

THE LIVING QUR'AN IN THE BARZANJI TRADITION: INTEGRATING THE SACRED TEXT AND LOCAL CULTURE

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Abstrak

Penelitian ini berangkat dari pertanyaan utama: bagaimana bentuk Living Qur'an dalam tradisi Barzanji di Desa Gunungtelu, Kecamatan Karangpucung, Kabupaten Cilacap, serta bagaimana dampaknya terhadap praktik ibadah dan pola keberagamaan masyarakat setempat? Tujuan penelitian ini adalah menganalisis bentuk ekspresi Living Qur'an melalui tradisi Barzanji dan menelaah pengaruhnya dalam kehidupan religius masyarakat. Penelitian menggunakan metode kualitatif lapangan dengan pendekatan fenomenologis, di mana data diperoleh melalui observasi partisipatif, wawancara mendalam, dan dokumentasi. Analisis dilakukan secara deskriptif-analitis dan interpretatif dengan kerangka teori Living Qur'an Ahmad Rafiq. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pembacaan Barzanji di Gunungtelu berlandaskan pada QS. al-Ahzab [33]: 56 dan dilaksanakan rutin dua kali setiap pekan. Tradisi ini tidak hanya memperkuat intensitas ibadah, seperti shalat berjamaah, dzikir, dan kajian

keagamaan, tetapi juga menumbuhkan mahabbah kepada Nabi Muhammad SAW, mempererat solidaritas sosial, dan menjadi medium integrasi nilai-nilai religius dengan budaya Nahdlatul Ulama. Dengan demikian, Living Qur'an dalam praktik Barzanji hadir bukan sekadar sebagai teks yang dibaca, melainkan sebagai praktik sosial-budaya yang membentuk habitus keagamaan dan melestarikan warisan keislaman lokal.

Kata Kunci: *Living Qur'an, Integrasi, Barzanji, Budaya, Lokal.*

Abstract

This study departs from the central question: how is the form of the Living Qur'an manifested in the Barzanji tradition in Gunungtelu Village, Karangpucung District, Cilacap Regency, and what are its impacts on worship practices and the community's religious life? The purpose of this research is to analyze the expression of the Living Qur'an through the Barzanji tradition and to examine its influence on the religious practices of the local community. The research employs a qualitative field method with a phenomenological approach, in which data were collected through participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Data analysis was carried out descriptively, analytically, and interpretatively, using Ahmad Rafiq's Living Qur'an theoretical framework. The findings reveal that the recitation of Barzanji in Gunungtelu is based on QS. al-Ahzab [33]: 56 and is routinely practiced twice a week. This tradition not only strengthens religious practices such as congregational prayer, dhikr, and religious study but also cultivates love for the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), reinforces social solidarity, and serves as a medium for integrating religious values with Nahdlatul Ulama culture. Thus, the Living Qur'an in the practice of Barzanji is present not merely as a text to be recited but as a socio-cultural practice that shapes religious habitus and preserves local Islamic heritage.

Keywords: *Integration, Living Qur'an, Barzanji, Culture, Local.*

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia, as an archipelagic nation, is characterized by a diversity of ethnicities, languages, and religious traditions that

together constitute a rich cultural heritage.¹ Amidst the dynamics of modernization, a number of local Islamic traditions have persisted and continue to serve as an integral part of communal life.² One such tradition is the recitation of *al-Barzanji*, a religious literary work composed by Shaykh Ja'far al-Barzanji, which narrates the life of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). This tradition functions not only as a medium of da'wah and spiritual edification but also as a social adhesive that reinforces the cultural identity of Muslim communities.³

In the context of Qur'anic studies, the recitation of *al-Barzanji* can be understood as a form of *Living Qur'an*—a phenomenon in which the sacred text is not only recited and memorized but also actualized within social practices and religious rituals.⁴ As explained by Ahmad Rafiq, the concept of *Living Qur'an* encompasses human interactions with the Qur'an beyond textual recitation, including ritual, cultural, and symbolic receptions that shape patterns of religiosity.⁵ The *al-Barzanji* text itself contains several Qur'anic quotations, among them QS. al-Ahzab [33]:56, which commands believers to send blessings upon the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and serves as the primary theological foundation of this practice.

Gunungtelu Village, located in Karangpucung District,

¹ Koentjaraningrat, *Kebudayaan, Mentalitet dan Pembangunan* (Jakarta: Gramedia, 2009), hlm. 75.

² Azyumardi Azra, *Islam Nusantara: Sejarah Sosial Intelektual Islam di Indonesia* (Bandung: Mizan, 2015), hlm. 210.

³ Lukman Hakim, "Tradisi Pembacaan Kitab Barzanji: Kajian Living Qur'an di Masyarakat Nahdlatul Ulama," *Jurnal Living Qur'an* 4, no. 1 (2019): hlm. 55–72.

⁴ Zainal Abidin, "Living Qur'an: Sebuah Pendekatan dalam Studi al-Qur'an," *Jurnal Studi Ilmu-ilmu al-Qur'an dan Hadis* 17, no. 1 (2016): hlm. 33–50.

⁵ Ahmad Rafiq, "Living Qur'an: The Social Reception of the Qur'an in Indonesia," *Al-Jami'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies* 45, no. 1 (2007): hlm. 23–48.

Cilacap Regency, is one of the Nahdlatul Ulama Muslim communities that continues to observe the tradition of *al-Barzanji* recitation regularly, twice a week, with the active participation of approximately 50 congregants. In addition to its weekly gatherings on Monday and Friday nights, the tradition is also practiced during the commemoration of the Prophet's birthday (*Maulid al-Nabi*) as well as at various communal festivities. This activity not only reflects obedience to the prophetic tradition of sending blessings but also internalizes the Prophet's moral values, strengthens social bonds, and preserves the cultural heritage of Islam Nusantara.

Previous studies on *al-Barzanji* have generally focused on the historical composition of the text, its theological significance, or its function within Maulid celebrations across different regions. Some research has highlighted its social dimension as a means of reinforcing Muslim communal solidarity. However, relatively few studies have examined *al-Barzanji* through the lens of *Living Qur'an*, that is, how the text is practiced, interpreted, and embodied in the daily lives of local communities. This scholarly gap opens up opportunities for deeper inquiry into the interaction between text, ritual practice, and local culture.

Accordingly, this study seeks to explore the manifestation of the *Living Qur'an* in the *al-Barzanji* tradition of Gunungtelu and to analyze its influence on religious practices and patterns of piety within the community. It is hoped that this research will contribute to academic discourse on the dialectic between sacred texts, religious rituals, and local culture within the framework of Islam Nusantara.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative fieldwork approach with a

phenomenological perspective. Such an approach is deemed relevant for gaining an in-depth understanding of the community's religious experiences and uncovering the meanings embedded in the practice of *al-Barzanji* as a form of *Living Qur'an*. The research site was determined to be Gunungtelu Village, Karangpucung District, Cilacap Regency, which is recognized as one of the Nahdlatul Ulama Muslim communities that consistently observes the tradition of *al-Barzanji* recitation. The research subjects include religious leaders, administrators of the *majelis taklim* (study circle), regular participants, and members of the wider community involved in these activities.

Data collection was conducted through participatory observation in order to directly observe the recitation of *al-Barzanji* as well as the accompanying socio-religious interactions. In addition, in-depth interviews with *kiai*, *ustadz*, village elders, and congregants were carried out to explore their interpretations and understandings of the tradition. Supporting data were also obtained from documentation such as activity records, photographs, audio recordings of recitations, and the *al-Barzanji* text itself.

The data were analyzed using a descriptive-analytical and interpretive method through processes of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. All findings were interpreted within the theoretical framework of Ahmad Rafiq's *Living Qur'an*, which emphasizes three forms of reception: ritual, cultural, and symbolic.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

LIVING QUR'AN AS AN ANALYTICAL LENS FOR THE INTEGRATION OF TEXT AND CULTURE

The concept of the *Living Qur'an* emerges from the awareness that the Qur'an, in addition to being a revealed text with

theological dimensions, also constitutes a living entity within society. Within this framework, the Qur'an is not only understood through literal reading and academic exegesis but is also enlivened through social practices, religious rituals, and cultural expressions. Ahmad Rafiq emphasizes that the phenomenon of the *Living Qur'an* encompasses all forms of human interaction with the Qur'an that go beyond textual interpretation, including literal reception, ritual observance, and cultural adaptation.⁶ This approach enables researchers to capture the dialectical dynamics between the authority of revelation and local realities.

This view is reinforced by Sahiron Syamsuddin, who conceives the study of the *Living Qur'an* as an effort to understand "the Qur'an in daily life," the presence of Qur'anic messages within the behaviors, habits, and symbols of everyday Muslim life. Through this perspective, the sacredness of the revealed text does not remain confined to its theological dimension but extends into the social and cultural spheres, shaping distinctive patterns of religiosity within specific contexts.⁷

The tradition of *al-Barzanji* recitation in Gunungtelu Village serves as a concrete example of how the *Living Qur'an* operates as a bridge between the sacred text and local culture. The text contains Qur'anic quotations, most notably QS. al-Ahzab [33]:56, which are collectively recited in a ritual format that has become embedded within the community's social cycle. This practice not only reaffirms theological values such as *mahabbah* (love) for the Prophet

⁶ Ahmad Rafiq, "The Living Qur'an: Its Text and Practice in the Function of the Scripture," *Jurnal Studi Ilmu-Ilmu Al-Qur'an dan Hadis* 22, no. 2 (2021): hlm. 469–484.

⁷ Heddy Shri Ahimsa-Putra, "The Living al-Qur'an: Beberapa Perspektif Antropologi," *Walisono: Jurnal Penelitian Sosial Keagamaan* 20, no. 1 (Mei 2012): hlm. 235–260.

Muhammad (peace be upon him) but also fosters social solidarity, strengthens the identity of the Nahdlatul Ulama community, and preserves the aesthetic traditions of rural Javanese culture.

As explained by Heddy Shri Ahimsa-Putra, the *Living Qur'an* can be understood as a form of "creative reception," in which communities do not merely reproduce the textual message but transform it into an integral part of their identity and culture. In the context of Gunungtelu, *al-Barzanji* functions as a medium for the internalization of Qur'anic teachings, articulated in forms that are familiar, beautiful, and rich in symbolic meaning. This demonstrates that the integration of sacred text and local culture does not diminish the sanctity of revelation; rather, it expands the scope of its meaning and ensures the continuity of its values across generations.

BARZANJI AS A MEDIUM FOR THE INTEGRATION OF SACRED TEXT AND LOCAL CULTURE

The *al-Barzanji* text was composed by Shaykh Ja'far bin Hasan al-Barzanji, a scholar and *qāḍī* in Medina, belonging to a distinguished family descended from the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). This work emerged within the vibrant intellectual and spiritual milieu of eighteenth-century Hijaz, where the narration of the Prophet's biography was presented as part of the *maulid* tradition and as a means of cultivating love for the Messenger. The text consists of two literary forms, prose (*nathr*) and poetry (*nazm*), employing refined Arabic language and elevated rhetoric, reflecting not only the author's literary mastery but also the depth of his religious scholarship.⁸

⁸ Muhammad Ismail. *Sejarah Hidup Syekh Ja'far al-Barzanji*. Jakarta: Pustaka al-Hidayah, 2015, hlm. 12–15.

Substantively, *al-Barzanji* narrates the birth of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), his genealogy, noble characteristics, struggles in da'wah, and eventual passing. Qur'anic verses are interwoven throughout the text, serving both as narrative reinforcement and theological legitimization. Among the most prominent is QS. al-Ahzab (33): 56

"Indeed, Allah and His angels send blessings upon the Prophet. O you who believe, send blessings upon him and greet him with salutations of peace."

This verse functions as the theological axis that binds the structure of the entire text, framing the recitation of *al-Barzanji* as an act of worship grounded in the authority of revelation. In the context of Gunungtelu Village, the text is not only recited during the *Maulid* celebration or particular communal events but has also become a weekly ritual held twice a week on Monday and Friday nights. The choice of these times is rich with symbolic meaning: Monday night is believed to commemorate the Prophet's birth, while Friday night holds special significance in Islam as a day of blessing and multiplied rewards for worship.

The ritual recitation in Gunungtelu demonstrates the integration of sacred text and local wisdom. The practice is conducted communally with clear role divisions: some lead, others follow the chanting, and others regulate the rhythm. The melodic patterns employed often combine Arabic *maqāmāt* with Javanese tunes, creating a distinctive atmosphere that enables participants to internalize the meaning more profoundly. This element illustrates a process of aesthetic adaptation, wherein the classical Arabic text is reframed within a musical structure familiar to the local community.

This phenomenon affirms Clifford Geertz's view that religious symbols gain their efficacy when rooted in the cultural framework recognized by the community. Here, *al-Barzanji* emerges as a religious symbol that does not exist in a vacuum but is encompassed by a local system of meaning shaped by history, culture, and religious identity.⁹

Furthermore, Heddy Shri Ahimsa-Putra refers to this process as *creative reception*, in which the community is not passive in receiving the text but actively adapts it to their collective values, aesthetic preferences, and needs.¹⁰ Thus, the *al-Barzanji* text performs a dual function: it serves as a source of theological instruction that refers to the Qur'an, while simultaneously acting as a medium for preserving the cultural heritage of Islam Nusantara, highlighting the harmony between doctrinal orthodoxy and local modes of expression.

From the perspective of the *Living Qur'an*, the position of *al-Barzanji* is highly strategic. It brings Qur'anic verses into the social sphere through regular recitation, enabling congregants to interact with the sacred text in an atmosphere that is communal, intimate, and imbued with cultural meaning. This integration not only sustains the relevance of the revealed message but also ensures its transmission across generations, as it is embodied in a tradition enriched with aesthetic appeal and emotional resonance for the community.

In other words, *al-Barzanji* in Gunungtelu functions as a meeting point between heaven and earth, between the universality

⁹ Clifford Geertz. *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books, 1973, hlm. 87–125.

¹⁰ Putra Ahimsa dan Heddy Shri. *Etnografi: Deskripsi Kebudayaan*. Yogyakarta: Kepel Press, 2012, hlm. 242.

of divine revelation and the particularity of human culture. It illustrates that the sanctity of the text is not diminished when entering the realm of culture; rather, it is reinforced, reinterpreted, and enlivened through organic interaction with local traditions.

Javanese culture functions as a medium of creative reception, enhancing the way in which the verse is presented within the social life of the Gunungtelu community. Nevertheless, much of the analysis to date has emphasized the socio-cultural aspects, while the theological dimension has only been touched upon superficially. Upon closer examination, the verse conveys an important message about the direct involvement of Allah and His angels in sending blessings upon the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), which is then transmitted to the believers as a practical command.

For the Gunungtelu congregation, the recitation of *al-Barzanji* is not merely a cultural or traditional practice but is believed to be a means of attaining divine mercy and the Prophet's intercession. They understand *ṣalawāt* as a spiritual bridge connecting human beings with God through love for His Messenger. Accordingly, QS. al-Ahzab (33): 56 is interpreted in practice as both an obligation and a gift, since every invocation of blessings is regarded as strengthening faith, purifying the heart, and bringing blessings into daily life.

This elaboration demonstrates that the *al-Barzanji* tradition in Gunungtelu is not simply a cultural practice but also an expression of practical theology that unites normative belief with collective religious experience.

LOCAL CULTURE AS A MEDIUM FOR THE RECEPTION OF SACRED TEXTS

The recitation of *al-Barzanji* in Gunungtelu Village cannot be separated from the framework of local culture that has been shaped

over centuries. Local culture here encompasses not only customary practices transmitted across generations but also systems of values, symbols, and social norms that shape the community's perceptions and interpretations of religious teachings. In this context, culture functions as a medium that facilitates the reception of the sacred text, allowing the messages of revelation to be accessed, understood, and internalized by the community.

As emphasized by Clifford Geertz in *The Interpretation of Cultures*, religion is essentially a system of symbols that provides meaning to the social world and guides human behavior. For such symbols to be effective, they must be articulated within the cultural language understood by the community.¹¹ In the case of Gunungtelu, the recitation of *al-Barzanji* functions as a religious symbol imbued with meaning, as it is expressed in forms aligned with the cultural horizon of rural Javanese society.

This adaptation is particularly evident in the dimensions of musicality and ritual procedure. The *al-Barzanji* chant, originally based on Arabic *maqāmāt*, is blended with soft and repetitive melodic patterns reminiscent of traditional Javanese songs characterized by a serene atmosphere. This enables congregants to engage emotionally, even those who may not fully understand the Arabic text being recited.

Furthermore, the ritual is organized in ways that resonate with the local social structure. The recitation is typically led by a respected religious figure, while participants consist of individuals from diverse social strata, ranging from farmers to small business owners. The circular seating arrangement reflects an egalitarian principle in social interaction, while also facilitating nonverbal

¹¹ Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), hlm. 89.

communication in the form of smiles, nods, and responsive chanting. The serving of warm tea and simple snacks afterward is likewise an inseparable component of the ritual.

From the perspective of the *Living Qur'an*, these cultural elements play a crucial role in enlivening the sacred text. The Qur'anic verses contained in *al-Barzanji* are not read in academic isolation but are brought into a social space imbued with cultural symbols, familial warmth, and local values. Moreover, local culture serves as a mechanism for sustaining the tradition. In an agrarian society such as Gunungtelu, the cyclical rhythm of planting and harvesting creates intervals of leisure that are filled with religious activities such as *al-Barzanji* recitation. This pattern ensures that engagement with the sacred text occurs consistently and repetitively, allowing its values to take deep root.

The integration of local culture is also reflected in the community's interpretation of the ritual timing. Monday and Friday nights are not only considered theologically auspicious but also carry cultural resonance that strengthens communal participation. These evenings are identified as moments for family and community gatherings, making the *Barzanji* ritual both a highly anticipated event and a means of reinforcing social bonds.

Thus, local culture in Gunungtelu is not a passive backdrop for the recitation of *al-Barzanji* but an active component that shapes, reinforces, and expands the meaning of the sacred text. Culture provides the emotional, aesthetic, and social framework through which the Qur'an—via the medium of *al-Barzanji*—becomes deeply rooted in daily life. This integration demonstrates that the endurance of the revealed message within a community depends not only on the authority of the text but also on its capacity to merge with the cultural language of the people who bring it to life.

INTEGRATION OF THEOLOGICAL AND SOCIAL VALUES

The tradition of *al-Barzanji* recitation in Gunungtelu Village exemplifies how theological values derived from the sacred text can be harmoniously integrated with social values rooted in local culture. This integration is not artificial but develops organically through processes of reception, internalization, and adaptation that span across generations.

The theological values embodied in *al-Barzanji* center on the strengthening of faith and the maintenance of worship, particularly through the practice of *ṣalawāt* as an act of obedience to God's command in QS. al-Ahzab (33): 56. The recitation of *al-Barzanji* reminds congregants of the virtues of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), internalizing his qualities such as compassion, moral exemplarity, and sincerity in *da'wah*. These values function as a moral compass for the community, serving as a guide for behavior in both social interactions and individual acts of devotion.

On the other hand, the social dimension of this tradition is reflected in the reinforcement of communal solidarity. The twice-weekly gatherings create a shared space that strengthens social bonds and networks (*social bonding*). Such rituals function as a means of cultivating *social capital*, the networks, norms, and trust that facilitate cooperation for the common good. In Gunungtelu, this is manifested in the strengthening of *gotong royong* (mutual assistance), reciprocal support during communal festivities, and collective participation in other religious activities.¹²

The integration of theological and social values operates through mutually reinforcing mechanisms. Theological values provide spiritual legitimacy for social activities, while social values

¹² Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), hlm. 19–22.

furnish the concrete context for the practice of religious teachings. Thus, al-Barzanji is not merely a text recited for the attainment of divine reward but also an instrument for shaping a cohesive social habitus. Pierre Bourdieu explains that habitus is formed through repeated practices within a structured social space.¹³ In this case, the regular recitation of al-Barzanji cultivates both religious and social dispositions that become ingrained in the members of the community. Furthermore, this integration illustrates the reciprocal relationship between religion and culture. Local culture provides the format, language, and aesthetics that facilitate the reception of revelatory messages, while religious teachings supply moral orientation and transcendental meaning to cultural practices. This phenomenon resonates with Roland Robertson's concept of glocalization, wherein global values such as the teachings of the Qur'an are adapted into local contexts without losing their substantive essence.¹⁴

The impact of this integration is also evident in the sustainability of the tradition. The people of Gunungtelu do not perceive the al-Barzanji ritual as an obligation imposed upon them, but rather embrace it as an organic part of their lives. The sanctity of the text and the warmth of local culture converge to create a holistic religious experience, enabling younger generations to inherit the tradition with pride rather than burden. In this way, al-Barzanji functions as a unifying bridge between the heavens, which convey the divine message, and the earth, which accommodates human life,

¹³ Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), hlm. 72.

¹⁴ Roland Robertson, *Globalization: Social Theory and Global Culture* (London: Sage, 1992), hlm. 173.

preserving a delicate balance between spirituality and communal existence.

THE TRADITION OF *BARZANJI* IN THE STUDY OF ISLAM NUSANTARA

In the context of Islam Nusantara studies, the *Barzanji* tradition in Gunungtelu Village occupies a strategic position as a productive form of acculturation between Islamic teachings and local culture. Islam Nusantara, as understood by many Muslim scholars such as Azyumardi Azra, represents a manifestation of Islam that has developed in the Indonesian archipelago, characterized by its adaptive, peaceful, and inclusive nature. It is an Islam capable of accommodating local traditions without compromising its commitment to the primary sources of teaching, namely the Qur'an and the Sunnah.

The *Barzanji* tradition reflects this spirit through its ability to connect the normative dimensions of the sacred text with the cultural expressions of Javanese rural society. On the one hand, it remains grounded in the authority of revelation, particularly through its incorporation of Qur'anic verses that serve as theological reinforcement. On the other hand, it absorbs elements of local culture such as musical patterns, spatial arrangements of communal gatherings, and a social system rooted in communal values. The harmony between these dimensions demonstrates that the integration of religion and culture is not only possible but also capable of strengthening the resilience of religious traditions.

When compared to other regions, the practice of *Barzanji* displays diverse forms of reception that highlight its flexibility as a tradition of Islam Nusantara. In Bugis society, for instance, *Barzanji* constitutes an important part of wedding rituals and the *mappacci* ceremony, where its recitation functions as both a prayer for

blessing and a means of affirming the marital bond. In Madura, *Barzanji* is more closely tied to the celebration of the Prophet's birthday (*Maulid*), marked by festive processions that incorporate popular entertainment, thereby serving as an expression of collective joy. In Java, particularly in Gunungtelu, *Barzanji* is recited routinely twice a week, independent of specific occasions, functioning instead as a constant form of worship embedded in the rhythms of everyday life.

This comparative perspective illustrates that the flexibility of *Barzanji* is not merely a matter of technical variation but rather a reflection of the adaptive and contextual character of Islam Nusantara itself. It can serve as a sacred prayer in matrimonial rites, a joyful communal celebration during *Maulid*, or a routine ritual that forms the basis of religious habitus. Such variations highlight the phenomenon of the Living Qur'an, wherein a single text can be embodied in diverse ways according to the cultural and religious needs of each community.

In Gunungtelu, this flexibility manifests in weekly recitations performed with distinctively soft Javanese melodic intonations, differing from the stronger Middle Eastern maqāmāt often used in the text's original cultural setting. This uniqueness demonstrates that the sanctity of the text does not demand a singular mode of presentation but can instead embrace multiple forms of articulation, provided its substantive essence remains intact. This phenomenon affirms Clifford Geertz's argument that religious symbols derive their vitality precisely when articulated within the cultural frameworks familiar to the community that employs them.

The flexibility of *Barzanji* is also one of the primary strengths of Islam Nusantara, where religious traditions endure and are transmitted across generations precisely because they resonate with

the lived realities of the communities that sustain them. This aligns with the anthropological concept of *local agency*, which refers to the capacity of local communities to interpret, adapt, and practice religious teachings in accordance with their needs and conditions without undermining their sacred dimension.

In this regard, the people of Gunungtelu are not passive recipients of a handed-down tradition, but active agents who preserve, reshape, and adapt it to their own socio-economic and cultural dynamics. For instance, the determination of Monday and Friday evenings for the recitation is rooted not only in theological considerations but also in the practical availability of villagers after their daily agricultural work.

More broadly, the *Barzanji* tradition in Gunungtelu may be read as a model of successful integration between sacred text and local culture. This integration connects the Qur'an with local oral and musical traditions while simultaneously uniting liturgical functions with social ones, transforming *Barzanji* into a practice imbued with both spiritual value and social significance. The success of this integration demonstrates that sustaining religious traditions does not require a rigid dichotomy between religion and culture; rather, both can mutually reinforce one another in a symbiotic framework. As Roland Robertson's concept of *glocalization* suggests, the adaptation of global values into local contexts produces religious forms that are relevant, authentic, and sustainable.

In this sense, *Barzanji* in Gunungtelu functions not merely as a legacy of the past that must be preserved but also as a source of inspiration for the development of contemporary religious practices that are contextually grounded and socially relevant. It provides an important lesson that the strength of tradition lies in its ability to

continually adapt to changing times while maintaining the essence of its divine values. In a broader perspective, this practice affirms that Islam Nusantara possesses substantial cultural capital to confront the challenges of modernity without severing its deep-rooted religious foundations.

TEXTUAL RECEPTION THROUGH THE PRESENCE OF QUR'ANIC VERSES IN *KITAB AL-BARZANJI*

In Gunungtelu, the dimension of textual reception is most evident in the way the congregation interacts with Qur'anic verses embedded in *al-Barzanji*, particularly QS al-Ahzab [33]:56 as the normative axis of *ṣalawāt*. This verse is not merely quoted but functions as the “backbone” that structures the entire narrative of praise for the Prophet—from the opening passages, the transition into poetic sections, to the emotional climax of the recitation. At the moment this verse is chanted, the tempo slows down, articulation becomes more deliberate, and *tajwīd* is emphasized—signaling that the community distinguishes the authority of divine revelation from the surrounding devotional narrative.

From a material-textual perspective, the manuscripts used by the community highlight the verse's distinctiveness: it is printed in larger or bolder script, while the prose (*nathr*) and poetry (*nazhm*) sections frame the verse with praises, supplications, and biographical accounts. This textual arrangement serves a pedagogical purpose: especially for younger participants, it facilitates the recognition of revelation amidst the flow of devotional narrative, ensuring orientation toward the primary source. In this sense, *al-Barzanji* functions as a “directed anthology,” guiding attention to a key verse rather than serving as a mere collection of praises.

The role of the verse in this practice operates on at least three levels. First, a normative function, as it represents an explicit command legitimizing *ṣalawāt* as an act of worship. Second, a performative function, since the repetition of the verse at strategic moments prompts communal responses—such as collective chanting and synchronized intonation—turning the verse into a trigger of liturgical cohesion. Third, a didactic function, as the leader of the assembly directs pronunciation, pauses at specific junctures, and corrects articulation, disciplining both the ears and tongues of the congregation; in this way, reception of the verse doubles as repeated training in *qirā'ah*.

At the level of authority, textual reception is reinforced by the figure of the assembly leader, who acts as the guardian of *adab al-qirā'ah*: ensuring the purity of space, intention, and recitation; selecting the edition of the text to be used; and signaling key moments (such as the *mahall al-qiyām*) that lead the congregation into the peak of veneration. Although the *mahall al-qiyām* involves bodily movement, its trigger remains textual—emerging precisely when the narrative reaches the Prophet's birth or when the key verse and certain *ṣalawāt* are recited—demonstrating that the text commands both body and atmosphere.

Field observations further reveal a pattern of internalizing meaning through sound. Many congregants do not pursue formal tafsīr studies, yet they grasp the weight of the verse through its sonic enactment: tonal emphasis, rhythmic pauses, and collective synchrony. Hence, interpretation emerges not only semantically ("the meaning of words") but also sonically and affectively ("the feeling of the verse"). This illustrates the *Living Qur'an* perspective, in which the sacred text comes alive within networks of practice—

in this case, an acoustic network that engraves memory and collective emotion.

In terms of transmission, textual reception operates across generations. Children and adolescents sit beside adults, mimicking the parts they can recall most easily—especially the key verse and shorter *ṣalawāt*. The strategy of “embedding the verse in repetitive patterns” allows memorization to grow organically rather than through separate drills. Over time, they learn to recognize the distinction between revelation and narrative praise while also absorbing the etiquette required during recitation: bowing heads, slowing bodily movements, and maintaining silence in the surroundings.

The findings indicate that textual reception in Gunungtelu embodies a three-layered integration: first, the layer of revelation, clearly marked and venerated in performance; second, the layer of devotional narrative, which orbits around the verse as its gravitational center; and third, the pedagogical layer of the community, which teaches how to listen, recite, and internalize. This layered structure explains why *al-Barzanji* is effective as a medium of integration: it safeguards the primacy of Qur’anic verses while providing narrative and musical frameworks that are culturally familiar, making the sacred text present, audible, and enduring in the daily lives of the congregation.

RITUAL RECEPTION THROUGH COLLECTIVE RECITATION AS RELIGIOUS PRACTICE AND SOCIAL COHESION

The ritual reception of *al-Barzanji* in Gunungtelu finds its clearest expression in the form of collective recitation, performed regularly on Monday and Friday evenings. The choice of timing is not incidental. Monday night carries historical and spiritual significance, as it is believed to be the night of the Prophet

Muhammad's birth, while Friday night occupies a privileged position in Islam as *sayyid al-ayyām* ("the master of days"), a time regarded as abundant in blessings and multiplied rewards.¹⁵ The determination of ritual timing reflects a theological awareness integrated with the community's social calendar. The al-Barzanji ritual in Gunungtelu typically begins after the evening ('Ishā') prayer, with participants gathering at the residence of a religious leader or in a designated mosque. Although the sequence appears simple, congregating after prayer, exchanging greetings, and collective intention, reciting prose (nathr) and verse (nazhm), and culminating in the *mahall al-qiyām*, the entire process constitutes a multilayered rite when analyzed through the lens of liminality.

According to Victor Turner, every ritual comprises transitional phases: separation from the profane, the liminal or threshold stage, and reintegration into a renewed community. In the context of Gunungtelu, the time after 'Ishā' signifies temporal separation from daily routines; the collective recitation ushers participants into a liminal stage, suspending everyday life while channeling communal attention toward shared spiritual experience. The *mahall al-qiyām* functions as the most intense threshold moment, where the collective act of standing symbolizes a transition that connects the community with the Prophet as a source of blessing, while simultaneously affirming the ritual's sacrality.

The spatial and corporeal configuration of circular seating, eye contact, whispered responses, and synchronized standing facilitates the emergence of *communitas*: an egalitarian experience of spontaneous togetherness that temporarily suspends formal

¹⁵ Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, Kitāb al-Ṣiyām, Bāb Istihbāb al-Ṣiyām Yawm al-Ithnayn wa al-Khamīs, no. hadis 1162 (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, t.t.), 2: hlm. 819.

social hierarchies. Turner emphasizes that *communitas* is not merely ordinary solidarity, but an anti-structural experience that deepens emotional and moral bonds among participants. In this context, the ritual leader retains a functional role, yet acts more as a facilitator of shared experience than as an enforcer of social dominance. Thus, the everyday social structure is not negated but enriched by the dynamics of anti-structure that emerge within ritual space. Emotional expressions, collective responses, and full bodily engagement during the *mahall al-qiyām* serve as strong indicators that the ritual cultivates a distinct mode of interaction, different from profane social relations.

From a performative perspective, liminality and *communitas* carry transformational implications: the ritual not only marks but also generates change in participants' religious dispositions. Weekly repetition produces a collective *habitus*, embedding religious inclinations into bodily practices and social habits. Consequently, recurring liminal experiences contribute to the internalization of moral values, devotion to the Prophet, and reinforcement of communal solidarity. In this sense, *al-Barzanji* functions as a ritual medium that bridges normative belief (theology) and emotional-cultural experience (practice), bringing the sacred text "to life" through embodied and social interaction.

The ritual serves not only as personal worship but also as a mechanism for building and maintaining social networks. In Robert Putnam's terms, such routine interactions generate social capital—networks, norms, and trust that facilitate cooperation beyond the ritual context, including *gotong royong* (mutual assistance), social support, and coordination of village events. Field interviews indicate that participants actively engaged in *al-Barzanji* recitation are also more likely to contribute to broader social activities, from

infrastructure development to the organization of large-scale religious events.

Beyond the social dimension, ritual reception also functions as a mechanism of value internalization. Through repeated participation, worshippers embody the meanings of ṣalawāt, the narratives of the Prophet's life, and the prayers contained in the text. Even without deep knowledge of Arabic, the repetition and distinctive rhythm evoke emotional resonance, enabling participants to feel connected to the Prophet. This corresponds with the Living Qur'an perspective, which posits that the vitality of sacred texts lies not only in linguistic comprehension but also in affective engagement and accompanying ritual practice.

Notably, ritual reception creates opportunities for intergenerational participation. Children sit beside parents or grandparents, imitating familiar passages, particularly shorter, repetitive ṣalawāt. Through this "learning by doing" mechanism, the transmission of tradition occurs organically, without formal assignments. Thus, the ritual reception of al-Barzanji in Gunungtelu not only sustains its devotional dimension but also ensures the cultural and social continuity of the tradition.

CULTURAL RECEPTION THROUGH AESTHETIC ADAPTATION IN RHYTHM AND PERFORMANCE

The cultural reception of *al-Barzanji* in Gunungtelu is most evident in the way the community adapts its mode of recitation to align with local aesthetic sensibilities and communicative patterns. One of the most striking features is the blending of Arabic *maqāmāt* such as *bayātī* or *hijāz* with Javanese musical nuances that are typically soft, repetitive, and harmonious. The result is a distinctive recitational style in which Middle Eastern musical structures

intersect with Nusantara tonalities, producing an atmosphere that is both familiar to local ears and imbued with a sense of sacredness.

This adaptation not only enhances auditory comfort but also deepens the congregation's emotional engagement. The gentle melodies allow participants to immerse themselves in the devotional atmosphere without feeling alienated by foreign tonalities. This resonates with Heddy Shri Ahimsa-Putra's notion of *creative reception*, in which a community actively reshapes the text by incorporating local elements, thereby making its message and meaning more accessible. In Gunungtelu, aesthetic adaptation functions as an "affective bridge" between the universal theological message and the community's shared sense of beauty.

Beyond musical aspects, cultural reception is also reflected in the spatial arrangement of the ritual. Worshippers typically sit in circles or semi-circles in the central area of a house or on a mosque veranda. This layout carries symbolic meaning: it creates an egalitarian space in which all participants face the center of recitation, without rigid hierarchical separation. The center is usually occupied by the ritual leader holding the *al-Barzanji* text, while other participants either hold their own copies or follow by memory. Such spatial organization fosters a sense of togetherness and facilitates nonverbal communication—such as nods or smiles—that reinforce social bonds.

Another cultural element is the presence of simple refreshments such as tea, coffee, or traditional snacks. Though seemingly minor, this practice serves as a transitional moment from solemn ritual to relaxed sociability, where light conversation unfolds and communal ties are strengthened. From an anthropological perspective, this represents a liminal phase bridging the ritual and everyday life, ensuring that the *al-Barzanji*

tradition functions not only as worship but also as a vehicle for nurturing interpersonal relationships.

Interestingly, cultural reception in Gunungtelu demonstrates openness to innovation. Ritual leaders do not dismiss adjustments in tempo or melodic variation, particularly upon request during special occasions such as the Prophet's birthday (*Maulid Nabi*) or village thanksgiving events. Such flexibility indicates that the continuity of tradition does not depend on rigid formality but rather on adaptability that preserves the essence of its teachings. In this sense, the cultural reception of *al-Barzanji* in Gunungtelu illustrates how sacred texts can flourish when intertwined with aesthetic values and deeply rooted modes of social interaction. This integration ensures that the Qur'anic message is not only read but also heard, felt, and embodied as part of the community's collective identity.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE SUSTAINABILITY OF TRADITION AND THE RELIGION CULTURE INTEGRATION MODEL

Findings from Gunungtelu demonstrate that the sustainability of the *Barzanji* tradition is not solely rooted in its theological content, but also in its organic integration with the community's social system, aesthetic preferences, and everyday rhythms of life. This integration creates an ecosystem in which religious practices are experienced as a natural part of daily existence rather than as separate or occasional activities. Within the framework of the *Living Qur'an*, this suggests that sacred texts remain alive insofar as they are articulated through cultural media that resonate with the community's lived reality.

In terms of continuity, the reception of *Barzanji* in Gunungtelu operates through a process of generational transmission that unfolds without coercion. Children and

adolescents gradually internalize the tradition through direct involvement in ritual spaces, whether by participating in recitation, holding the text, or simply observing. This *learning by doing* mechanism ensures that the tradition is not dependent on rigid formal instruction but instead grows through organic participation. Such a model is highly relevant for Muslim communities seeking to safeguard religious practices amid rapid social change.

Another implication lies in *Barzanji*'s potential as a model of religion–culture integration capable of addressing the tensions often posed by modernization and globalization. In many contexts, modernization generates friction between the “purity of doctrine” and “local practice.” However, the Gunungtelu case demonstrates that the two need not be mutually exclusive. By preserving the substance of revelation Qur’anic verses, *shalawāt*, and supplications while embedding them in familiar cultural forms, *Barzanji* simultaneously maintains sacredness and cultural relevance.

Theoretically, this successful integration aligns with Roland Robertson’s concept of *glocalization*, in which global values (in this case, Islamic teachings) are translated into local, contextual forms without losing their essential meaning. Such an approach allows religious traditions to endure even amid strong currents of cultural homogenization. Moreover, the implications extend beyond the local context to academic discourse. The *Barzanji* tradition in Gunungtelu provides a valuable case study for enriching the scholarship of *Islam Nusantara* and broader studies of religion–culture integration. It demonstrates that creative reception of sacred texts constitutes an effective strategy for preserving religious vitality in multicultural societies.

Accordingly, the Gunungtelu experience may serve as a source of inspiration for developing adaptive models of religiosity in diverse contexts, both within Indonesia and globally.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the *Barzanji* recitation tradition in Gunungtelu represents a concrete example of the successful integration of sacred text and local culture. Viewed through the lens of the *Living Qur'an*, the presence of Qur'anic verses—particularly QS. al-Ahzab (33): 56 functions not only as a theological foundation but also as a ritual catalyst, a means of strengthening social cohesion, and a pedagogical tool for the community.

The reception of *Barzanji* in Gunungtelu operates across three interrelated layers. First, textual reception, which situates the Qur'anic verse as the theological axis structuring the devotional narrative. Second, ritual reception, in which collective recitation becomes both a routine act of worship and a medium of social bonding that cultivates a religious *habitus*. Third, cultural reception, which adapts the format, rhythm, and performative aspects of recitation to align with local aesthetic sensibilities and patterns of social interaction. These three layers work synergistically, ensuring that the sacred text is not merely recited but also embodied, experienced, and internalized within everyday life.

The findings highlight that the sustainability of the *Barzanji* tradition depends on its ability to adapt creatively without compromising the substance of revelation. This integration illustrates that religion and culture are not mutually exclusive domains; rather, they can coexist in a mutually reinforcing and harmonious relationship.

The specific contribution of this article to the study of *Islam*

Nusantara lies in the conceptual proposal of “layered reception” (*resepsi berlapis*) as an analytical model. This model consists of: (1) textual reception, which designates Qur’anic verses—especially QS. al-Ahzab [33]:56 as the theological axis of legitimacy; (2) ritual reception, which embeds the text into routine collective worship and nurtures communal religious dispositions; and (3) cultural reception, which reconfigures the recitation’s format, melody, and spatial arrangements to resonate with local aesthetics and cultural frameworks.

Through this perspective, the *Barzanji* tradition in Gunungtelu is understood not merely as a local expression of Islam, but as a dynamic mechanism that enables sacred text to be transformed into a simultaneous social and cultural praxis. This approach enriches *Living Qur’an* scholarship in Indonesia by illustrating how religious vitality is sustained when scripture is enlivened within the cultural rhythms cherished by its community. Furthermore, the proposed framework provides a transferable analytical lens for comparative studies of *Islam Nusantara* across diverse regions.

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