ruptures create fragmented cultural landscapes rather than complete replacements. Communities navigate between these aesthetic systems depending on context, audience, and the specific configuration of religious authority in their locale. This discontinuous pattern challenges essentialist narratives of either inevitable secularization or straightforward Islamization, instead highlighting how Javanese identity itself becomes a site of ongoing contestation and reinterpretation through the very medium of performance and artistic expression.

[57] Marli Huijer, 'A Critical Use of Foucault's Art of Living', *Foundations of Science* 22, no. 2 (2017): 323–27.

V. CONCLUSION REMARKS

Ricklefs' trilogy explores the history of Islamization in Java over seven centuries, encompassing various shifts from spiritual to political contexts. Throughout this period, traditional performing arts have played a crucial role in shaping the spiritual lives of Javanese Muslims.

In "*Mystic Synthesis in Java: A History of Islamization from the Fourteenth to the Early Nineteenth Centuries*" (2006), Ricklefs noted that traditional performing arts, such as wayang and gamelan, were intricately linked with the mystical synthesis of Islam, particularly within the context of Javanese courts. The second book, "*Polarising Javanese Society: Islamic and Other Visions, C. 1830-1930*" (2007), elaborates on the emergence of new devout Muslim groups known as *putihan*, following the rise of a puritan Islamic vision in the aftermath of the Java War. This period saw a distinct separation between the lives of Muslims within and outside the court. Within the court, traditional performing arts continued to thrive. However, outside the court, there existed tensions between the *putihan*, who advocated a more Islamic stance, and the less orthodox abangan, reflecting differing aesthetic preferences.

The *Putihan* deliberately avoided *wayang, gamelan*, and other traditional arts as they sought to adhere strictly to Islamic principles and distance themselves from pre-Islamic traditions. Following the historical analysis, "*Islamisation and Its Opponents in Java: A Political, Social, Cultural, and Religious History, C. 1930 to Present*" *(2012)*, the final volume of Ricklefs' trilogy explores the evolution of Islam in Java against the backdrop of nationalism, the Old Order post-independence, New Order, and Reformation Era. While the abangan embraced traditional Javanese arts, such as *gamelan* and *wayang*, the *putihan* preferred *selawatan*, accompanied by simple percussion instruments, as part of their more puritanical approach to Islamic practice.

After Indonesian independence in 1945, the emergence of the PKI (Indonesian Communist Party) heightened tensions between the *putihan* and *abangan* factions in Java. The PKI, aligned with the abangan group, utilized traditional Javanese arts to satirize elites and Islamists. Following the downfall of the PKI, the New Order regime's harsh measures against PKI-linked influences contributed to the decline of certain forms of art. However, the new regime effectively repurposed these arts as tools for political campaigns.

During the New Order era after 1965, Javanese traditionalist Muslims began to exhibit a trend towards "reconciliation" with local traditional arts. Similarly, modernist Muslims showed a similar attitude at the beginning of the early 2000s Reformation era. Islamist parties in Java also adopted this nuanced approach, although hardliners continued to oppose local arts and culture. Meanwhile, Javanese courts, while supporting local arts externally, developed their own interpretation of Islam through creative expressions in performing arts.

Ricklefs' work provides valuable insights into the Islamization process in Java, although it does not extensively cover the pre-Mataram era. The depiction of Javanese traditional performing arts is well-contextualized within various historical fragments. Building on Ricklefs' historical analysis, the role of conventional performing arts within the Javanese Muslim community can also be examined through the lens of PASER (Paguyuban Seni Religius), an organization representing the largest religious performing arts groups in Sleman, Yogyakarta.

PASER highlights the current cultural landscape in which traditional arts continue to evolve, particularly among the Muslim communities in rural Java. Within PASER, one sees a predominance of *hadrah* (Islamic devotional music) and *sholawatan* (prayers or praises for the Prophet Muhammad), both of which rely heavily on percussion instruments. These forms of performance are closely associated with the *santri* (devout Muslim) community, aligning more with the *putihan* vision that Ricklefs describes, where strict adherence to Islamic principles guides artistic expression. In this sense, PASER not only reflects the transition in aesthetic preferences that Ricklefs highlighted but also demonstrates how these preferences manifest in the present day, particularly within rural Javanese contexts.

Moreover, Foucault's theory of discontinuity provides a valuable framework for understanding the shifts in Javanese Muslim artistic practices. The change from gamelan to *hadrah* as the preferred form of artistic expression represents a rupture in the cultural continuity of Javanese performing arts. The gamelan, once integral to religious celebrations and accepted by the abangan community, began to lose favor as the more orthodox *santri* communities, which adhered strictly to Islamic law, sought to distance themselves from pre-Islamic traditions.

This discontinuity reflects a more profound shift in the cultural and religious landscape, where the arts are no longer viewed as a universal expression of Javanese identity but are increasingly defined by the ideological and religious divides within the Muslim community. The dominance of *hadrah* and other percussion-based Islamic arts in PASER illustrates how artistic forms have been reshaped by power relations and religious authority, aligning with Foucault's notion that cultural practices and knowledge evolve through shifts in the structure of power.

By combining Ricklefs' historical analysis of Islamization with Foucault's theory of discontinuity, the complexities of religious and artistic evolution in Java can be better understood. PASER, as a contemporary manifestation of these changes, illustrates how traditional arts have been reinterpreted and reorganized to reflect the ideological and religious tensions between the *abangan* and *putihan* communities. The shift of arts instrumentation and repertoires serves as a tangible example of how cultural practices evolve in response to religious and political changes, further reinforcing the need for continued research into these dynamics.

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