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## **The sacralization of food in javanese islamic rituals: A study of Abdul Qadiran in Mlangi**

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**Abstract:** Mlangi has many religious rituals that are still continuously carried out to this day. However, each tradition has a variety of goals and procedures for its implementation. The Abdul Qadiran tradition is a tradition in itself for the community as a form of prayer and hope for the fulfillment of big wishes. This research is qualitative. The method used is a field study with ethnographic techniques that aim to understand and observe in more detail the process of forming food sacralization in the Abdul Qadiran tradition in Mlangi Hamlet. Primary data sources were obtained through observation, interviews, and documentation. While secondary data sources were obtained from academic literature that is still related to the object of research. The subjects of this study are divided into three main actors, namely cultural figures, the organizing committee, and the community who are part of the Abdul Qadiran congregation. The purpose of this study is to reveal the symbolic meaning of food sacralization in the Islamic-Javanese ritual tradition preserved by the Mlangi Hamlet community. The results of the study show that each obligatory food served in Abdul Qadiran has its own philosophy and meaning. The obligatory foods that must be present are sego abang, sego putih, ingkung, and seven kinds of eggs. Meanwhile, the social meaning obtained from the Abdul Qadiran tradition in Mlangi is as a form of respect for guests, the formation of collective moral values, and the maintenance of social structures.

**Keywords:** Mlangi; Abdul Qadiran; Sakralisasi Makanan.

**How to Cite:** Chasanah, C., L., Faizin, I., (2025). The Sacralization of food in javanese islamic rituals: A study of Abdul Qadiran in Mlangi. *HUMANISTIKA: Jurnal Keislaman*, 11 (2), 144-151. <https://doi.org/10.55210/humanistika.v11i2.2175>

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### **Introduction**

Tradition and religion are global social phenomena that cannot be separated from one another. As stated by Saudi anthropologist Talal Asad, he refers to Islam as a “discursive tradition.” He further explains that Islam is not a unique social structure or a collection of beliefs, artifacts, customs, and moral values, but rather a tradition. (Asad, 2009, p. 10) Asad said, differing interpretations of the Quran and Hadith have led to significant differences in traditions within Muslim societies. In Indonesia, as the largest Muslim country, religious traditions, especially those with local characteristics, are often associated with the Islam Nusantara that promoted by NU (Nahdlatul Ulama) group (Bruinessen, 1994, p. 23). Islam Nusantara refers to a distinctive form of Islam that developed in the Indonesian archipelago, emphasizing the integration of universal Islamic teachings with local traditions, cultures, and wisdom. Islam Nusantara stresses a contextualized, moderate, and inclusive approach, shaped by centuries of interaction between Islam and Indonesian cultural realities. Traditions such as slametan, tahlilan, ziarah, and syukuran are part of religious rituals that have become deeply rooted traditions in the NU community. These traditions not only contain spiritual rituals but also often involve food that is used as a washilah to obtain blessings from a ritual in a particular tradition.

Food has a close relationship with tradition and culture. This concept encompasses how food is selected, prepared, served, and enjoyed within a specific social context. Food is not merely a biological

necessity but also part of cultural heritage, a symbol of identity, and a tool for strengthening social bonds. Food in religious traditions is more than sustenance it is a symbolic bridge to the divine, a foundation for community, and a vessel of cultural memory. Through ritual, sharing, and symbolism, sacred food practices help believers express their faith in everyday, tangible ways. Rudi Hardjanto says that food is a bridge that connects various ethnic and cultural groups, so that mass communication plays a role in fostering cross-cultural understanding. Durkheim argues that the religious life of society is based on the dichotomy between the sacred and the profane. This statement does not only apply to objects such as sacred objects or heirlooms, but food also undergoes a process of sacralization in various community traditions.

In the Mlangi community, the Special Region of Yogyakarta is known for the tradition of Abdul Qadiran. This activity is organized by the community members who have a wish (shahibul hajjat) that they hope will come true. The rituals performed, such as reciting verses from the Qur'an, involve the presentation of food through sacralization, as it requires special attitudes in its functional use, including the recitation of shalawat and religious texts, namely manaqib. This tradition is accompanied by dishes such as sego abang, sego putih, and ingkung ayam, all of which have their own purposes and symbolism. The term Abdul Qadiran is derived from the word 'Abd al-Qadir, attributed to the name of the Sufi scholar Syekh Abdul Qadir al-Jaylani. The choice of Syekh Abdul Qadir al-Jaylani as the figurehead is because he was a scholar closely associated with the tarekat. The people of Mlangi believe that by performing the Abdul Qadiran tradition, they will receive safety, smoothness, and fulfillment of their desires.

A previous discussion on this topic the first was conducted by entitled *The Road to Halal: Ethics and Sacralization of Food in the Life of the Muslim in Guadalajara* this study examines the process of sacralization of halal-labeled food by the Muslim community in Mexico, stating that this sacralization process is heavily influenced by Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan (Medina, 2022). The second was Qohar Al Basir, entitled *The Symbolism of the Ngabdul Qodiran Tradition at the Al Luqmaniyyah Islamic Boarding School in Yogyakarta: The Living Qur'an study* focused on the arguments and ritual processions of Abdul Qadiran (Basir, 2019). Sukron Ma'mun's writing, entitled *Kyai Nur Iman and Kampung Santri Mlangi: Exploring the Harmony of Islamic Integration with Javanese Culture in the Mataram Palace* discusses how historical knowledge based on cultural and geosocial-political conditions of traditions that are accepted by the surrounding community, such as Nariyahan, Tahlil pitung wekso, and Abdul Qadiran, was formed, without discussing in detail the procession of the Abdul Qadiran tradition and its sacralization (Ma'mun, 2015). In addition, Munawwir Abdul Fattah's book, *Tradisi Orang-Orang NU (Traditions of the NU People)*, examines several traditions of the NU people related to the moral values of each tradition that they believe in and some of the symbolic meanings of the rituals. However, the study is limited to general slametan traditions that are similar but different from the Abdul Qadiran tradition (Fattah, 2006). From the above studies, Previous research has been limited to discussions of the basic principles and rituals of Abdul Qodiran. Therefore, the novelty value of this research lies in its focus on the aspects of food sacralization and moral symbolism in Abdul Qadiran's rituals, which have not been touched upon by previous researchers.

This study on the sacralization of food is intriguing to explore, given the significant attention the Abdul Qadiran tradition receives from the Mlangi community. Additionally, by examining the sacralization of food an area that has not received much attention this research could open new horizons for studies on religious traditions worldwide, particularly among Indonesian communities.

### **Method**

This study employs a qualitative-descriptive method with an ethnographic approach. The ethnographic method was chosen to provide an in-depth understanding of the sacralization of food in the Abdul Qadiran ritual in Mlangi Hamlet. This approach is considered appropriate because it allows the researcher to be directly involved in the social and religious life of the community, thereby enabling an experiential interpretation of symbols, practices, and meanings embedded in the ritual. Such involvement aligns with the character of the phenomenon under study, which is a socio-religious tradition rich in symbolic and philosophical values. The research was conducted in Mlangi Hamlet, Nogotirto Village, Gamping District, Sleman Regency, Special Region of Yogyakarta an area well known for its Islamic-Javanese traditions and as a center of the Qadiriyyah wa Naqsyabandiyah Sufi order. The research subjects consisted of religious leaders (kyai), organizers of the Abdul Qadiran ritual, and community members who participate in or witness the event.

Primary data were obtained through direct field interactions, including participant observation, informal interviews, and documentation. Observations were carried out by immersing in the entire ritual process starting from food preparation, prayer recitations (shalawat), and the communal consumption of sacred food. Interviews were conducted using semi-structured formats, focusing on informants' perceptions, experiences, and beliefs surrounding the symbolic meaning of food in the ritual. Documentation included written notes, photographs, videos, and audio recordings of the ritual. Secondary data were sourced from relevant academic literature such as journals, theses, dissertations, and books related to Islamic ritual, symbolism, and Javanese traditions. Data analysis followed the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions interactively, as outlined by Miles and Huberman. The analysis was guided by Clifford Geertz's interpretive anthropology and Émile Durkheim's theory of collective representation to identify key themes including sacralization, symbolic food, and social cohesion.

To ensure the validity of the data, triangulation techniques were applied by cross-referencing findings from different sources and methods (observation, interview, documentation). This methodological rigor aims to reveal the symbolic dimensions of food sacralization in the Abdul Qadiran ritual and how such ritual practices sustain and reproduce the religious identity of the Mlangi Muslim community.

### **Result and Discussion**

#### **The Process of the Abdul Qadiran Tradition in Mlangi**

The tradition of Abdul Qadiran differs from the slametan tradition in Mlangi Village. Slametan is intended for praying for the safety of a person or the success of a specific event. Slametan is a deeply rooted cultural practice in Javanese society. The existence of slametan serves as a means for Javanese people to achieve safety and goodness in life (Fattah, 2006). Meanwhile, Abdul Qadiran is aimed at ensuring the smooth progress of a desired event or ritual organized by the host. The events referred to in the Abdul Qadiran tradition are major events such as the Hajj pilgrimage, khataman, and haflah tasyakur lil ikhtitam (M. R. Basyir, personal communication, May 2025). The host of the Abdul Qadiran event can come from all walks of life in Mlangi Village without exception. However, not just anyone can participate as attendees, congregants, or prayer leaders in the Abdul Qadiran event. The Abdul Qadiran congregation in Mlangi is exclusively for adult men, while women are responsible for preparing and serving the food during the event.

Furthermore, prayer leaders cannot be just anyone; they must be individuals who have obtained an Abdul Qadir certificate from a religious figure and have a lineage traceable back to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). Currently, there are three individuals in Mlangi Village who have received the Abdul Qadir certificate: KH. Chasan Abdullah, KH. Nur Hamid Majid, and Mr. Rahmat.

This certificate was previously granted by one of the religious figures in Mlangi Village, KH. Suja'i Masduqi, who is the head of the Assalafiyah Mlangi Islamic Boarding School. The transmission or delegation of the Abdul Qadir certificate cannot be done according to the personal wishes of the previous figure, but must follow a lengthy religious process, including prayers, and guidance through dreams after performing specific recitations of the shalawat. The uniqueness of those who have received the certificate lies in their ability to deeply understand how the traditions of Abdul Qadiran were formed, the shalawat with authentic chains of transmission, and the profound philosophy behind the traditions practiced in Mlangi Village. This knowledge is not necessarily accessible to the general public who have not received the *ijazah*.

The term "Abdul Qadiran" is derived from the phrase "Abd al-Qadir," which is attributed to the name of the Sufi scholar Sheikh Abdul Qadir al-Jaylani. The choice of Sheikh Abdul Qadir al-Jaylani as the reference figure is because he was a scholar closely associated with the Qadiriyyah wa Naqsabandiyah order. In the context of Dusun Mlangi, this refers to the Qadiriyyah wa Naqsabandiyah order. Therefore, the Abdul Qadiran tradition remains closely tied to the Qadiriyyah wa Naqsabandiyah Sufi order. The origin of the Abdul Qadiran practice stems from the routine of Sheikh Abdul Qadir al-Jaylani himself, who performed certain rituals when he had a specific need. These practices consist of prayers and shalawat recited with his followers. Before and during the prayer ceremony, Sheikh Abdul Qadir al-Jaylani was accustomed to providing delicious and enjoyable meals with the aim of making the hearts of the followers feel happy and sincere. The purpose and hope of Sheikh Abdul Qadir al-Jaylani was that the prayers and wishes would be granted due to the sincerity and joy of those who participated in the prayers (Basir, 2019).

What distinguishes Abdul Qadiran in Mlangi is the number of participants who attend. In Mlangi Village, a minimum of seven adult men must be present, and they must maintain their ritual purity (*wudhu*) from the beginning to the end of the event. This adds a sense of sacredness to the traditional practice. In line with Emile Durkheim, who stated that sacredness is not an inherent property of an object (in this case, food), but rather a social process through collective belief practices. "Sacred things are those which the community sets apart and treats with reverence and awe". In contrast, in other areas, there is no minimum number of participants, allowing the practice to be conducted in a simpler and less sacred manner (Antono, 2022)

### **The Process of Food Sacralization in the Practice of Abdul Qadiran**

In various religious traditions and activities, there are social processes that enable the socialization and internalization of social values and values contained in religion itself. Durkheim argued that religious life in society is based on the dichotomy between the sacred and the profane (Mirola et al., 2016). The sacred is everything that can be considered holy and respected, while the opposite is the profane, which are ordinary things in everyday life. In a broader sense, the sacred is something that is protected from violation, disruption, or contamination. Something that is holy is something that is respected, revered, and cannot be defiled. The perception of something as sacred can come from the subject who believes in the sanctity of certain things. Sacred or sacredness is not a property of the object itself, but is given by humans or social groups who sanctify the object. The sacredness of something is influenced by several variables, namely sacralization (sanctified through rituals), function, user, and duration of the ritual.

The Abdul Qadiran tradition presents a meal through the variable of sacralization because it requires special attitudes in its functional use, including the recitation of shalawat and religious texts, namely *manaqib*. The food provided is not merely biological consumption but an object that undergoes a process of sacralization. As what Mr Rahmat-the elder of this tradition said "Abdul Qadiran (Mlangi) cannot be handled by people who do not meet the criteria. The handling cannot be done carelessly, including the cook, who is not just a skilled chef but a postmenopausal woman who is pure from anything

impure (menstrual blood). Before the communal meal (consumption), the followers of Abdul Qadiran must pray and remain in a state of wudhu (purity).” (M. R. Basyir, personal communication, Mei 2025) because it is associated with blessings, prayers, and religious commands. The food served in the Abdul Qadiran event is diverse in type and must meet strict requirements. The process of food sacralization in Abdul Qadiran in Mlangi Village is due to the presence of special rituals involving the recitation of *manaqib* and prayers. The factors that make food in the Abdul Qadiran practice in Mlangi sacred can be divided into two categories: the cooking process and the recitation of specific religious practices during the event.

*First*, the process of preparing food from raw ingredients to cooked ingredients ready to be served must be carried out by an adult woman who has experienced *menophouse*, meaning she no longer menstruates. This requirement shows the belief of the Mlangi community that women who have experienced *menophouse* are pure because they no longer release anything unclean from their bodies. Another unique aspect is that during the cooking process, the women must fast and remain silent (*mbisu*). Fasting *mbisu* here means not speaking to anyone. The purpose is to ensure that the food being prepared is truly pure and free from evil deeds. Women who have not yet *menophouse* are only allowed to help prepare the food that will be served in Abdul Qadiran without playing a leading role in cooking.

*Second*, the *amaliyah* process that takes place from the beginning of the Abdul Qadiran event until its completion. The series of *amaliyah* in the Abdul Qadiran tradition in Mlangi is carried out by the people of Mlangi with the aim of obtaining blessings from Sheikh Abdul Qadir al-Jaylani. This *amaliyah* has significant differences when compared to other Islamic-Javanese traditions such as *slametan*, *shalawatan*, and *haul*. The fundamental difference is the recitation of *manakiban*, which can be interpreted as the story of the life of a holy man. In this tradition, it refers to reading the *manakib* of Sheikh Abdul Qadir. Meanwhile, a *haul* is a commemoration that coincides with the anniversary of someone's death. A *haul* is usually held to commemorate the death of someone who was considered to have contributed greatly to Islam and Muslims during their lifetime. The dishes served at a *haul* are intended as *selametan* or alms dedicated to the deceased.

The practices carried out in Abdul Qadiran in Mlangi must be in accordance with the teacher who previously passed down the *ijazah*. The *ijazah* given is not merely a religious text but also contains *sanad-sanad* (chains of transmission) that are connected to the Prophet Muhammad. The sequence of practices is as follows: it begins with the recitation of al-Fatihah, which is directed toward the Awliya of Sheikh Abdul Qadir al-Jilani. This is followed by the recitation of the Asmaul Husna: Ya Alim, Ya Khobiru, Ya Hadiyu, and Ya Mubinu, each recited one hundred times. The second step involves reciting selected verses from the Quran, namely Surah al-Waqiah, al-Zalzalah, al-Alaq, ad-Dhuha, and as-Syams during daytime sessions, and Surah al-Lail during nighttime sessions.

### Symbolic and Social Meaning of Abdul Qadiran Tradition

In this study, the author uses Clifford Geertz's theory, which defines religion as a cultural system. Geertz is an anthropologist who tends to discover meaning in phenomena based on what is known, felt, and experienced by cultural actors. This is referred to as “from the native's point of view” (Syam, 2007). Clifford Geertz's definition of religion includes the following key points: religion is (1) a symbol that has the purpose of (2) creating strong feelings and motivations that can spread and are not easily lost within a person, (3) forming a conception of an order, (4) attaching this conception to the factual dimension, and (5) ultimately, the feelings within a person become their own motivation and emerge as a unique reality.

#### 1. The Symbolic Meaning of Food in Abdul Qadiran

The dishes served to guests are not just any food, but food that has been determined in accordance with the elders and traditional leaders who have obtained a certificate. The first requirement is *Sego Abang* and *Sego Putih*. The symbolic and philosophical meaning of *Sego Abang* is that humans want

to return to the earth by going to the Creator. Meanwhile, Sego Putih represents the philosophy of human life with a pure (white) heart so that we can return to Allah SWT safely. The second requirement is two pieces of Inggung. The symbolic meaning behind this is that the word Inggung is derived from the term Njungkung. Njungkung refers to Njungkung to Allah SWT by drawing closer to Him, surrendering, and obeying His commands.

The meaning of two pieces is that human life must be filled with two things that cannot be separated. Human beings live with a body and soul, the outer and inner self, which will continue to complement each other and cannot be separated from one another. Both must exist within human beings. The meaning of the number two can also be interpreted as the existence of Sharia and Haqiqat. Shari'ah is the religious law that establishes the rules of human life, the relationship between humans and Allah SWT, the relationship between humans and other humans, and the relationship between humans and the natural environment, based on the Qur'an and Hadith. Meanwhile, Haqiqat is the core, essence, or deeper purpose of religion. Shari'ah is the external form of religion, while Haqiqat is the deeper spiritual experience (Poerwadarminta, 2003).

The third requirement for the meal is that it must consist of seven types of dishes. Specifically, during the ritual procession, the organisers serve seven types of fruit, seven glasses of milk and seven Javanese eggs. Seven in Javanese is called "pitu." The symbolic meaning of the seven types or 'pitu' is "Pitulungan." Human beings must live in this world with the help of Allah SWT. Without *pitulungan*, it is impossible for humans to live well on this earth. The seven types of offerings that must be presented are Javanese eggs or *Ndog Jowo*, seven glasses of milk, and fruits. Eggs are chosen because they symbolize the philosophical idea that humans should not look at something from its bad side but rather from its good side. Eggs can be considered ugly because they come out of chickens along with their feces. However, eggs have many benefits and uses for human consumption. The meaning of fruit is so that we can produce what we need and desire.

In addition to the mandatory dishes, there are also various foods that can be served according to the host's wishes. However, these dishes are not mandatory, so they may or may not be served. Among them are baceman, kotok vegetables (a Mlangi specialty consisting of tempeh and melinjo leaves cooked in thick coconut milk), bakmi, lodheh vegetables, and jenang. Jenang is mostly served in seven containers, either as jenang abang or jenang putih.

## 2. Respecting Guests

The main purpose of the Mlangi community in celebrating Abdul Qadirin is to seek blessings from Sheikh Abdul Qadir al-Jaylani through the use of wasilah to fulfill their wishes. Each type of food served has spiritual symbolism that is also believed to bring blessings to both those who serve and those who receive it. The fulfillment of the requirements for each type of food is not merely a symbolic fulfillment of obligations in traditional practices. The food served also serves as a way to honor guests. The Mlangi community believes that honoring guests is one of the forms of respect that must be fulfilled, as it aligns with the practices of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). Entertaining and honoring guests with a sincere and pure heart is believed to bring goodness, including as an intermediary for the concept of pitu or pitulungan from Allah SWT.

Honoring guests in this tradition as an expression of Islamic manners and Javanese culture by providing the best and most complete food reflects respect for guests and is part of social and spiritual behavior. Additionally, society values good food not merely for its taste but also as the fruit of prayers and good intentions, as believed in the philosophical meaning of fruits, which symbolize the hopes and aspirations of all efforts made. In line with Clifford Geertz's interpretation, symbols in this context can serve as cultural tools that regulate the meaning of social order through collective symbolic practices.

## 3. Collective Moral Values

The social meaning and its relationship with the sacralization of food in Abdul Qadirin's practice is not limited to fulfilling spiritual needs, but goes further than that to form a social authority structure

and strict division of roles. This can be seen from the determination of who is allowed to cook the dishes, namely women who are considered holy by the community and must maintain silence while cooking. This practice emphasizes the purity of values and self-control in society. In addition, the role of men as participants in the gathering, which must consist of at least seven people, and the leader of the prayer who has received an *ijazah*, represents a spiritual-based authority structure. The sacredness of the *ijazah* gives a person greater authority in traditional practices in Mlangi, to the extent that not all *kyai* are automatically considered eligible to lead this ritual (M. R. Basyir, personal communication, Mei 2025). The formation of moral values in the Abdul Qadiran tradition can be seen in how the host and participants are not allowed to violate the principle of “*Molimo*,” which prohibits stealing, drunkenness, gambling, playing, and drug use. This demonstrates the integration of social and spiritual ethics in the community.

#### 4. Formation and Maintenance of Social Structures

Clifford Geertz identified three distinct social strata in Javanese culture: *abangan*, *santri*, and *priyayi*. These three social strata have different social structures and forms. On the other hand, they also have different interpretations of the values they live by. The *abangan* community actualizes its diversity of behavior while still adhering to Islamic values that can blend with local traditions, including rituals. The *santri* social class emphasizes diversity of behavior based on the formalities of Sharia law and Islamic teachings. Meanwhile, the *priyayi* class's diversity still stems from Islamic teachings, but in some rituals, there is an emphasis on elements outside of Islam.

The symbols found in the Abdul Qadiran tradition in Mlangi Hamlet are not merely expressions of individual religiosity. This tradition serves as an integrative instrument that strengthens the social structure of the community without causing conflict among the three social strata *abangan*, *santri*, and *priyayi*. The interaction of the three layers of society can be seen from the *santri* group as the main executor of rituals because they have a deep understanding of religion, especially cultural figures and *kyai* who play roles as leaders. For example, KH. Chasan Abdullah, known as the recipient of the Abdul Qadir *ijazah*, comes from the *pesantren* (*santri*) community and is trusted by the society to lead prayers due to his knowledge and strong religious lineage. The *abangan* group usually tends to be the *shahibul hajat* and active participants when they have significant events. Meanwhile, the *priyayi* layer acts as a social buffer, sometimes voluntarily providing facilities by donating logistics. The existence of sacred foods and the division of roles in the implementation of *amal* are able to create social harmony in a culturally and spiritually diverse community. The symbols in the meaning of the seven types of food indicate acceptance as a cultural heritage that can be accepted by various social groups.

The absence of boundaries between social strata in the practice of Abdul Qadiran negates other identities. Conversely, this ritual is inclusive, emphasizing the purity of intention, *washilah*, *haj*, and respect for spiritual authority. Ultimately, the Abdul Qadiran tradition in Mlangi Village will continue to be passed down from generation to generation without any changes in practice, preserving the tradition in the expression of social and cultural needs.

### Conclusion

Ordinary food can become sacred after undergoing several religious rituals. The process of food sacralization can be seen in the banquet held during the Abdul Qadiran tradition in Mlangi. The recitation of *manaqib*, verses from the Qur'an, and the Beautiful Names of Allah (*Asmaul Husna*) represent symbolism rich in religious and cultural meaning. The Abdul Qadiran tradition not only serves as a spiritual medium for conveying wishes and hopes to God but also embodies Sufi values, social morality, and religious authority structures within a cultural community. Through the symbolic meaning of the mandatory foods that must be present in the Abdul Qadiran feast, such as *sego abang*, *sego putih*, *ingkung*, seven kinds of eggs, and other Javanese specialties, it is evident that the people of Mlangi Village actualize their religious beliefs and values in a concrete form through a culture that continues to

be preserved. Thus, through Clifford Geertz's cultural and religious symbolic approach, it can be concluded that the sacralization of food in the Abdul Qadiran tradition is not merely about fulfilling nutritional and religious needs, but also plays a crucial role in shaping social structure, honoring guests, strengthening solidarity, and maintaining the collective identity of the Mlangi community in harmony, without distinguishing between different social strata such as abangan, santri, or priyayi.

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