

## VILLAGE MUSLIM AS A SYMBOL OF RESISTANCE TO THE TRANSNATIONAL ISLAMIC MOVEMENT IN YOGYAKARTA

Muh. Subhan Ashari & Farida Fitriyaturosyidah

Institut Ilmu Al Qur'an An Nur Yogyakarta

subhanashari@gmail.com; faridafitri0809@gmail.com

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### Abstract

This study explores the underlying factors driving the resistance of village Muslims to the transnational Islamic movement through the lens of Islamic boarding school (*pesantren*) development in Yogyakarta, as well as the ongoing dynamics that have led to prolonged conflict. Employing a qualitative case study approach, the research investigates how socio-religious tensions emerge and persist within local contexts. The findings identify two primary causes of resistance: the absence of a symbiotic relationship between village Muslims and transnational Islamic actors, and a lack of effective communication with the local community. These factors have sustained resistance over time, marked by cultural and political negotiations in response to symbolic differences in daily religious practices. The resulting disharmony illustrates how local identity and religious expression diverge from those promoted by transnational movements. Viewed through the lens of human needs theory, the conflict reflects a struggle to preserve deeply rooted communal ideals and identity. Ultimately, the study concludes that religious identity serves as the central force motivating village Muslims to uphold their values and resist external pressures, underscoring the complexity of religious interaction at the grassroots level.

**Keywords:** Village Muslims; Resistance; Transnational Islamic Movement; Islamic Boarding Schools; Religious Identity

## INTRODUCTION

Village Muslims are Muslim individuals who reside in rural areas. Ideologically, they tend to practice a form of cultural Islam in their daily lives. Cultural Islam is a form of Islam that attempts to engage in dialectics with local cultures, developing a unique characteristic that reflects its distinct characteristics (Woorward, 2008). Its uniqueness and distinctiveness do not immediately remove the purity of Islamic teachings, but rather, it has been acculturated with local culture (socio-cultural).

If we examine the history of the archipelago, how the Javanese people resisted foreigners (Dutch colonizers), for five years (since 1825-1830), the people continued to provide fierce resistance, resulting in the biggest war during the colonization. It was because Prince Diponegoro gave religious doctrine to the people (Widodo et al., 2022). The Diponegoro War is a real example of how a social resistance movement with a religious spirit. In another version, according to Carey, the war carried out by Prince Diponegoro was portrayed as a Jihad in the form of the Sabil War, a war narrated as a religious jihad to fight foreign groups that sought to colonize Javanese society. The term Sabil War was also intended to strengthen Diponegoro's position as both a spiritual leader and a leader of a social movement (Tobroni & Amilia, 2019). A prestigious title that aroused the spirit of resistance among the Javanese people due to the various forms of colonialism and social instability in Yogyakarta and its surroundings at that time. It is not surprising that spiritually charged conflicts have a profound impact on both individuals and society. In this context, the Theory suggests that disputes often occur in society due to the intersection of religious-based identity group interests (Susan, 2010).

In general, the characteristics of Javanese Muslim society tend to be accepting of anyone present around them. They prefer to give in rather than have to conflict. However, there is something different and unique about village Muslims in several areas in Yogyakarta. They collectively give a serious response to the Transnational Islamic movement. Judging from their official website, their movement has strong ties with countries in the Middle East, so it is very natural if this Islamic boarding school is called an Islamic movement that tends to the *Salafi Manhaj* ideology. Transnational Islamic movements like this typically have traditional and conservative values, but they adapt to the changing times. Therefore, they can leverage existing modernization and expand their movement globally (Assegaf, 2017).

What is interesting here is that this Islamic movement emerged to develop its ideology in educational institutions such as Islamic boarding schools in villages, which are known to have a strong traditional Islamic base. Although the majority of the surrounding village communities do not conform to the Islamic educational method, this transnational Islamic movement was able to become a superior seed that grew well and found its proper place. They seemed not to care about the social groups surrounding them, allowing this movement to continue developing various educational initiatives in this area (Researcher's Observation, 15 November 2023). Although the development of education in this Islamic boarding school is quite rapid, the local community is not interested in sending their children to these educational institutions, resulting in a low number of students.

The public's disinterest in this Islamic movement was already apparent a few years ago when the public rejected their Islamic boarding school. Various posters and protest writings were visible along the road, such as "Reject Development This *Pesantren*!!, Reject Building Expansion!" and so on. At that time, the public's reason was that the construction of the Islamic boarding school had no economic impact on the surrounding residents, despite the school having been established for a long time and having thousands of students (Personal interview, 23/12/2023). Not only that, when the students were returning home from this transnational Islamic institution due to the COVID-19 pandemic, several buses picking up students were rejected by residents. They blocked the road, so the parking area for several buses had to turn around to find alternative routes. The villagers' self-protection of their mobility was very strong until the end of 2023. (Researcher's Observation, 08/12/2023).

Even now, some hamlets still refuse to accept boarding houses or rent out their homes to husbands and wives from their group, and mosque administrators also refuse to appoint imams from among them. The rejection is no longer motivated by economics, but has 'spread' to ideological motives, so that the community is more protective of itself by strengthening cultural activities in its environment. Likewise, their Islamic boarding schools, despite numerous rejections, continue to construct multi-storey buildings and maintain communication with various parties.

The background above suggests that there are several interesting aspects, making this research worthwhile and deserving of immediate attention, including: First, as village Muslims who tend to give in and avoid conflict, they realize that giving in does not necessarily

mean losing. When someone disturbs their habits (which have been comfortable with their cultural Islam), of course, no matter how small, they will fight it. Second, to maintain the stability of society, village Muslims are used as a symbol of resistance to Transnational Islamic boarding schools (*Salafi-Wababi*), so that, with that, the conflict emerged and continues to be 'managed' until now.

Therefore, this article will address two fundamental questions: the reasons behind village Muslims serving as a symbol of resistance to the transnational Islamic movement, and the dynamics of the resistance of village Muslims against it, which ultimately led to a prolonged conflict. At this point, this article becomes important to be analyzed and understood comprehensively by academics, especially in the field of Islamic movements.

## METHODS

The research employs a qualitative, ethnographic approach to gain a deep understanding of the socio-religious dynamics within the Muslim community in Yogyakarta. This method allows for immersive observation and participation in the daily lives of villagers, facilitating a nuanced exploration of how local Islamic identities are maintained and expressed as forms of resistance. Ethnographic fieldwork is complemented by in-depth, semi-structured interviews with key community members and local authorities, capturing diverse perspectives on the interplay between local Islamic practices and transnational Islamic influences (Kusumastuti & Khoiron, 2021).

Data collection involves participant observation during religious, cultural, and social events, such as mosque activities, communal prayers, and local ceremonies, which serve as symbolic sites for affirming and resisting identity. This approach aligns with the phenomenological framework, which focuses on the lived experiences and meanings attributed by community members to their religious practices and social interactions (Creswell, 2013). Additionally, the study incorporates historical secondary data analysis to contextualize the evolution of Islamic identity in the village, drawing from archival materials, local records, and previous research on Yogyakarta's Muslim minority communities.

To ensure rigor and reliability, the research employs triangulation by cross-verifying data obtained from observations, interviews, and document analysis (Sugiyono, 2017). Content analysis is applied to interpret textual and visual materials, including sermons, community statements, and local media, to identify discursive strategies used by the village

as a symbol of resistance. This multi-method strategy enhances the depth and credibility of findings by capturing both explicit and implicit expressions of resistance against transnational Islamic movements perceived as external influences.

Ethical considerations are paramount throughout the research process. Informed consent is obtained from all participants, ensuring confidentiality and respect for cultural sensitivities. The research design also incorporates reflexivity, acknowledging the researcher's positionality and potential biases in interpreting community narratives. By combining ethnographic immersion with qualitative interviews and document analysis, the study provides a robust investigation into how a Muslim village in Yogyakarta symbolically and practically resists transnational Islamic movements, thereby contributing to broader discussions on local religious identity and socio-political agency in Indonesia.

## RESULTS

### **Background of Muslim Village as a Symbol of Resistance to Transnational Islamic Movements in Yogyakarta**

As explained in the earlier chapter, village Muslims have their religious symbols, and in some places, these symbols are as strong as those of transnational Muslim religious symbols. Village Muslims have a strong local religious culture, including *tablilan* events, *shalawatan*, and *yasinan*, among others. If these cultural symbols are disrupted or halted for various reasons, they will naturally resist, regardless of how slight the disruption may be.

In this sub-discussion, the researchers explain why village Muslims are used as resistance to the Transnational Islamic movement, including:

First, based on the Theory of public relations, which states that conflict arises due to prolonged polarization. It means that the Muslim villagers in Yogyakarta initially had trust in the Transnational Islamic boarding school for various reasons. Still, since 2015, the Muslim villagers here have begun to lose their distrust of them. This distrust has several reasons, namely:

1. There is a lack of mutual symbiosis between village Muslims and their Islamic boarding schools.

The initial distrust arose because the establishment of Islamic boarding schools was one of the purposes of strengthening the pre-existing religious community. What is

happening now is that these Islamic boarding schools are strengthening their internal religious foundations and branching out, not in the surrounding areas, so that the community begins to ignore their existence. Some are indifferent to all their activities, whether carried out in *pesantren* or the general community.

It is as conveyed by Mr. STN, a Muslim resident in Yogyakarta: "Initially, this Islamic boarding school was built so that the religious community could increase, because the *ustadz* were from outside the city, so they could exchange experiences here, sir. But now they are doing activities without involving us much. It is what many people regret. So in 2015-2016 there was a rejection of new construction, one of the reasons being that."

Based on the interview results above, village Muslims do not focus solely on ideological issues; their concerns extend beyond abstract beliefs to encompass practical and immediate matters. One of the most critical issues for them is related to basic needs, particularly the family's economic situation. This financial dimension significantly influences their social interactions and decision-making processes, making it difficult for them to compromise with others when their livelihood is at stake. The prioritization of economic survival underscores that resistance or cooperation is not merely ideological but deeply intertwined with the material conditions and daily realities faced by the community.

Consequently, it is not surprising that distrust arises between the village Muslims and external parties. This distrust stems primarily from an imbalance in the concept of mutual symbiosis, where the relationship that should ideally be mutually beneficial fails to maintain equilibrium. When one party perceives that their needs or contributions are undervalued or exploited, the foundation of trust erodes, leading to social tension and resistance. This dynamic highlights the complexity of local responses to transnational Islamic movements, where economic and social factors intersect with ideological considerations.

## 2. Lack of good communication with the community

Naturally, transnational Islamic groups will have difficulty finding a gap for intense communication with the surrounding community. One reason is the presence of certain symbolic differences in their daily newspapers. It is as conveyed by Mrs. Wsh,

a female figure: "We just don't feel comfortable, sir. Our communication is normal. If we are invited to talk, we talk. If not, we just keep quiet. It's normal like that. Because they are different from us."

Other interviews emphasize the word "different" in the interview above. For example, Mr. WYD (as a Muslim figure) noted that communication between the community and them was limited to "say hello..." only. Sometimes they only smile back if they smile. If they are asked to talk, they only say as much as necessary. The relationship between society and transnational Islamic movements is generally not intense, nor is it intimate. The interactions that occur tend to be formal and limited because society already understands which parties can communicate more openly and which are limited to superficial communication. It is influenced by differences in ideology, goals, and perspectives in the practice of religious teachings and daily social life. Transnational Islamic movements often introduce understandings or ideologies that differ from local Islamic traditions, prompting society to maintain a distance and limit communication to avoid clashes of values or social conflict.

People's understanding of who they can communicate with more freely is usually reflected in physical symbols that are visible in everyday life. These symbols can take the form of dress, lifestyle, and even religious attributes that are associated with certain individuals or groups. Similarities in physical symbols often indicate closeness in values and identities, allowing people to feel more comfortable and open when interacting with each other. Conversely, differences in physical symbols can create social distance and limited communication, because they are considered to represent significant differences in values and perspectives (Juliadi et al., 2018).

Physical symbols in social communication hold a significant meaning in shaping or limiting interactions between society and transnational Islamic movements. The use of symbols is not only an identity marker but also a nonverbal communication tool that can strengthen or reduce a sense of togetherness. In the context of Islam in Indonesia, symbols such as clothing, worship movements, and religious attributes are the main differentiators between local groups and transnational groups. If people find similarities in these symbols, they tend to be more aware and accept each other easily. However, if the symbols displayed are strikingly different, people will be more cautious and maintain their distance when communicating (Wana, 2016).

Second, village Muslims tend to engage in negotiation. Although in some places, many areas refuse to rent their houses to these Islamic boarding school ustadz, village Muslims in other places negotiate to allow it with certain conditions, including when there is an RT gathering, they are still asked to participate and socialize. In some cases, there are communities whose negotiations involve few conditions; they request that no disturbance be made in their area.

It is as conveyed by SGG (the host who allows the ustadz or pesantren employees to rent his house) as follows: "Because they are different from us, right, sir. We try to understand. We allow them to rent here, but there are several conditions, namely to maintain order or join the RT meeting every month. This condition is important to maintain mutual comfort in our place, sir."

Based on the researcher's observations and documentation, this negotiation occurred in an area where the community was less religious or in an environment close to an Islamic boarding school. It means that the village Muslims who rejected them had an unbalanced position, because one of them did not have daily economic impacts and less interaction. What happened was a strong difference of opinion, specifically between the village version of Islam, which must be maintained, and the outside version of Islam that continues to try to enter the village area. To date, negotiations between the interested parties have continued.

Third, if the conflict between Muslim villagers and Islamic boarding schools is connected to the Theory of human needs, as explained earlier, then this is quite relevant. However, religious-based conflicts often contain an important underlying reason, namely, economic reasons. The reason why the community decided to allow this Islamic boarding school to be located in their area is so that the community can enjoy financial benefits. As more students from various regions enroll their children in this Islamic boarding school, it is hoped that the surrounding community will meet their living needs.

It is as stated by SH (One of the Community Leaders): "This *pesantren* was built for the benefit of the community, sir. Previously, the Islamic boarding school said that if this *pesantren* was built, many people would be involved and 'splashed' with blessings. One of them is economic blessings. The daily needs of the students, he said, would be greatly facilitated by the surrounding community. But the evidence is actually the

opposite, they built their own shops for the students' daily needs, so that the community is rarely affected economically. It is what we all regret, sir.”

Economic needs are fundamental human requirements that are crucial to fulfill, as they are directly related to survival, welfare, and social stability. These needs include clothing, food, shelter, health, and employment opportunities, which are universally recognized as the main prerequisites for creating a decent life (Spacey, 2024). If the basic needs of society are not met properly, then the potential for social conflict to arise will be greater. The inability to meet economic needs can cause tension, unrest, and even division in society, as explained in the Theory of basic needs and the relationship between poverty, inequality, and conflict (R Kanbur, 2007).

This phenomenon is also seen in the interaction between the Muslim village community and the Islamic boarding school (a transnational Islamic group) in Yogyakarta, where the imbalance of economic reciprocity becomes the main source of tension. The Islamic boarding school's limited economic contribution to the surrounding community has led to resistance from residents and several stakeholders, resulting in the school no longer receiving support to expand its territory. Injustice and economic inequality between groups are the main triggers for recurring conflicts, because the community feels that they do not get fair benefits from the presence of the Islamic boarding school. This condition aligns with the finding that economic inequality and the unequal distribution of benefits can exacerbate polarization and increase the risk of conflict between groups in a particular area (Mazzaro, 2012).

This imbalance is one of the important factors in how village Muslims resist Islamic boarding schools, which are part of a transnational Islamic group. The issue of different cultures, reinforced by economic factors, is a rational reason for village Muslims to fight back. Various kinds of negotiations will experience difficulties if one of the conflict transformations (i.e., cultural, social, economic, or political issues) cannot be unraveled and resolved individually. This problem will worsen if the parties remain silent and do not seek an immediate solution.

Fourth, religious-based identity is an urgent reason for how village Muslims continue to fight and defend their idealism from any party. On the one hand, religion is used by various parties as a source of values and moral Goodness, but on the other hand, religious identity is used as a symbol and source of conflict. A significant reason

why religion is a source of conflict in society is the complex relationship between religion and local culture, which often intersect with each other (Fahim, 2016).

It also applies to the conflict between Muslim villagers in Yogyakarta and the Transnational Islamic Boarding School. According to the study's results, religion, culture, and society are significant factors contributing to the conflict between the two. Muslim villagers as a historical religious identity in rural areas are always integrated with various practical life problems of the community in an actual and factual way. However, this culturally based religion in rural areas has been deeply embedded in the individual community as a necessity of life. On the other hand, there is a new identity that attempts to change or offer alternative values that differ from those previously held.

This difference in identity is one of the causes of conflict in this study. It is as conveyed by Mr. PRM (one of the community leaders): "Actually, here we are comfortable with our way of practicing Islam. Although sometimes there are Muhammadiyah, their way of practicing Islam is almost the same as NU. Every time there is a celebration, they join *tablilan*, *sholawatan*, and so on. But the *pesantren* people (transnational Islam) do not want such things. Finally, residents began to think about what if they were not in their neighborhood, to maintain comfort with fellow residents here."

This interview is interesting because it highlights the strong identity of the Muslim village religion, which remains consistent, regardless of the community organization (Ormas) chosen. However, their daily religious practices are always intertwined. Not only that, but through the results of the interview above, it was found that most people around their Islamic boarding school do not accept its existence; however, in another dimension, they are more tolerant and open to understanding each other.

## DISCUSSION

### Muslim Village: Portrait of Cultural Islam

Islam entered and developed in villages across the archipelago, particularly in Java, through the significant role of ulama and kiai, who employed a culture-based transformation approach. These *ulama* not only disseminated religious teachings textually, but also integrated

Islamic values into local traditions and customs that were already deeply rooted in society. This process is known as cultural acculturation, where the original traditions of the community were adjusted and enriched with Islamic values without eliminating the existing local identity (Sartika & Zulmuqim, 2022).

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The acculturation between village traditions and the noble values of Islam has produced a new form of culture that is more religious but still rooted in local identity. Examples can be seen in various religious rituals that are packaged in the form of community traditions, such as *selamatan*, *tahlilan*, and village *slametan*, which contain elements of Islamic propagation while maintaining the values of togetherness and cooperation. This process proves that Islam in the archipelago, especially in Java, developed peacefully and harmoniously with local culture, and was able to create a social order that was both religious and cultured (Solikah et al., 2024)

According to Suyanto, several key characteristics of Javanese society need to be understood, namely its religious nature, non-doctrinaire approach, tolerance, accommodation, and optimism. With that, they gave birth to a unique and distinctive pattern of spiritual life, one that includes the belief in God's existence. They call it Sangkan Paraning Dumadi, and tend to maintain harmony, cooperation, and Peace (Suyanto, 1990:144). Here, it shows that village Muslims have a strong ideology since long ago; on the other hand, they are still accommodating to groups who want to socialize in their lives. Being tolerant and avoiding conflict are characteristics that many village Muslims still hold firmly.

However, as part of the Islamic cultural group, village Muslims have their strong religious traditions, including *sholawatan*, *tahlilan*, and *hadrahan*, among others. When this tradition is disrupted by a group that questions it, they experience discomfort, and this can lead to conflict. To avoid physical conflict, village Muslims will politically mobilize to resist the discomfort. According to M. Mukhsin Jamil (2013), traditional society (in this case,

Muslim villagers) has long formulated the meaning of civil society with its main agenda being resistance (both against the state and against groups that harm them). It was not born from an unthinkable term, but has been influenced by the values of religiosity and various socio-political experiences that I have had.

Therefore, in understanding the conflict of resistance, there are at least several causes. According to Fisher (2003), things that can cause conflict can be understood in at least six ways, namely: First, public relations. This Theory states that conflict is often caused by continuous polarization. Conflict also arises due to distrust and differences in values between groups (Sari, 2017). Second, principal negotiation. In this Theory, a conflict is caused by an unbalanced position, thus giving rise to different views among the parties with an interest. Third, human needs. In this Theory, conflicts that occur in society are caused by the basic needs of human life (both mentally, physically, and socially) that are not met properly. Fourth, identity. In this Theory, conflict is usually caused by an identity whose existence is threatened. It causes past suffering that has not been resolved properly until now (Husniati & Maryam, 2020). Fifth, conflict transformation. In this Theory, conflict is usually caused by an imbalance and injustice between two parties. This conflict usually originates from cultural, political, social, economic, and so on issues. (Indrawan & Putri, 2022).

The five approaches can be understood as a comprehensive analytical framework for examining research on Muslim villages as a symbol of resistance to transnational Islamic movements in Yogyakarta. Through these approaches, as explained in the study's sub-results, researchers can observe how Muslim village communities maintain their local identities and traditions while responding to the influence and pressure from transnational Islamic movements that tend to introduce more rigid and global religious ideologies and practices. By employing this approach, research can uncover the social, cultural, and spiritual dynamics that emerge from the interaction between local Islamic cultural values and the modernization of transnational preaching, which is oriented towards the purification of teachings.

## CONCLUSION

Village Muslims have a very strong local religious culture. When these cultural symbols are disrupted or feel threatened, they tend to resist, even in a subtle form. Resistance to the transnational Islamic movement emerged due to the lack of mutual symbiosis between village Muslims and Islamic boarding schools and the lack of effective communication with

the local community in the Yogyakarta area. This disharmony is caused by differences in certain symbols in daily activities, leading village Muslims to prefer negotiating politically and culturally. If the conflict between village Muslims and Islamic boarding schools is linked to the Theory of human needs, as previously explained, then this is highly relevant. Overall, religious-based identity is the main reason why village Muslims continue to struggle to maintain their idealism against various pressures from any party.

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