

Islamic Variant of Sasak: Transition and Dialectics in the Wetu Telu Community in Lombok, Indonesia

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Abstract

Outsiders have often perceived the Wetu Telu community in Lombok as a variant or a splinter of the predominantly Islamic Sasak society's religious system. This article aims to understand the existence of the Wetu Telu community on the island of Lombok from the perspective of both outsiders and insiders with a holistic, interdisciplinary approach. This study uses a qualitative method with a phenomenological approach. The research subjects include the Wetu Telu community in and around Lingsar Narmada in West Lombok, the Tanjung area, and several villages in the Bayan district of North Lombok, such as Loloan, Anyar, Akar-Akar, and Mumbul Sari. The required data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, documentation, and literature studies. Data analysis involved domain, taxonomic, componential, and thematic analysis. The results show that phenomenologically Wetu Telu is a variant of Islamic Sasak that believes in some Islamic doctrinal values, understands and practices religious rituals that have many similarities with the belief systems before the coming of Islam to Lombok, and blends with local Sasak cultural traditions or customs. Wetu Telu was born from the historical transition of the development of local belief

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systems that dialectically interacted with the arrival and development of major religions on the island of Lombok and were intertwined with the socio-cultural and socio-political dynamics of Sasak society. This study significantly contributes to the study on the relationship between “foreign religion” and local culture with a special reference to Wetu Telu of Sasak people in Indonesia.

Key Words

Sasak Islam, transition, dialectics, Wetu Telu community, Lombok

Introduction

Some scholars classify religions into heavenly (*samawi*) and earthly (*ardhi*) religions. The term “heavenly religion” refers to the Abrahamic religions; Abraham is considered the father of three major religions, namely Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, which were revealed from God. The three religions originated from one religion: the religion of the sky (*wahyu*) (Hidayat 2003). In contrast, the term earthly religions are defined as religions considered to have been born and developed by human civilization. In addition, there is the third term “traditional religion.” Traditional religion contains specific values, concepts, views, and practices. Weber equates traditional religion with the work of a sorcerer (cited in Budiwanti 2013b, 2013a). According to Bellah, traditional religion places a lot of emphasis on worldly matters because it creates doctrines that provide limited rational explanations (cited in Budiwanti 2014a, 2014b).

Despite the controversy surrounding these terms, we describe religion from the perspectives of sociologists and anthropologists. According to Edward Burnett Tylor (1832-1917), religion is a belief in spiritual beings. Religion is described as a belief in the existence of invisible spirits that think, act, and feel the same as humans, which is called animism. Lucien Levy-Bruhl (1857-1945), a French historian and philosopher, rejected Tylor’s theory above because he believed that primitive humans could not think abstractly. Primitive people could believe in a person with a particular plant or animal and easily believe in a totem animal. The mystical nature, according to Lucien, is that the whole of nature is permeated by supernatural forces (cited in Agus 2006).

According to James George Frazer (1854-1941), the essence of religion is dependence or belief in supernatural powers (cited in Fleure 1941). Radcliffe-Brown (1881-1955) defined religion as an expression in one form or another of consciousness of dependence on forces outside

ourselves, called spiritual or moral powers (cited in Niehaus 2021). Auguste Comte (1798-1858) understood religious thought as a tendency to seek absolute answers about everything, such as returning the cause of all events that happen to the will of God (cited in Graham 2012).

Local religions exist or emerge in various regions of Indonesia. The presence of these local religions is a form of a belief system that arises from the local culture. The research conducted by Clifford Geertz with his monumental work *The Religion of Java* resulted in three typologies of Islam, namely *Santri*, *Priyai*, and *Abangan*. According to Suparlan (2014), this is a study of religion viewed as an acculturative and syncretic social system. Based on the notes of the reformists, Geertz described some of the practices of *Abangan* and *Priyai* as un-Islamic and sometimes referred to as Hindu teachings of worship of ancestors and belief in spirits with offerings as rituals, magic, and forms of mysticism (Bruinessen 2003). This is also true with the local religion of the Sasak tribe who inhabit the island of Lombok, which is described in this research as *Wetu Telu*. However, Islam *Wetu Telu* still contains many ambiguous and controversial meanings due to differing perspectives or approaches (Cederroth 1975; Telle, 2009). Therefore, a more comprehensive study with a multidisciplinary approach is needed to gain a more complete and objective perception and understanding of the Sasak Muslim community's variant of Islam defined by the term *Wetu Telu*, which still exists today.

Interest in local wisdom is growing in cultural and religious studies. There are also studies on customs and religion in West Nusa Tenggara and Lombok's "local religion," which has yet to be studied from various perspectives, including law (*sharia*), sociology, and anthropology. Studies on Lombok, particularly on *Wetu Telu* Islam, have been conducted domestically and internationally. Erni Budiwanti's (2013b) research on Sasak Islam studies the Sasak Bayan community in Lombok, focusing on ideological conflicts between two religious and cultural groups, namely *Wetu Telu* and *Waktu Lima*. *Wetu Telu* is Sasak people who, despite identifying as Muslims, continue to worship ancestral spirits, various spirits, and others in their area. *Waktu Lima* is characterized by a high adherence to Islamic teachings. M. Ahyar Fadly's book on local Islam is not different from Erni Budiwanti's book, both deal with local Islam in Lombok, namely Islam *Wetu Telu*. Nevertheless, Fadly's book indicates a change in religious attitudes among the followers of Islam *Wetu Telu*. This change mainly occurred because traditional stakeholders and *kyai* (Muslim leaders) began to look to the future by engaging in previously taboo work (Fadly 2008). Muhammad Harfin Zuhdi's book on traditional parochialism

towards the religious patterns of the Wetu Telu Islamic Community in Bayan, which is based on his research at the research institution of UIN Syarif Hidayatullah in 2009, examines the relationship between Islam and the traditional parochialism of Wetu Telu, which influences the religious patterns of the Bayan community (Zuhdi 2009).

In contrast to the relevant previous studies as described above, this study emphasizes the emergence of the Sasak Islamic variant from the transitional history of the development of the local belief system which dialectically intersects with the coming and development of major religions in the island of Lombok that are intertwined with the socio-cultural and socio-political dynamics of the Sasak people. Therefore, this study aims to understand the existence of the Wetu Telu community on Lombok Island from the perspective of outsiders and insiders in the community, with a balanced interdisciplinary approach. To reveal the focus of the research, we used qualitative methods to capture an object with a certain description by following certain ideas and looking for certain thoughts (Al-Jabiri 2003).

Based on the purpose and subject of the research, this study used a phenomenological approach, which emphasizes the importance of the equal study of different “religious cultures,” whether in the past or present, the understanding of different traditions that cross the religious spectrum and the construction of a case for the benefit of religious studies in the academic world (Erricker 2002). The required data were collected through observation and in-depth interviews with the Islam Wetu Telu community in the Lingsar Village, Narmada District, West Lombok, the Tanjung area, and several villages in the Bayan District, North Lombok Regency. The collected data were analysed through the techniques of domain, taxonomic, componential, and theme analysis. By doing this, this study contributes a better understanding of the intersection between local religions and foreign, world religions with a reference to the Wetu Telu community among Sasak people in Lombok, Indonesia, and its dialectics with Islam. This study is expected to contribute to the discourse about the relationship between “foreign religion” as represented by Islam and local culture with a special reference to Wetu Telu of Sasak people in Indonesia.

Views on the Locality of Religious Practice

The term “local religion” becomes problematic when confronted with world religions because it creates a negative paradigm (Zaenuddin 2020). In the context of Indonesia, there are six accepted or official religions: Islam, Christianity, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism (Mu'ti and Burhani 2019). Other local or unofficial religions and their adherents

are treated unfairly. Local religions should be studied with appropriate approaches and methodologies (Maarif 2015). There are at least three approaches used in studying a (local) religion. The first is the “humanistic” approach which demands a perspective that every idea and activity of an individual or community being studied is a form of human creativity. The approach in social science is called the empirical approach (empirical study). The second is the “interdisciplinary” approach that views religion, although already implied as a unique cultural dimension, can be seen as always related to other dimensions. For example, history, anthropology, sociology, philosophy, and psychology have different approaches, focuses, and emphases. The third approach is the “cross-cultural” approach. This approach is not limited to comparing two cultures as the research subject but also demands dialogue between researchers and participants (Maarif 2015). The theories used include Emile Durkheim’s phenomenology theory (D’Orsi and Dei 2018; Gangas 2011).

The spiritual life of Islam is closely related to the understanding and personal experience of each individual. Therefore, this study uses a phenomenological approach. The approach and understanding of the phenomenon of human diversity through the anthropological perspective is a way of approaching and understanding the “object” of religion from various perspectives (Abdullah 2000; Peek 2005). The phenomenological approach to religion is similar to the approach to Pure Science. A phenomenological approach is a scientific approach that seeks to find the essence behind all religious manifestations in human life on earth (Abdullah 2000).

The phenomenological perspective seeks to understand the meaning of events and their relationship to ordinary people in particular situations. Phenomenology does not assume that researchers know what something means to the people being studied. What is emphasized by phenomenologists is the subjective aspect of people’s behaviour (Desjarlais and Throop 2011). They try to enter the conceptual world of the subjects they are studying so that they understand what and why they develop an understanding of events in their everyday lives. The main task of phenomenological analysis is to reconstruct human life’s “real” world in its natural form (Cilesiz 2011).

There are two ways to examine the nature of religious experience. The first is by using the historical description of religion, sect, or religious thought itself and the second is starting from the potential environment where individual experiences occur (Westley 2020). There are four opinions about the nature of religious experience. Firstly, denying the existence of such an experience; the religious experience from this first opinion is a mere

illusion. Secondly, acknowledging the existence of a religious experience, but it is separate from common experiences. Thirdly, equating historical forms of religion with religious experience. Lastly, acknowledging the existence of pure religious experience that can be identified using specific criteria that can be applied to any expression (Mulyana 2013).

Religious beliefs are always held by groups that declare and practice rituals corresponding to those beliefs. These beliefs are not only individually accepted by all group members but also belong to the group, and they unify all members. Individuals within the group have a sense of togetherness with others due to the belief that is believed and shared (Durkheim 2011). Religious phenomena can be divided into two categories: beliefs and rituals. The first is a state of opinion and consists of representations, and the second is a special form of action. All religious beliefs, whether simple or complex, show one common feature: to require the classification of everything, whether real or ideal, that can be known by the class of people, namely, the profane and the sacred.

According to Durkheim, in any religious society, the world is divided into two separate parts: the “sacred world” and the “profane world,” not natural and the supernatural, in which the sacred has a broad influence, determining the well-being and interests of all members of society (Greely 2017). Meanwhile, the profane does not have such a significant influence; it only reflects every individual’s daily life, whether related to personal activities or habits that each individual and family always carry out. The important role of religious beliefs and rituals in society is much more significant than that. The sacral function is the main factor that plays a role in society (Pals 2011). In this context, Sasak Islam is an important religious phenomenon that is the subject of study in examining the development and existence of religions in Indonesia.

The Development of Religion in the Sasak Community

The Sasak ethnic group is one of the indigenous tribes in Indonesia, which has its own unique culture and tradition. They inhabit the island of Lombok in West Nusa Tenggara province and have a distinctive language and way of life. The religion of the Sasak people has undergone a long and complex development process, influenced by various factors such as historical events, socio-cultural changes, and interactions with other cultures. Before the arrival of Islam in Lombok, the Sasak people practised a form of animism and ancestor worship, which involved the veneration of spirits and the use of magic and ritual practices to seek protection and

blessings. The arrival of Islam in the 16th century marked a significant turning point in the religious history of the Sasak people, as it gradually replaced traditional beliefs and became the dominant religion in the area.

The process of Islamization in Lombok was not a simple or rapid one but rather a gradual and selective adoption of Islamic beliefs and practices, which were adapted to the local context and incorporated into the existing cultural traditions of the Sasak people. This process was facilitated by the arrival of Muslim traders and scholars from various parts of the archipelago, who established mosques and Islamic schools in the region and played a crucial role in spreading the religion. Over time, Islam became deeply ingrained in the social and cultural fabric of the Sasak society. A distinct Islamic practice and belief emerged, commonly known as “Islam Sasak.” This form of Islam combines elements of traditional Sasak beliefs and practices with Islamic teachings and reflects the unique cultural identity and worldview of the Sasak people.

Today, most Sasak people are Muslims, and Islam plays a central role in their religious, social, and cultural life. However, traditional beliefs and practices still exist among some segments of the population, particularly in rural areas, where the influence of Islam is less pronounced. Overall, the development of religion in the Sasak ethnic group is a complex and ongoing process shaped by various historical, social, and cultural factors.

Overall, the early development of Islam in Lombok is similar to the development of Islam in Indonesia. Two critical themes have been permanent throughout the history of Lombok. First, the seemingly dormant and backward islands are a place of various religions that influence the practices and beliefs of the Sasak community. Second, there is a periodic but consistent call for the purification of faith. The type of Islam first practised by the Sasak people is a mixture of Austronesian beliefs and Islam (Bartholomew 2001).

The original religion of the people of Lombok is the Boda religion, which is spelt in different ways (*bode*, *bodo*, *bude*) or Boda Keling, the religion of ancestors, or the religion of Majapahit (Smith 2021; Suprpto 2015; Wijono 2009). Alfons van der Kraan, in his book *Lombok, Conquest and Underdevelopment 1870-1940*, quoted the opinions of 20th-century sociologists such as J. C. Van Earde (*Anteken over de Bodha van Lombok TBG 43*) and G. H. Bousquet (*Recherches sur les deux seces musulmanses (W3 at W5) de Lombok, Revue des Eudes Islamique*), that there are three groups of Sasak communities based on religion, namely Budha, *Wetu Telu*, and *Waktu Lima* (Kraan 2009). Budha followers are Sasak people based

on ethnicity, culture, and language but fully adhere to the Budha belief. Meanwhile, *Wetu Telu* is Sasak people who practice Budha and Islam to some extent. Islam is a religion that greatly influences the Sasak people (van Eerde 1906).

Regarding *Boda* religion (considered the original religion of Lombok), it is said that outsiders gave the name *Boda* to the *Boda* community, the people of Lombok, to refer to the community living in the hills who practice the religion of their ancestors (Budiwanti 2014a; Wijono 2009). The beginning of the development of Islam in Lombok, according to one version, came from Java brought by the saints using the ancient Javanese language and indicated that the Hindu Javanese tradition was still visible. The arrival of Islam in Lombok is estimated to be in the 16th century after the fall of Majapahit (Tohri et al. 2020, 2022). In the 17th century, the Majapahit government was replaced by several small Muslim kingdoms that established trade relations along the north coast of Lombok and from Maluku, better known as the "Spice Island" (Bartholomew 2001; Telle 2009). Meanwhile, according to other records, in the 17th century, Lombok had become a "contested object" between the King of Bali Karangasem and the Makassar people who operated from Sumbawa (Kraan 2009).

The spread of Islam in Lombok is considered to be quickly accepted by the Lombok community (Jamaluddin 2011b; Mutawali and Zuhdi 2019). Several main factors accelerated the process of spreading Islam in Lombok. Firstly, the teachings of Islam emphasize the importance of the principle of *tauhid*, which gives individuals freedom from any other power except Allah SWT. Secondly, the teachings of Islam do not immediately replace the entire value system that had developed in the community before Islam came. Thirdly, Islam is a dominant institution in facing and fighting against the power in front of it (Fahrurrozi 2018; Zakaria 1998).

According to researchers, the spread of Islam in Lombok is not much different from the pattern of Islam's entry into Indonesia (Basarudin 2019; Jamaluddin 2019a; Mutawali 2016). At least, there are three basic arguments about the origin and the entry of Islam into Indonesia. First, Islam originated directly from Saudi Arabia and Egypt. This theory is supported by the discovery of rulers in Samudra Pasai, followers of the Shafi'i Mazhab. Second, Islam in Indonesia originated in Bangladesh. This theory is based on the assumption that Islam first spread to Indonesia from the eastern coast of the Malay Peninsula. The third theory states that Islam entered Indonesia through traders from Gujarat, as evidenced by the fact that the gravestone of Malik Ibrahim in Gresik and several gravestones in the Pasai Kingdom are believed to have been imported from Cambay Gujarat (Jamaluddin 2019b; Marjani 2012).

The Dialectic of Wetu Telu History and Its Development

Following Geertz's typology, Wetu Telu falls under the criteria of Islam Abangan, which is Islam that is mixed with local customs and culture, or more precisely, syncretic Islam. Wetu Telu Islam is imbued with local nuances such as animism, Hinduism, and Islam. Historically, there was a dialogue between the Muslim and Hindu communities, which resulted in a new pattern of religion in the Sasak community, known as Islam Wetu Telu (Mustain 2013). In the academic context, the term "Wetu Telu" is generally understood as the belief of the local Sasak community that has not fully accepted Islamic understanding (Fattah et al. 2017).

However, until now, several studies do not indicate precisely when the term Wetu Telu emerged and who coined it. The term Wetu Telu is often contrasted with Islam Waktu Lima although there is slight contradiction or conflict due to these differences (Jamaluddin 2011a, 2011b). The exact meaning of Wetu Telu, etymologically and terminologically, remains a debate among researchers. Some questions need further study such as how are the understanding and experiences of the community of followers, especially the Wetu Telu figures, and how the religious practices of the Wetu Telu community continue to experience dynamics in their history.

In this study, Wetu Telu are elaborated based on the views or opinions of insiders and outsiders. In this context, insiders refer to prominent figures in the Wetu Telu community such as traditional leaders, community figures, and elders (these people are considered to have the legitimacy to explain the term Wetu Telu). In addition, we view the common people's opinions also need to be heard to know the comprehensive understanding and beliefs of the Wetu Telu community. As for outsiders in general, they refer to people or groups outside the Wetu Telu community that represent the views of the normative Islamic community.

Generally, the normative Islamic community or Islam Waktu Lima views Wetu Telu as those who worship "three times", three priority worship performed by its followers: funeral prayer, Friday prayer, and Eid prayer. All kinds of worship are only performed by the kiyai (religious leader), not the followers (Salam 1992). Such views can be justified from the perspective of outsiders who compare it with the understanding of the majority of Islam. Still, it is not entirely acceptable by the Wetu Telu community if it relates to beliefs that are too simplified regarding profane rituals (Halim 2020).

The main principles held by followers of Islam Wetu Telu are 1) Obedience to Allah through the teachings they receive from their teachers; 2) Obedience to the government; 3) and Obedience to parents in a broad sense (Muliadi and Komarudin 2020). The religious practices of Wetu Telu

are based on the meaning of *Harian Wetu Telu*, which means three times, by reducing and summarizing almost all rituals into three. Compared to formal Islamic teachings, Wetu Telu only practices three pillars of Islam: reciting the creed, performing daily prayers, and fasting. Generally, Wetu Telu is seen as an identity attached to the Sasak ethnic group, who live in several areas and still hold local customs, such as Bayan, Tanjung, and Narmada. In the village of Lingsar, precisely in the Narmada district, the religious practices of Wetu Telu followers are seen to share a temple in celebrating religious holidays, especially in the *pujawali* celebration, which includes the ritual of *perang topat* (Suprpto 2017).

The beliefs and religious practices of Wetu Telu are classified into five groups as follows: 1) they acknowledge praying five times daily, but the practice is limited to the kyai (Islamic teacher) and his followers; 2) they only perform the Dhuhr prayer on Fridays, pray on Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha, pray Tarawih in Ramadan, and pray for the *mayit*; 3) they perform prayers only on Thursday afternoon (Asr), Fajr prayer on Eid al-Fitr, and Dhuhr on Fridays; 4) they perform the Fajr prayer only on Eid al-Fitr, Dhuhr prayer on Fridays, Maghrib and Isha prayers in Ramadan, Tarawih prayer in Ramadan, Eid al-Fitr prayer, and funeral prayer (*mayit*); and 5) the prayer time is determined as follows; during the kyai's duty as "marbot" (mosque caretaker), the kyai prays five times a day and continuously for seven nights. However, if no longer assigned, he only prays on Fridays, Tarawih prayer during the month of fasting, Eid al-Fitr prayer, and funeral prayer (Salam 1992).

The start of Ramadan fasting in the Wetu Telu Islamic community varies. One group follows a calendar called *Aboge (Rebo Wage)*, which sets the beginning of fasting on the 1st day of Ramadan. Another group sticks to the Thursday Pahing calendar, which always sets the beginning of fasting on the second day of Ramadan. The last group follows the Jumat Pon calendar, which always sets the beginning of fasting on the third day of Ramadan. The Wetu Telu Islamic followers' calendar differs from the commonly used Islamic lunar calendar (*Qamariyah*). The Wetu Telu calendar is based on an 8-year cycle, a system not recognized in Islam. The years set as follows: *Alip* Year (First Year), *Year Ehe* (Second Year), *Jimawal* Year (third Year), *Dal* Year (fourth Year), *Be* Year (fifth Year), *Ce* Year (sixth Year), *Wau* Year (seventh Year), and *Jimahir* Year (eighth Year) (Budiwanti 2013b). The *Alip* Year marks the celebration of the *Alip* festival, which is held every eight years when the Bayan community (mainly) collaborates to repair the bamboo walls and roof of the *Reak* tomb. The *Alip* celebration is a renewal of the ancestral burial complex.

Meanwhile, for customary leaders, especially in Bayan (the majority of the Wetu Telu community), *Wetu* is often reduced in its meaning to the terminology of time in the sense of tempo or moment. In contrast, *Wetu* comes from the word *metu*, which means emerge or originate from, while *telu* means three. Erni Budiwati further explains in her research:

Symbolically, this expresses that all living creatures emerge (*metu*) through three types of reproduction: 1) giving birth (*menganak*), such as humans and mammals, 2) laying eggs (*menteluk*), such as birds, 3) developing from seeds and fruits (*mentiuik*), such as grains, vegetables, and fruits. *Menganak*, *menteluk*, and *mentiuik* symbolically represent the literal meaning of *wetu* or *metu telu*. However, the focus of the Wetu Telu belief is not only limited to the reproductive system but also refers to the Almighty power of God that allows life to reproduce and develop on its own through the mechanism of reproduction (Budiwanti 2013b).

The opinions of other figures who support the previous stakeholders' views that Wetu Telu as a religious system is also embodied in the belief that all creatures must go through three stages of the cycle, namely *menganak* (giving birth), *urip* (life), and *jodoh* (death). The most crucial element that is embedded in the teachings of Wetu Telu is faith in God, Adam, and Hawa as the center of Wetu Telu beliefs. This belief is derived from the *Lontar Layang Ambia*, namely 1) Secret or *Asma* that manifests in the five senses of the human body; 2) God's Creation manifested in Adam and Hawa as Adam represents the father or male lineage, while Hawa represents the mother or female lineage; and 3) God's nature is a combination of 5 senses (derived from God) and eight organs inherited from Adam and Hawa (Budiwanti 2013b).

The views of common members and leaders in the Wetu Telu community on these religious principles differ from those of Islamic followers of Waktu Lima. Wetu Telu believe in, first, three types of reproductive systems; second, a balance between the micro and macro world; third, ceremonies that accompany each stage of the transformative process in a person's life from birth, energy, and death; and fourth, the acknowledgment of God, Adam, and Hawa.

The doctrinal basis of the above Wetu Telu beliefs, from the normative perspective of the majority of Islamic followers in Lombok (the perception of outsiders), is not considered to be in conflict with mainstream Islamic doctrine but is perceived as a belief or understanding of an incomplete

and unfinished religious system (Jamaluddin 2011). This incompleteness is believed to be caused by historical transition factors that do not fully touch all aspects of teaching, both exoteric and esoteric dimensions. Another perspective, according to the scientific nuance of outsiders (socio-anthropological studies), regards it a syncretic local religion. The starting point of its syncretism nature is attached by finding similarities in terms of religious understanding and rituals within several pre-Islamic belief systems, namely animism-dynamism, Boda, Hindu, and Buddhism (Halim 2020).

The views or perceptions of outsiders that are recognized by the *Wetu Telu* Islamic community, although not all entirely accepted in the context of historical transitions that dialectically interact with social, political, and cultural factors, are as follows: 1) the da'wah method of Islamic spreaders which are tolerant and committed not to damage local customs. The passive attitude of the preachers towards this local belief system creates a perception among the Sasak community that Islamic teachings are not different from their ancestral beliefs; 2) In general, the religious and political policies of the Hindu-Bali rulers in Lombok, especially the Mataram Karangasem Kingdom rulers, hindered the processes of nurturing Islamic religion, such as hindering Muslims who went on the hajj, community and religious figures were pitted against each other through systematic patterns such as Sasak women who married Hindu men were forced to convert to their husband's religion or mix their beliefs, and gambling mobilization in every village; this reality often creates confusion and simultaneously nurtures the growth of *Wetu Telu* Islam; and 3) The active spread of Hinduism followed the fading of Islam in the Sasak community, which was initiated by Danhyang Nirartha (Dangkian Niraka), a Brahmana caste priest based on the mandate of the Gelgel Bali king in 1530 (Budiwanti 2021); and 4) Dutch efforts to create conflict between the Muslim communities in Lombok were aimed at strengthening their grip on the island since 1894 by applying the divide and conquer policy (*divide et imperia*) to more easily control the majority Sasak Waktu Lima people, who were predominantly Muslim and highly anti-colonialist (Depdikbud 1983).

The historical debate of *Wetu Telu* and its development can be understood through a phenomenological understanding of the lived experiences of the *Wetu Telu* community. Phenomenology emphasizes the subjective experiences of individuals and how humans perceive the world around them. Initially, the *Wetu Telu* community followed animism and dynamism beliefs, believing that spirits were present in everything. However, with the introduction of Islam to Lombok, the *Wetu Telu*

community underwent a process of transformation and adaptation in merging their animism and dynamism beliefs with Islamic teachings.

This transformation process can be understood as the lived experience of individuals in adapting to changes in their environment and socio-political circumstances. The Wetu Telu community transitioned from animism and dynamism to Islamic teachings as reflected in their religious practices such as the five daily prayers and fasting. However, this transformation process also brought significant social and cultural impacts on the Wetu Telu community. They began to lose their original cultural identity and were influenced by the dominant Islamic teachings. This is reflected in the changes in their religious practices, where they began to abandon practices that conflicted with Islamic teachings such as traditional ceremonies.

These changes can be understood as the lived experience of the Wetu Telu community in facing the social and cultural differences. The Wetu Telu community experienced conflicts between their cultural and religious identities, which became part of their lived experiences and shaped the historical development of Wetu Telu. Thus, the historical debate of Wetu Telu and its effect can be understood through a phenomenological understanding of the lived experiences of the Wetu Telu community in facing social and cultural changes and how these changes affect their religious practices and cultural identity.

Conclusion

This article has shown that Wetu Telu as a local belief system of the Sasak community in Lombok is a variant of Islam practiced by the Sasak people that is often contrasted or pitted against the mainstream and majority Islam that is simplified by the term Islam Waktu Lima. The emergence and existence of the Wetu Telu community is a logical consequence of the historical transition process of the coming and development of Islam in Lombok Island, which dialectically interacts with social, political, and cultural factors in a long and complex process. Therefore, the views of outsiders on the community of Wetu Telu followers do not reflect an adequate portrayal of their understanding and religious rituals, particularly those related to the esoteric dimension. Understanding Wetu Telu from the perspective of insiders and outsiders through an interdisciplinary approach allows for a balanced explanation and objective view. Thus, it is appropriate to use the term Islamic Variant of Sasak to define the social reality of the religious phenomenon of the Muslim community in Lombok. This study enriches our understanding of the interaction between Islam and local cultures as seen in the case of Wetu Telu community in Lombok.

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