

Nurturing Tradition, Negotiating Modernity: The Dynamics of Islamic Life in Contemporary Muslim Communities

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Article Information	Abstract
Keywords: <i>Nurturing Tradition, Negotiating Modernity, Dynamics of Islamic, Muslim Communities</i> Sub. 2th, Jan. 2025 Rev. 10th, Marh. 2026 Pub. 23rd, May. 2026 Vol. 01, No. 02, May 2026 DOI: JIISR 	Social change driven by modernization, globalization, educational expansion, urbanization, and digitalization has transformed the ways Muslim communities understand, practice, and express their religious lives. However, these changes do not necessarily lead to the disappearance of Islamic traditions. Instead, traditions often undergo processes of reinterpretation, selection, and adaptation in order to remain relevant to contemporary social conditions. This article examines the relationship between Islamic tradition and modernity in contemporary Muslim life and explores how Muslim communities negotiate inherited religious practices with changing social realities. The study employs a qualitative approach through library research. Data were drawn from scholarly books, journal articles, and previous studies addressing Islam, tradition, modernity, Muslim identity, religious practices, and social change. The analysis was conducted thematically and interpretively using Talal Asad's concept of Islam as a discursive tradition, Anthony Giddens' perspective on modernity and reflexivity, and Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, field, and social practice. The findings indicate that the relationship between tradition and modernity cannot be adequately understood as a simple opposition. Contemporary Muslim communities do not merely choose between preserving tradition and embracing modernity. Rather, they engage in processes of negotiation through reinterpretation of religious practices, cultural selection, changing forms of religious authority, and the reconstruction of Muslim identities. Modernity can even provide new spaces and instruments for reproducing Islamic traditions. Therefore, the dynamics of Islamic life among contemporary Muslims are better understood as a process in which continuity and transformation occur simultaneously.

1. Introduction

Social change is one of the defining characteristics of contemporary society. The development of communication technologies, educational expansion, urbanization, social mobility, market economies, and globalization has transformed the ways individuals interact with their social environments. These transformations are not limited to economic and political spheres but also extend

to religious life. Religion, which was once practiced primarily within families, local communities, mosques, pesantren, and religious institutions, now also occupies digital spaces, social media, modern educational institutions, cultural industries, and various forms of public life. Within Muslim communities, these changes have generated new configurations of religious understanding and practice.

The sociology of Islam demonstrates that modernity should not be understood as a social condition that automatically eliminates religion. Contemporary studies of Muslim societies instead reveal the emergence of diverse forms of Muslim modernity, transformations of religious institutions, and new challenges to religious authority (Kurzman, 2019). The relationship between Islam and modernity therefore cannot be adequately explained through a simple opposition between the traditional and the modern. Muslim religious life develops through complex processes of adaptation, reinterpretation, and negotiation.

In Indonesia, the relationship between Islam and modernity has developed within a distinctive social and historical context. Islam interacts with local traditions, customary practices, religious education, Islamic organizations, family structures, and broader processes of social change. Certain religious traditions continue to be practiced because they function as sources of social identity and community solidarity, while other practices undergo transformation due to educational development, technological change, social mobility, and economic restructuring. Research on Indonesian Islam demonstrates that traditionalist and modernist orientations have interacted in the construction of contemporary Muslim identities (Ardianto et al., 2025).

The relationship becomes increasingly significant because modernity does not necessarily enter Muslim communities as an external force that must simply be accepted or rejected. Muslim communities can employ modern technologies and institutions to preserve and develop religious practices. Digital media, for example, can be used to disseminate Islamic knowledge, organize religious activities, establish communities, and expand access to religious learning. Modernity can therefore become a new arena for the reproduction of religious traditions rather than merely a force that undermines them.

This perspective is consistent with Lukens-Bull's (2001) study of Islamic education in Indonesia, which demonstrates that tradition and modernity do not necessarily occupy mutually exclusive positions. Instead, they can be negotiated through educational institutions and social practices.

Modernity may therefore contribute to the reconstruction of tradition in forms that correspond to changing social circumstances.

Talal Asad's concept of discursive tradition provides an important theoretical foundation for understanding this process. Asad (1986) conceptualizes Islam not simply as a static collection of doctrines but as a discursive tradition embodied through practices, authority, moral formation, and historically situated relationships between the past and the present. This perspective enables Islam to be understood as a tradition that is continuously articulated and debated within changing social contexts.

Anthony Giddens' theory of modernity and reflexivity further helps explain how individuals and communities respond to social transformation. Modernity increases social reflexivity, encouraging individuals to continuously evaluate and reconsider their practices and life choices (Giddens, 1991). In religious life, this process may involve questioning inherited practices, selecting particular forms of religious expression, and assigning new meanings to established traditions.

Pierre Bourdieu's perspective also provides an analytical framework for explaining the persistence and transformation of religious practices. The concept of habitus helps explain how social dispositions formed through past experiences are reproduced in everyday practices, while the concepts of field and capital help illuminate the positions and resources through which social actors maintain or transform particular practices (Bourdieu, 1990). Previous studies have examined the relationships among Islam, tradition, modernity, and identity. Some have focused on traditionalism and modernism, transformations in Islamic education, or changing forms of religious authority. Others have tended to frame tradition and modernity as opposing categories. However, Muslim everyday life demonstrates a more complex space between preservation and transformation. Research on contemporary Islamic culture likewise indicates processes of adaptation, global-local interaction, and transformation in response to modernization (Muttaqin & Suyurno, 2024).

This article therefore addresses the following central question: How do contemporary Muslim communities preserve Islamic traditions while simultaneously negotiating the demands of modernity? This question is elaborated through three analytical concerns: first, how Islamic traditions are maintained in contemporary social life; second, how modernity influences religious practices and identities; and third, how negotiations between tradition and modernity generate new forms of Islamic life.

The article argues that the dynamics of Islamic life among contemporary Muslims should not be understood as a linear transition from tradition to modernity. Rather, they involve processes of continuity, selection, reinterpretation, and transformation. Islamic traditions can be preserved while acquiring new meanings, while modernity can be adopted without necessarily eliminating Muslim religious identities. Contemporary Muslim communities should therefore be understood as active social actors who continuously construct the relationship between Islam, tradition, and social change.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Islam as a Discursive Tradition

Tradition in Islamic studies cannot be reduced to inherited practices mechanically transmitted from the past. Asad's (1986) concept of discursive tradition emphasizes that Islamic traditions are connected to historical practices, textual interpretations, authority, moral reasoning, and specific social contexts.

From this perspective, Islamic practices are not simply repetitions of the past. When communities maintain religious rituals, respect religious scholars, participate in Islamic learning, or preserve local religious customs, these practices may acquire new meanings within changing social circumstances. Continuity therefore does not necessarily imply the absence of change. This perspective is particularly relevant for understanding Muslim communities in Indonesia, where Islamic practices frequently interact with local cultures and historical traditions. Sari et al. (2024), for example, demonstrate the relevance of Asad's anthropological perspective for understanding the relationship between Islam, local tradition, and social practice among the Sasak Muslim community in Lombok.

2.2. Modernity and Social Reflexivity

Giddens (1991) argues that modernity is characterized by continuous transformation and reflexivity. Individuals increasingly evaluate their practices and identities in relation to changing social conditions. Identity is therefore not simply inherited but continuously constructed and reconstructed. In contemporary Muslim life, reflexivity can be observed when individuals encounter multiple sources of religious knowledge, participate in different Islamic communities, follow various religious scholars, or reconsider inherited religious practices. Modernity thus transforms the context in which Muslim identities are constructed. Kurzman (2019) emphasizes the diversity of Muslim experiences of modernity. There is no single model of what it means to be a modern Muslim because modernity is

experienced and negotiated differently across social, cultural, and historical contexts.

2.3. Habitus and the Reproduction of Religious Practice

Bourdieu's (1990) concept of habitus provides an explanation for how social practices become embodied through repeated experiences. In religious life, habitus can be developed through family upbringing, religious education, pesantren, mosques, Islamic organizations, and local communities. This concept helps explain why particular religious practices may persist despite structural changes. Individuals may live in highly modern environments, use digital technologies, receive higher education, and participate in modern economic institutions while continuing religious practices acquired through childhood socialization. However, habitus should not be regarded as completely fixed. Changes in the social field can generate adjustments in dispositions and practices. Religious habitus may therefore contribute simultaneously to continuity and transformation.

2.4. Tradition, Modernity, and Muslim Identity

Muslim identity is shaped through interactions between individuals, communities, institutions, and religious discourses. In Indonesia, Muslim identities develop through interactions among local traditions, Islamic organizations, religious education, state institutions, popular culture, and globalization. Research on Indonesian traditionalism and modernism indicates that these orientations have different intellectual traditions and sources of authority, while also interacting in the construction of Muslim identities (Ardianto et al., 2025). The categories of traditional and modern should therefore be treated as analytical concepts rather than rigid empirical boundaries.

3. Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative approach using library research. This method was selected because the purpose of the study is to conceptually analyze the relationship between Islamic tradition, modernity, and contemporary Muslim life. The sources consist of three main categories. First, theoretical works that provide the analytical foundation, particularly Talal Asad's writings on Islamic anthropology and discursive tradition, Anthony Giddens' works on modernity and reflexivity, and Pierre Bourdieu's works on habitus and social practice. Second, academic books and journal articles addressing Islam in Indonesia, tradition, modernity, Muslim identity, and social change. Third, contemporary studies examining transformations in Muslim culture and religious life in the context of modernization and digitalization.

The literature was collected through systematic searches using keywords such as Islam and

modernity, Islamic tradition, Muslim identity, Islamic practices, tradition and modernity, and sociology of Islam. Sources were selected according to their relevance to the research questions, academic credibility, and contribution to the theoretical and empirical discussion. The data were analyzed through four stages. First, relevant literature was identified. Second, the literature was classified into four thematic categories: Islamic tradition, modernity, Muslim identity, and religious practice. Third, relationships among these themes were interpreted using the theoretical perspectives of Asad, Giddens, and Bourdieu. Fourth, the findings were synthesized into a conceptual argument concerning the negotiation between tradition and modernity. The credibility of the analysis was strengthened through source triangulation by comparing classical theoretical works with contemporary studies of Muslim societies. The findings are therefore not intended to provide statistical generalizations about all Muslim communities but to develop a theoretically informed understanding of patterns of negotiation identified in the literature.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Islamic Tradition as Social Memory and Everyday Practice

The literature indicates that Islamic tradition remains important in sustaining social continuity within Muslim communities. Tradition functions not only as cultural inheritance but also as a mechanism for transmitting values, norms, identities, and forms of community solidarity. Religious traditions are transmitted through families, educational institutions, mosques, pesantren, Islamic study groups, and local communities. Through these institutions, younger generations acquire religious knowledge while simultaneously learning how to participate in Muslim social life.

From Bourdieu's (1990) perspective, this process can be understood through habitus. Religious practices performed repeatedly can become embodied dispositions that shape everyday behavior. The continuity of tradition therefore does not necessarily depend on conscious decisions made by individuals at every moment. Practices may persist because they have become embedded in everyday social life. Nevertheless, preserving tradition does not mean maintaining every aspect of tradition in precisely the same form. Communities may preserve particular values while changing the ways in which those values are expressed. Religious activities that once occurred exclusively within local communities can, for example, be extended through digital platforms.

Consequently, tradition possesses an adaptive dimension. Modernity does not necessarily eliminate tradition but can provide new instruments through which traditions are reproduced.

4.2. Modernity and Changing Forms of Religious Understanding

Modernity transforms the ways individuals obtain knowledge and construct identity. In earlier

social contexts, religious knowledge was primarily transmitted through families, religious scholars, Islamic schools, pesantren, and local communities. Digital technologies have significantly expanded these sources. Individuals can now encounter multiple forms of Islamic knowledge and authority. A Muslim may participate in a local religious study group while simultaneously accessing lectures by scholars from other regions or countries. This situation expands the range of available religious resources while also encouraging processes of comparison and selection.

Giddens' (1991) concept of reflexivity helps explain this development. Individuals increasingly reflect upon their identities and practices rather than simply accepting inherited patterns. Religious identity can consequently become part of an ongoing process of self-construction. These transformations can be observed in religious clothing, educational choices, Islamic consumption, patterns of social interaction, religious communities, and the ways Muslims negotiate professional and religious identities. Modernity therefore does not simply remove religion from social life; it changes the social context in which religion is practiced.

4.3. Negotiating Tradition and Modernity

The central finding of this study is that the relationship between tradition and modernity is better understood as a process of negotiation rather than absolute opposition. The negotiation occurs through at least four interconnected dimensions. First, the negotiation of practice. Religious practices may continue while their modes of implementation change. Religious activities can incorporate digital technology, modern organizational systems, and new communication patterns. Second, the negotiation of meaning. Established practices may acquire new interpretations in response to contemporary social needs. A religious tradition may be understood not merely as something inherited but also in terms of education, social solidarity, environmental responsibility, community welfare, or other contemporary concerns.

Third, the negotiation of authority. Religious authority is no longer confined to a single social space. Digital media have expanded the arenas in which religious knowledge is produced and circulated. Hirschkind (2006) demonstrates how media can contribute to the formation of Islamic public spaces and ethical practices. Contemporary digital platforms have expanded these possibilities further. Fourth, the negotiation of identity. Individuals can combine elements of inherited tradition with contemporary lifestyles without necessarily perceiving them as mutually exclusive. A Muslim may maintain local religious traditions while simultaneously receiving higher education, participating in professional environments, using digital technologies, and engaging with global cultural flows.

Negotiation does not mean unrestricted acceptance of modernity. Rather, individuals and communities selectively appropriate elements of modern life according to their religious values, social experiences, and cultural frameworks.

4.4. Tradition as a Source of Identity in Modern Society

Tradition also functions as an important source of social identity. In situations of rapid social change, tradition can provide continuity by connecting individuals to families, communities, and collective histories. Preserving tradition therefore does not necessarily indicate resistance to modernity. Instead, tradition may become an important resource through which individuals locate themselves within changing social environments. Muslim identity is consequently shaped through the interaction between inherited social structures and contemporary experiences.

Asad's (1986) concept of discursive tradition is particularly useful here. Islam connects the present with inherited traditions while simultaneously providing moral and intellectual resources for interpreting contemporary change. Tradition thus becomes a framework through which social transformation can be evaluated and negotiated. Research on the Sasak Muslim community in Lombok similarly demonstrates the importance of examining Islam, local tradition, and social context together rather than treating them as isolated domains (Sari et al., 2024).

4.5. Reproducing Tradition through Digital Technology

One of the most visible forms of negotiation with modernity is the use of digital technology for religious reproduction. Digitalization has created new spaces for producing, circulating, and consuming Islamic knowledge. This transformation concerns not only religious preaching but also community formation and identity construction. Individuals can participate in religious communities without sharing the same geographical location. Religious lectures can be accessed repeatedly, while community communication can take place continuously through digital platforms.

At the same time, digitalization transforms the structure of religious authority. Religious knowledge becomes easier to access, compare, and circulate. Individuals may follow multiple religious figures and sources, producing a more plural religious information environment. This situation demonstrates the dual role of modernity. On the one hand, it transforms patterns of social interaction and knowledge production. On the other hand, it provides new instruments for reproducing Islamic traditions. The relationship between religion and technological modernity should therefore not be reduced to a straightforward secularization process. A significant theoretical implication of this study is the need to move beyond a simple traditional–modern dichotomy. Such a dichotomy may portray

tradition as static and modernity as progressive, whereas everyday social life reveals more complex relationships.

Lukens-Bull (2001) demonstrates that modernity and tradition can operate simultaneously within Indonesian Islamic education. Muslim institutions can incorporate modern organizational and educational practices while maintaining significant elements of Islamic tradition. Contemporary research on modern Islamic culture likewise points to processes of adaptation and transformation rather than the complete disappearance of tradition (Muttaqin & Suyurno, 2024). Religious change is therefore better understood as transformation rather than replacement.

Conceptually, the process can be represented as:

Tradition → socialization and habitus → encounter with social change → reflexivity and selection → negotiation → reproduction in transformed forms. This model emphasizes that tradition is not merely inherited but continuously enacted by social actors. Modernity is not simply an external force acting upon tradition but also an arena in which tradition can be reconstructed.

5. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the dynamics of Islamic life among contemporary Muslim communities cannot be adequately understood through a simple opposition between tradition and modernity. Islamic traditions continue to play an important role in social life as sources of identity, collective memory, moral values, and community solidarity. At the same time, modernity transforms the ways Muslims obtain knowledge, construct identities, practice religion, and engage with religious authority.

The process is not simply the replacement of tradition by modernity. Instead, it involves negotiation, selection, reinterpretation, and transformation. Muslim communities can preserve particular religious values while adopting modern technologies, institutions, and forms of communication. Modernity can therefore become a medium through which Islamic traditions are reproduced in new forms. Talal Asad's perspective demonstrates that Islam can be understood as a discursive tradition continuously articulated within changing social contexts. Giddens' theory explains how modernity encourages reflexivity in the construction of identity and everyday practices. Bourdieu's framework, meanwhile, demonstrates how traditions can be reproduced through habitus and social practice while remaining open to transformation when social fields change. The main contribution of this article is the argument that contemporary Muslim religious life should be understood through the concept of continuity and transformation. Tradition can change without losing all of its historical significance, while modernity can be incorporated without necessarily eliminating religious identity. Muslim communities are therefore active social actors who continuously negotiate the relationship between Islam, tradition, and modernity. Future research should examine this conceptual framework through empirical studies of particular Muslim communities. Ethnographic

observation, in-depth interviews, and analysis of everyday religious practices would provide further insight into how negotiations between tradition and modernity take place in specific social contexts.

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