

# Anticipating Disaster: The 'Urf Perspective of Rebo Wekasan Ceremony in Kudus, Central Java

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## **Anticipating Disaster: The 'Urf Perspective of *Rebo Wekasan* Ceremony in Kudus, Central Java**

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### **Abstract:**

Rebo Wekasan is a popular practice among Indonesian Muslims, including those who live in Kudus, Central Java. This article discusses the practice of Rebo Wekasan in Indonesia generally, Kudus in specific, and the rite of drinking water salamun, as well as the practice of Rebo Wekasan from the perspective of 'urf. The anthropological approach is used to understand the tradition of Rebo Wekasan while the observation took place in 2021. Additionally, we also collected relevant documents including pictures and newspaper articles of Rebo Wekasan from 2018 to 2019, and interviews with 8 resource persons ranging from takmir (caretaker of the mosque), ceremonial committee, village officials, and visitors. Rebo Wekasan rite in Kudus is done by performing sholat tolak bala (prayer for anticipating any calamities) and drinking salamun (blessing-infused) water. People who attend the ceremony believe it based on religious belief and classic text showing that the last Wednesday in Safar month is the day of disaster advent. They also believe in the Javanese value that water is a medium of spiritual cleansing. In the perspective of 'urf (custom), Rebo Wekasan is deemed to fulfill aspects of 'urf belonging to the category of 'urf shahih (good custom) because it contains noble values and is sourced from religious teaching.

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**Keywords:**

Kudus; *Rebo Wakasan*; 'Urf

**Abstrak:**

Rebo Wekasan adalah sebuah praktik yang populer di kalangan Muslim Indonesia, termasuk masyarakat Kudus, Jawa Tengah. Artikel ini membahas praktik Rebo Wekasan di Indonesia secara umum, di Kudus secara khusus termasuk ritual meminum air salamun, juga praktik Rebo Wekasan dalam perspektif 'urf. Pendekatan antropologis digunakan untuk memahami tradisi Rebo Wekasan dengan mengamati praktik tersebut pada 2021. Selain itu, kami juga mengumpulkan dokumentasi-dokumentasi yang relevan berupa gambar dan artikel surat kabar tentang pelaksanaan Rebo Wekasan pada 2018-2019 serta wawancara dengan 8 narasumber yang terdiri dari takmir, panitia penyelenggara, perangkat desa dan pengunjung. Rebo Wekasan di Kudus dilakukan dengan melakukan salat tolak bala dan meminum air salamun. Pengunjung percaya bahwa tradisi ini berdasar pada keyakinan agama dan teks klasik bahwa Rabu terakhir dalam Safar adalah hari datangnya bencana. Rebo Wekasan memiliki keterkaitan dengan penyebaran agama Islam di Kudus. Selain itu, praktik ini memiliki relasi dengan nilai-nilai budaya Jawa yang percaya bahwa air berfungsi sebagai media pembersihan diri. Dalam perspektif 'urf, Rebo Wekasan dianggap memenuhi aspek 'urf dalam kategori 'urf shahih karena mengandung nilai-nilai luhur dan bersumber dari ajaran agama.

**Kata Kunci:**

Kudus; *Rebo Wakasan*; 'Urf

**Introduction**

The pre-Islamic society in Mecca City believed that Safar was a misfortune month (*tasa'um*). This was latter countered by a hadith, narrated by Abu Hurairah, a Companion of the Prophet Muhammad, which mentioned the Prophet's saying reads: There is no

epidemic/infectious disease, prejudice, misfortune, and disaster in Safar month.<sup>1</sup>

However, today, the assumption of epidemic arrival in Safar month is still attached to some Muslims in Java, such as mentioned in *Serat Centini*.<sup>2</sup> This did not come without any precedence because some literature deliver the same information. In his book, al-Dairaby, for instance, referring to the warning of *ahl al-Kashfi* (gnostics), mentioned that God descends 350,000 disasters or accidents every year and most of them are on the last Wednesday of Safar. Therefore, he mentioned that the last Wednesday of Safar is the most precarious day of the year. He also suggested an attempt to avoid disaster by performing four *rekaat* (streak) prayers. In the first *rekaat*, after the *Fatiha*, *Surah* al-Kautsar is recited 17 times. It does the same for *Surah* al-Ikhlas in the second *rekaat* and both al-Falaq and al-Nas in the third and fourth *rekaat*. The prayer is concluded with the special *du'a* of *Asyura*.<sup>3</sup>

Likely, in order to prevent disaster, some Muslims regularly perform a religious rituals on the fourth Wednesday of Safar month, which is typically called *Rebo Wekasan* (The Final Wednesday). *Rebo* in Javanese means Wednesday while *Wekasan* means the last. There are various names of *Rebo Wekasan* in Indonesia such as *Rabu Pungkasan* (Yogyakarta), *Rebo Kasan* (Sunda), *Makmegang* (South Aceh), *Arba Mustamir* (South Borneo) or *Rabu Capuk* (Riau). They are all initiated by the assumption that the fourth Wednesday of Safar is full of calamities or fateful days. Therefore, the culturalization of *Rebo Wekasan* tradition and its ritualization are due to the perception as the effort to reject the catastrophe/*tolak balak* (to anticipate calamity) by praying to God.

Regardless of assumptions and the reality about the fourth Wednesday of Safar month, the positive side of religious ritual according to O' Dea is to instill high awareness to strengthen the

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<sup>1</sup> Al Imam al-Hafidz Abi 'Abdillah Ibn Isma'il al Bukhori, *Shahih Al-Bukhori* (Damaskus dan Beirut: Dar Ibn Katsir, 2002), 249.

<sup>2</sup> Karel A. Steenbrink, *Beberapa Aspek Tentang Islam Di Indonesia Abad Ke-19* (Jakarta: Bulan Bintang, 1984), 202.

<sup>3</sup> Ahmad al-Dairaby, *Mujarabat Al-Dairaby al-Kabir* (Egypt: Maktabah al-Tijariyah al-Kubro, n.d.), 75.

community with moral efforts.<sup>4</sup> The existence of *Rebo Wekasan* is a form of accommodative Islamic indigenization approach. According to Simuh, indigenization is a result of understanding Islam contextually, flexibly, respectively, and appreciatively towards local culture so that Islamic teaching is indigenized.<sup>5</sup> Rite, meanwhile, is a way of a group of religious people marked by the various elements and components, i.e., time, place, tools, and people who conduct the ceremony. However, an appropriate ritual is by referring to complete religious postulates. In Islam, a tradition which does not refer to the Qur'an dan al-hadis is responded with pro-contra by the public, i.e., regarded as *bid'ah* (an activity which is not written innash), *takhayul*/superstition (activity based on thinking creativity), *khurafat* (a belief which is not based on sharia), or *syirik* (acknowledging there is another power besides God).

*Rebo Wekasan* tradition is deemed not to be found in any text of the Qur'an dan the Hadith. The practice is based <sup>6</sup> what is written by Syeh Abdul Hamid Quds<sup>6</sup> in his book entitled *Kanz an-Najah wa al-Surur fi al-'Ad'iyyah al-Ma'thurah allati Tashrah al-Sudur*.<sup>7</sup> Farida mentioned that this book contains prayers of certain days and months in one year, such as the beginning of Hijriyah year, the first ten days of Muharram, worship deeds in the month of Sura, Safar, Rabiul Awwal, Rajab, Sya'ban, Ramadan, the last ten days of Ramadan, on the day of Idul Fitri and Idul Qurban, on the day of Arafah, and the end of the Islamic year. The prayers refer to some authentic and authoritative (*mu'tabar*) books written by *shalih* (pious) people.

In Kudus city, on the last Wednesday of Safar, people come to the Mosque al-Makmur of Mejobo Kudus in order to receive *salamun water* (blessing infused water). It is believed to maintain the fine condition of the consumer annually as taken from an old well just

<sup>4</sup> Thomas F O'Dea, *Sosiologi Agama Suatu Pengenalan Awal*, Terjemah Yasogama (Jakarta: RajaGrafindo Persada, 1995), 7.

<sup>5</sup> Simuh, *Interaksi Islam Dalam Budaya Jawa Dalam Muhammadiyah Dalam Kritik* (Surakarta: Muhammadiyah University Press, 2002), 149.

<sup>6</sup> 'Abdul al-Hamid ibn Muhammad 'Ali Quddus ibn 'Abdul al-Qadir al-Khatib ibn 'Abdullah ibn Mujir Quddus was born and passed away in Makkah 1278 H/1861 AD, passed away <sup>7</sup> in 1915 AD/1334 H in the age of 58 years, buried in Ma'la.

<sup>7</sup> Abdul Hamid, *Kanz Al-Najah Wa al-Surur Fi al-Ad'iyyah al-Ma'thurah Allati Tashrah al-Sudur* (Lebanon: Dar al-Hawi, 2009), 34-35.

beside the mosque. Local people strongly believe that the last Wednesday of Safar is the day of calamities so a lot of employees, such as construction workers, ask for a day's leave to avoid any fatal incident during that day.

This article discusses the tradition of *Rebo Wekasan* in Kudus compared to those practiced in other areas, the rite of drinking *salamun water*, and the '*urf* analysis of the tradition. There are three main issues addressed in this article: how is the practice of *Rebo Wekasan* in Indonesia and Kudus? And how is the tradition of *Rebo Wekasan* taken into account from the perspective of '*urf*?

### **Method**

In order to understand the practice of *Rebo Wekasan* in Kudus, this article applies an anthropological perspective of the belief and then analyzes it from the perspective of *ushul fiqh*, mainly '*urf* concept. The basic framework of anthropological research is descriptive—instead of normative—based on local practice (data from location) while finding out the relationship among domains and comparing inter-region. Anthropological research is meant to interpret religion by seeing the existing religious practices in social life. Religion as a belief cannot be studied because it is abstract but religion as an actualization, in form of social and cultural behavior, is otherwise.<sup>8</sup>

The data collection was proceeded amid the pandemic, making the *Rebo Wekasan* ritual not the same as in previous years. In this article, the practice of *Rebo Wekasan* in 2021 was observed. In order to have a deeper understanding of the practice, pictures, and newspaper articles of the practice of *Rebo Wekasan* in 2018-2019 are also collected. These documents provide a better understanding on how is the "normal" practice of *Rebo Wekasan* in Kudus before the pandemic. In addition to observation and documentation, several informants were interviewed. They are the caretaker of the mosque, the committee of *Rebo wekasan*, village officials, and visitors.

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<sup>8</sup> Pebri Yanasari, 'Pendekatan Antropologi Dalam Penelitian Agama Bagi Sosial Worker', *Empower: Jurnal Pengembangan Masyarakat Islam* 4, no. 2 (Desember 2019): 230.



## Discussion and Result

### *Rebo Wekasan* in Indonesian Muslim Societies

The practice of *Rebo Wekasan* is widely known among Javanese Muslims and has been researched from various perspectives and areas. Sa'adah, for instance, describes the practice of *Rebo Wekasan* in Gresik, where Muslims eat *ketupat* (sticky rice dumpling), and drink Safar water.<sup>9</sup> In Jember, people perform the prayer of *tolak bala* and drink blessing-infused water.<sup>10</sup> Instead of drinking blessing-infused water, people in Tegal gather in the river to have mass bathing. They also perform *tolak bala* prayer and do *ziarah kubur* (visiting ancestors' graves). Uniquely, there is also a shadow puppet show celebrating *Rebo Wekasan* in Tegal.<sup>11</sup> The significance of blessing-infused water in commemorating the last Wednesday of Safar is also mentioned in the research conducted among Muslim societies in Bandung<sup>12</sup>, Cilacap<sup>13</sup>, Pandeglang<sup>14</sup>, and Tondano<sup>15</sup>. In other places, water has not become an important aspect of *Rebo Wekasan*, such as in *Lebak*<sup>16</sup> and *Cirebon*.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Nur Sa'adah, 'Makna Tradisi Rebo Wekaan Menurut Masyarakat Desa Suci, Manyar, Gresik Studi Teologi' (Skripsi, IAIN Surabaya, 2011).

<sup>10</sup> Umi Nuriyatur Rohmah, 'Penggunaan Ayat-Ayat al-Quran Dalam Ritual Rebo Wekasan Studi Living Quran Di Desa Sukoreno Kecamatan Kalisat Kabupaten Jember' (Skripsi, UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta, 2014); Nazar Noordin Latif, Sutjipto, and Sumarjono, 'Tradisi Rebo Wekasan Pada Masyarakat Desa Gambiran, Kecamatan Kalisat, Kabupaten Jember Tahun 2000-2014', in *Artikel Ilmiah Mahasiswa Prodi Pendidikan Sejarah* (Jember: Jurusan IPS FKIP Universitas Jember, 2014).

<sup>11</sup> Ahmad Nurozi, 'Rebo Wekasan Dalam Ranah Sosial Keagamaan Di Kabupaten Tegal Jawa Tengah (Analisis Terhadap Rebo Wekasan Di Desa Sitanjung Lebaksiu', *An-Nuha* 3, no. 1 (July 2016): 7.

<sup>12</sup> Wawang Nurhayati, 'Makna Simbolik Dalam Tradisi Rebo Wekasan Studi Deskriptif Di Desa Laksana Kecamatan Ibun, Kabupaten Bandung, Jawa Barat' (Skripsi, UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung, 2018).

<sup>13</sup> Mutingatul Khoeroh, 'Sejarah Dan Makna Tradisi Rebo Wekasan Di Desa Banjarsari, Kecamatan Nusawungu, Cilacap' (Skripsi, IAIN Purwokerto, 2019).

<sup>14</sup> Dede Nur Afiyah, 'Ritual Perayaan Rebo Kasan Desa Girijaya Kecamatan Saketi Kabupaten Pandeglang Provinsi Banten' (Skripsi, UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta, 2018).

<sup>15</sup> Nurul H. Mutmainah, Yusno Abdullah Otto, and Hadirman, 'Tradisi Rebo Kasan Di Kampung Jawa Tondano Kabupaten Minahasa', *Jinnsa Journal Interdisipliner Sosiologi Agama* 2, no. 1 (2021).

<sup>16</sup> Weny Widyawati Bastaman and Fitria Dewi Fortuna, 'Posisi Penganan Ketupat Dalam Prosesi Upacara Tradisi Rebo Wekasan Di Desa Cikulur, Lebak, Banten Tahun 1980-2016', *Bihari: Pendidikan Sejarah Dan Ilmu Sejarah* 2, no. 1 (2019).

Among others, the tradition of *Rebo Wekasan* across Indonesia can exist because of some following factors: *First*, it has become a part of the custom that people keep doing time by time. *Second*, the belief is based on: (a) a hadith narrated by al-Baihaqi about the acceptance of prayer on Wednesday after the sunset,<sup>18</sup> (b) narration that activities starting on Wednesday will incur perfect results, including planting trees that will grow fruits,<sup>19</sup> (c) a hadith mentioned that Allah created light on Wednesday.<sup>20</sup> *Third*, it is in line with Islamic teaching about *du'a*/prayer, *salat*, and charity. *Fourth*, it becomes a means for strengthening interaction among people in this individualistic era.

*Rebo Wekasan*, furthermore, is also sourced from several other references. A hadith in the book titled *Kanz al-Najah wa al-Surur* implied that the practice closely relates to a view of Jahiliyah Arabic society which made an analogy on *Safar* month as a starving snake ready to prey on humans so that the month was regarded to contain many calamities.<sup>21</sup> However, the narration chain (transmission) of the hadith is mentioned as weak so Imam al-Sakhawi used a compromising method in understanding the hadiths related to the calamities in *Safar* month. He came to a conclusion that unluckiness can possibly happen anytime and the misfortune in *Safar* month only applies to those who believe it.<sup>22</sup>

Likely, Farida<sup>23</sup> found that the hadith about the downfall of calamities as many as 320.000 on the fourth Wednesday of *Safar* month had been criticized for two reasons. *First*, its content (*matn*) tends to be *mubham* (unclear) even *majhul* (closed/blocked) because it does not mention any more authoritative reference. *Second*, it is contradictory to another hadith narrated by Affan, Salim ibn Hayyan,

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<sup>17</sup> Siti Nurjannah, 'Living Hadis: Tradisi Rebo Wekasan Di Pondok Pesantren MQHS Al-Kamaliyah Babakan Ciwaringin Cirebon', *Diya Al-Afkar* 5, no. 1 (June 2017).

<sup>18</sup> Al-Baihaqi, *Shu'ab al-Ima* (Beirut, Lebanon: Dar al-Fikr, 2012), 3591.

<sup>19</sup> Ad-Dailami, *Sunan Ad-Dailami* (Aleppo: Maktabah Isa al-Bab al-Halabi, n.d.), 5479.

<sup>20</sup> al-Bukhari, *Shahih Al-Bukhori*, 4997.

<sup>21</sup> Abdul Hamid, *Kanz Al-Najah Wa al-Surur Fi al-Ad'iyah al-Ma'thurah Allati Tashrah al-Sudur*, 108.

<sup>22</sup> al-Sakhawi, *Al-Maqasid al-Hasanah* (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 2009), 943.

<sup>23</sup> Umma Farida, 'Rebo Wekasan Menurut Perspektif KH Abdul Hamid Dalam *Kanz Al-Najah Wa al-Surur*'.



Sa'id ibn Mina which narrated that Abu Hurairah stated that Prophet Muhammad said "no infectious diseases, no bad luck forecast, no pesky owls, and no bad luck in Safar month."<sup>24</sup>

On the other hand, *Rebo Wekasan* is one of the clearest proofs of acculturation between local custom and Islam in a way to pray to God for *tolak balak* (keeping away the catastrophe). It develops quite well among different areas in Indonesia along with the social dynamics in the respective tribes. However, the well-maintained typical thing is the frame and value of Islam beyond the tradition, such as praying in the Islamic way and making *kenduri* (giving charity in form of food, rice, and instant side dishes) or *selametan* (thanksgiving). Table 1 shows various ritual practices conducted by Muslim in Indonesia on the last Wednesday of *Safar*.

Table 1  
Ritual Practice of *Rebo Wekasan* in Different Areas

Region		Ritual Practices
Banjarsari Nusawungu Cilacap Regency, Java <sup>25</sup>	Village, Sub-district, Regency,	Conducting <i>mutlak</i> prayer ( <i>salat mutlak</i> ) of 4 <i>rekaat</i> , drinking water from the well which has been given <i>rajah</i> (special writing in <i>pegon</i> (letter) of Javanese believed to be the prayer), and giving charity.
Sitanjung Lebaksiu Tegal, Central Java <sup>26</sup>	Village, Sub-District,	Conducting <i>sunnah</i> prayer, visiting one another, taking a bath of <i>Safar</i> in a river, and holding a <i>Wayang Kulit</i> (shadoq puppet) show.
Kampung Laksana	Sangkan, Village, Sub-	Bringing <i>nasi tumpeng</i> (festival cone rice) to the village mosque; <i>rajah</i> or <i>jimat</i> (amulet)

<sup>24</sup> al Bukhori, *Shahih Al-Bukhori*, 476.

<sup>25</sup> Mutingatul Khoeroh, 'Sejarah Dan Makna Tradisi Rebo Wekasan Di Desa Banjarsari Kecamatan Nusawungu, Cilacap'.

<sup>26</sup> Ahmad Nurozi, 'Rebo Wekasan Dalam Ranah Sosial Keagamaan Di Kabupaten Tegal Jawa Tengah (Analisis Terhadap Rebo Wekasan Di Desa Sitanjung Lebaksiu'.

<b>district of Ibum, Bandung Regency, West Java<sup>27</sup></b>	from the local religious leader with special prayers, and conducting <i>sunnah</i> prayer.
<b>Suci Village, Manyar Sub-district, Gresik Regency of East Java<sup>28</sup></b>	Reciting the Holy Quran, <i>istighosah</i> (prayer together), reciting <i>selawat nabi</i> accompanied by <i>banjarin</i> (rebana/ Islamic tambourine), doing prayer, eating <i>nasi tumpeng</i> , and <i>ketupat</i> , and drinking special water.
<b>Gambiran Village, Kalisat Sub-district, Jember Regency, East Java<sup>29</sup></b>	Conducting <i>shalat li daf'il bala'</i> (calamity repelling prayer), drinking water of <i>azimat</i> (amulet), and <i>sedekahan</i> (charity)
<b>Sukoreno Village, Kalisat Sub-district, Jember Regency, East Java<sup>30</sup></b>	Drinking the amulet water, performing <i>shalat talak balak</i> (calamity repelling prayer) by reciting certain verses every <i>rakaat</i> (streak) of the prayer after reciting <i>Surah</i> al-Fatihah ( <i>Surah</i> al-Kautsar, al-Ikhlās, al-Falaq, and an-Nas).
<b>Girijaya Village, Saketi Sub-District, Pandeglang Regency, Province of Banten<sup>31</sup></b>	Performing prayer, taking a bath of Safar, and climbing Mount Pulosari.
<b>Kampung Bahbul Pasir, Cikulir Village, Lebak Sub-district, Lebak</b>	Going to the village mosque or <i>musholla</i> , bringing <i>ketupat</i> as a medium for <i>tolak balak</i> (refusing calamities) performing <i>shalat Rebo</i>

<sup>27</sup> Wawang Nurhayati, 'Makna Simbolik Dalam Tradisi Rebo Wekasan Studi Deskriptif Di Desa Laksana Kecamatan Ibum, Kabupaten Bandung, Jawa Barat'.

<sup>28</sup> Nur Sa'adah, 'Makna Tradisi Rebo Wekasan Menurut Masyarakat Desa Suci, Manyar, Gresik Studi Teologi'.

<sup>29</sup> Nazar Noordin Latif, Sutjipto, and Sumarjono, 'Tradisi Rebo Wekasan Pada Masyarakat Desa Gambiran, Kecamatan Kalisat, Kabupaten Jember Tahun 2000-2014'.

<sup>30</sup> Umi Nuriyatur Rohmah, 'Penggunaan Ayat-Ayat al-Quran Dalam Ritual Rebo Wekasan Studi Living Quran Di Desa Sukoreno Kecamatan Kalisat Kabupaten Jember'.

<sup>31</sup> Dede Nur Afiyah, 'Ritual Perayaan Rebo Kasan Desa Girijaya Kecamatan Saketi Kabupaten Pandeglang Provinsi Banten'.

<b>Regency, Province of Banten<sup>32</sup></b>	<i>Wekasan</i> (refusing calamities congregationally), holding <i>istighosah</i> (congregational prayer), <i>tahlil</i> , reciting al-Quran (surah Yasin), reciting <i>shalawat</i> , and making the prayer (du'a)
<b>Air Anyir Village, Merawang Sub-District, Bangka Regency, Province of Kepulauan Bangka Belitung<sup>33</sup></b>	Starting with <i>azan</i> (summon of prayer), dipping the <i>wafaq</i> ( <i>jimat</i> , <i>raja</i> , talisman) into the water and drinking it, performing congregational prayer, and removing the wrap of long <i>ketupat</i> (a symbol of throwing disease away) then eating them together in the mosque.
<b>Kampung Jawa Tondano (Jaton), Minahasa, Regency of North Sulawesi<sup>34</sup></b>	Reciting <i>dzikir</i> , <i>shalawat</i> , verses of Holy Qur'an, and making <i>rano dundo</i> (prayer water) in the vessel. Filling the vessel with water and paper with a prayer written on it by the <i>imam</i> (leader) of the Mosque. The water, which has been melted down with the ink/prayer with the prayer written on it, is shared to the villagers

#### **Rebo Wekasan and Banyu Salamun in Kudus, Central Java**

'*Wekasan*' in *Rebo Wekasan* is believed to derive from Arabic word 'hasan' which means 'baik (good)'. 'Kasan', on the other hand, stands for Javanese '*pungkasan*' which means the last. The word '*kasan*' to the residents in Kudus does not relate to the name Hasan-Husein, a son of Ali, grandson of Prophet Muhammad.

Typically, *Rebo Wekasan* ceremony is held in a mosque. After *maghrib* (sunset) prayer, in many mosques and *musholla* in Kudus,

<sup>32</sup> Weny Widyawati Bastaman and Fitria Dewi Fortuna, 'Posisi Penganan Ketupat Dalam Prosesi Upacara Tradisi Rebo Wekasan Di Desa Cikulur, Lebak, Banten Tahun 1980-2016'.

<sup>33</sup> Fallenia Faithan, 'Tradisi Upacara Tolak Bala Rebo Kasan: Sejarah, Makna, Dan Fungsi' (Skripsi, Universitas Sanata Dharma Yogyakarta, 2018).

<sup>34</sup> Nurul H. Mutmainah, Yusno Abdullah Otto, and Hadirman, 'Tradisi Rebo Kasan Di Kampung Jawa Tondano Kabupaten Minahasa'.

Muslims recite *zikir*, *shalawat*, and Holy Quran verses. In Jepang village, Kudus, for instance, the ceremony usually takes place in Al Makmur mosque. It is a historical mosque believed to be built by a *wali* (saint). The mosque is famous for its Hindu temple-shaped gate and an old well where *salamun* water is taken from. In other mosques, people bring their bottled water for *Rebo Wekasan*. Furthermore, *Rebo Wekasan* in Kudus becomes both religious and tourism agenda. There was a carnival as the opening of *Rebo Wekasan* ritual. People from Mejobo village and its surrounding come to receive a few amounts of *salamun* water which were already given *do'a keselamatan* (safety prayer) by religious leaders.

There is also a *kirab* (carnival parade) starting at Mejobo village hall to al Makmur Mosque. The participants parade the *gentong* (a soil pitcher to store water) and the *gunungan* (cone-shaped pile) which are made of fruit and traditional foods, including *lentog* (a large rice cake) and vegetables such as beans, eggplant, kale, corn, carrot, and chili. After the parade is done, people run after the *gunungan* and fought over all the things on it. In 2016, there were 8.000 plastic bags of *salamun* water distributed to people attending the event.

*Rebo Wekasan* is a tradition that has been done for generations by Mejobo residents, especially around Al Makmur mosque neighborhood. It is deemed not contrary to Islamic sharia because it has the basis in the *kitab kuning* (classical Islamic manuscript). People believe that the purpose of *Rebo Wekasan* tradition is to be aware of disasters and to get closer to God by praying. In addition, it has an economic impact on people around the mosque as they can introduce UMKM (*Usaha Mikro, Kecil, dan Menengah*; micro, small and medium enterprises) and home industry products at the exhibition as a series of *Rebo Wekasan* celebration. The local community also earns income from the management of visitors' motorcycle parking. Children enjoy the excitement of *Rebo Wekasan* procession because many foods and toy vendors are available.

During this pandemic, *Rebo Wekasan* is held by implementing the health protocols, which are keeping social distancing, physical distancing, and using masks all the time. Thus, people are suggested not to come to the mosque and as a consequence, the committee delivers the water to houses surrounding the mosque. It means that only people who live around the mosque are able to drink the water.

In Kudus, the ritual of *Rebo Wekasan* is typically done through 4 steps, i.e., (1) reciting *do'a*, (2) drinking *salamun* water (3) making *selamatan*, i.e., rice and side dish brought to the worship place to be shared to the attending people, (4) performing *salat sunah* of four *rokaat*<sup>35</sup> and reciting the special prayer.

Participants of *Rebo Wekasan* are having a diverse understanding concerning the event. Rohimah, a resident, routinely follows the tradition of *Rebo Wekasan* because she follows *dawuh* (teachings) of *kyai* (religious figure) who says that *Rebo Wekasan* is a good custom. *Rebo Wekasan* is believed to be one of the efforts to resuscitate oneself from any disaster (*tolak balak*) as the verses of the holy Quran are recited during the practice as well as the prayer of *tolak balak*. Rohimah said that she regularly attends *Rebo Wekasan* in order to get *salamun* water. She believes that by consuming *salamun* water, her family is safe from any disaster and is always healthy, even during the Covid-19 pandemic.<sup>36</sup>

Meanwhile, according to Suhban, one of the youths who serve on the organizing committee, *Rebo Wekasan* is a routine agenda of Al Makmur mosque that needs to be preserved. He believes that this tradition is in accordance with Islamic teachings because it contains congregated prayers and advice given by Islamic scholars/*kyai* so that citizens are wished to be safe from any illness and disaster. He added that the common prayer, typically called *doa tolak balak*, is a reminder of the existence of God who has the power to bring down disasters and provide salvation to humans.<sup>37</sup>

Similar to the other regions, some participants of *Rebo Wekasan* in Kudus perceive it more as an entertainment event instead of religious practice. Religious teachings that lie behind the ritual seem to be long forgotten.<sup>38</sup> Some participants even intended to watch the parade rather than join the *do'a* dan *sunnah* prayer. The parade itself has become an entertainment for them. They also like to jostle along the route of the parade. It looks quite contrast with a few *jamaah* who

<sup>35</sup> Mohammad Dzofir, 'Agama Dan Tradisi Lokal Studi Atas Pemaknaan Tradisi Rebo Wekasan Di Desa Jepang, Mejobo, Kudus', *Jurnal Ijtima'iyah* 1, no. 1 (2017).

<sup>36</sup> Interview Rohimah, 2021

<sup>37</sup> Interview Subhan, 2021

<sup>38</sup> Karel A. Steenbrink, *Beberapa Aspek Tentang Islam Di Indonesia Abad Ke-19*, 187.



join *maghrib* prayer and recite *doa tolak balak*. It seems, furthermore, that some people come to the event merely to get the *salamun water*. Thus, *doa tolak balak* as the core of *Rebo Wekasan* has been replaced by *salamun water*.

The core ritual of *Rebo Wekasan* in Kudus is indeed *air salamun* (*salamun water*) taken and distributed during the event. It is believed to bring blessing when consumed. Because of its historical value and perception of blessing within, the well where the water is taken from is still maintained today so that it never drains even in the drought. This proves the existence of a mythological awareness of the objects amid controversial connotations as *klenik* (superstition) and *khurafat*. According to a *marbot* or *takmir* (mosque committee) of Al Makmur mosque, the source of water that was latter turned into *salamun water* is taken from a well which is believed to be a relic left by a disciple of Sunan Kudus. People believe that by consuming the water, they will always be healthy, be cured of diseases, and have their intelligence increased.<sup>39</sup> Notably, water has an essential meaning for Javanese Muslims as a medium of purification and cleaning up bad deeds.<sup>40</sup> Water, for instance, is often prescribed by traditional curer (*dhukun*) who puts a prayer or magical formula on it to cure illness.<sup>41</sup>

### Rebu Wekasan from the Perspective of 'Urf

The culturalized habit by society is typically called custom or '*urf*'. Etymologically, the word '*urf*' means an activity that is continuously done.<sup>42</sup> It also means good.<sup>43</sup> In the aspect of terminology, '*urf*' means tradition which has been long culturalized in form of utterance or activities.<sup>44</sup> '*Urf*' can also be interpreted as a

<sup>39</sup> Interview with Fakhur Rohman Aziz, a caretaker (*marbot*) of al Makmur Mosque, November 13<sup>th</sup>, 2019

<sup>40</sup> P. B. R. Carey, *The Power of Prophecy: Prince Dipanagara and the End of an Old Order in Java, 1785-1855* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2015), 579-80, <https://doi.org/10.1163/9789067183031>.

<sup>41</sup> ROBERT WESSING, 'Porous Boundaries: Addressing Calamities in East Java, Indonesia', *Bijdragen Tot de Taal-, Land- En Volkenkunde* 166, no. 1 (2010): 49-82.

<sup>42</sup> Teungku Muhammad Hasbi Ash Shiedieqy, *Pengantar Hukum Islam* (Semarang: Toha Putra Group, 1994), 226.

<sup>43</sup> Isrun Haroen, *Ushul Fiqh I*, Cet. II (Jakarta: Wacana Ilmu, 1997), 137.

<sup>44</sup> Abdul Wahhab Khallaf, *Ilmu Ushul Fiqh*, Terjemah Moh Zuhri dan Ahmad Qarib (Semarang: Toha Putra Group, 1994), 13.



sustainable habit which becomes popular.<sup>45</sup> The word *adat* in Indonesian is derived from the Arabic word *adat* which means custom or habit. It is a synonymous of '*urf*'. Both *adat* and '*urf*' is the result of a long-standing convention which is adopted or adapted to circumstances and has been broadly followed.<sup>46</sup>

*Ushul fiqh* scholars study '*urf*' to find ways to resolve legal issues in society considering that '*urf*' is a routine and popular habit. In addition, '*urf*' has a positive response from *fiqh* experts.<sup>47</sup> Ibn 'Ābidīn, for instance, argued that '*urf*' could modify the result of *ijtihād* whether it is a general or a specific. He linked '*urf*' to *darūra* (emergency condition) concept by suggesting that once something is widely practiced, prohibiting it would lead to various problems.<sup>48</sup> Custom has always been important for the accommodation of legal rulings down to various local contexts.<sup>49</sup>

Imam Hanafi, meanwhile, uses '*urf*' in arguing for the law (*hujjah*) when it is not stated in the Qur'an, al-hadith, *ijma'* (scholars' consensus), and *istihsan* (the assumption of the goodness of something).<sup>50</sup> Imam Malik even left *qiyas* (a method of formulating law based on analogy) if it was against '*urf*'. Both Imam Shafi'i and Hanabilah scholars accept '*urf*' if it does not conflict with the Qur'anic and hadith texts.<sup>51</sup> Accordingly, Jamal al-Din 'Atiyyah has suggested a new scheme for conventional *usul al-fiqh* in which he proposed to divide the sources of shari'a into five main headings. One of them is the existing conditions or status quo, in so far as it bears harmony

<sup>45</sup> Wahbah az-Zuhaili, *Ushul Fiqh Al-Islam*, Cet. 2, vol. Juz 2 (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1986), 828.

<sup>46</sup> Reuben Levy, *The Social Structure of Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957), 248.

<sup>47</sup> Mustafa Ibrahim al-Zilmi, *Dilalat Al-Nusyusy Wa Turuq Istimbath al-Ahkam Fi Daw Ushul al-Fiqh al-Islami*. (Baghdad: Matba'ah As'ad, 1983), 59.

<sup>48</sup> Ahmed Fekry Ibrahim, 'Customary Practices as Exigencies in Islamic Law: Between a Source of Law and a Legal Maxim', *Oriens* 46, no. 1-2 (1 January 2018): 222-61, <https://doi.org/10.1163/18778372-04601007>.

<sup>49</sup> Burhan al-Din Ibrahim Ibn Ali Ibn Abi al-Qasim Ibn Muhammad Ibn Farhun, *Tabsirat Al-Hukkam Fi al-Aqdiyah Wa Manahij al-Ahkam* (Cairo: Maktabah al Kuliyat al-Azhariyyah, 1986), 382-85.

<sup>50</sup> Teungku Muhammad Hasbi Ash Shiedieqy, *Pokok-Pokok Pegangan Imam Mazhab* (Surabaya: Pustaka Rizki Putra, 1997), 174-75.

<sup>51</sup> Narul Rusli, *Konsep Ijtihad Al-Syaukani Relevansi Bagi Pembaruan Hukum Islam Di Indonesia* (Jakarta: Logos Wacana Ilmu, 1999), 34-35.

with other preceding sources, and this includes custom and presumption of continuity (*istishāb*.) The theory of *ijtihād*, for him, is in fact explicit on the requirement of familiarity with the custom of society and people in which the *mujtahid* lives.<sup>52</sup>

Based on the interpretation of al-Baqarah: 233, '*urf*' is commonly used as a legal basis (*hujjah*) so that Islamic scholars formulate a legal maxim reads *al-'adah muhakkamah* which means that habits can become one of the law sources. Its derivative legal maxim implies that any legal stipulation coming from '*urf*' is considered the same as other stipulations coming from textual provisions (*ats-tsabit bil 'urf ka tsabit bi an-Nash*).<sup>53</sup> Another basic for considering '*urf*' as a part of Islamic legal source is a sentence of Al-Hajj: 78 which reads; *wa ma ja'ala 'alaikum fiddiin man haraj*. Leaving the well-maintained habit is considered as *haraj* (difficulties).

Attributing the force of law to custom is inevitable in Islam owing to the nature of Islamic law. Islamic law deals with universal mankind as well as the norms of each ethnic group which differ from each other considerably. Moreover, because custom is intuitively rooted in people's lives and their utterances, taking their customs into account is inevitable.<sup>54</sup> In this specific context, '*urf*' is approved to be a part of Islamic law source because it represents public reason. Any activity is considered good if people or the public sense say it is good.<sup>55</sup>

Reinterpretation of '*urf*' is therefore important to strengthen and enrich Islamic law so that it can continue to play important role in the future. Strengthening '*urf*' may be conducted through improving the way of understanding and using the verses of the Holy Qur'an and hadith as the foundation of Islamic law. One should also affirm

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<sup>52</sup> Mohammad Hashim Kamali, 'Methodological Issues in Islamic Jurisprudence', *Arab Law Quarterly* 11, no. 1 (1996): 3-33, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3381731>.

<sup>53</sup> Sulfan Wandu, 'Eksistensi 'Urf Dan Adat Kebiasaan Sebagai Dalil Fiqh', *Samara: Jurnal Hukum Keluarga Dan Hukum Islam* 2, no. 1 (2018): 191-92.

<sup>54</sup> Luqman Zakariyah, 'Custom and Society in Islamic Criminal Law: A Critical Appraisal of the Maxim "al-'Ādah Muḥakkamah" (Custom Is Authoritative) and Its Sisters in Islamic Legal Procedures', *Arab Law Quarterly* 26, no. 1 (2012): 75-97, <https://doi.org/10.1163/157302512X612159>.

<sup>55</sup> M. Noor Harisudin, 'Urf Sebagai Sumber Hukum Islam (Fiqh) Nusantara', *Al-Fikr* 20, no. 1 (2016): 66-86.

the position of *fiqh* as the result of historical and cultural interpretation as well as negotiation between texts of Islamic teaching and local practices.<sup>56</sup>

'Urf itself can be classified into three types, i.e., '*urf shahih* (good habit), '*urf fasid* (bad habit), and '*urf* based on place or local '*urf* (local based habit). *Rebo Wekasan* tradition in Kudus is deemed to fulfill criteria of '*urf shahih* because it consists of good activities such as reciting 30 *juz* (chapter) of the Holy Qur'an, performing uncompulsory prayers, and reciting the specific prayer. The practices are also believed to be in accordance with the essence of prayers mentioned at QS. Ali Imran: 8 and Hud: 47. Local people also like to relate the practice to the notion that calamities can happen anytime as QS. al-Baqarah: 155-157 shows and therefore, they anticipate it by reciting specific prayers reciprocally, performing uncompulsory prayer, and giving charity.

In this talk, however, not every habit can be called '*urf*. There are some requirements to fulfill, namely: (1) reasonably logical and in line with common public opinion; (2) becomes a tradition with a wide scope, (3) has been traditionalized in a long term, (4) no excessive requirement, (5) not contradictory with *nash* or religious text.<sup>57</sup> Other considerations also matters, namely (1) not causing any *mafsadat* (damage), complication and not eliminating any positive value; (2) culturalized; (3) not applicable to any obligatory worship.<sup>58</sup> On a stricter criteria, a habit can be deemed as '*urf* as long as it covers the following; (1) it exists continuously, (2) it has become a long term preserved tradition, (3) it is well known by the residents, (4) it is not contradictory with any *shar'i* postulate.<sup>59</sup>

The practice of *Rebo Wekasan* in Kudus, in short words, is deemed not to violate any *sharia* teaching since the rituals and the whole procedure and steps within are conducted in accordance with

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<sup>56</sup> Ach Maimun, 'Memperkuat 'Urf Dalam Pengembangan Hukum Islam', *Al Ihkam: Jurnal Hukum & Pranata Sosial* 12, no. 1 (1 August 2017): 22-41, <https://doi.org/10.19105/al-ihkam.v12i1.1188>.

<sup>57</sup> Syafi Mahmassani, *Filsafat Hukum Dalam Islam*, 262.

<sup>58</sup> A Djazuli and Nurol Aen, *Ushul Fiqh Metodologi Hukum Islam* (Jakarta: RajaGrafindo Persada, 2000), 187.

<sup>59</sup> Mustafa Ibrahim al-Zilmi, *Dilalat Al-Nusyusy Wa Turuq Istimbath al-Ahkam Fi Daw Ushul al-Fiqh al-Islami*, 58.

*sharia* teaching. It ranges from praying, reciting the Holy Qur'an and specific prayers, to giving *shadaqah* (voluntary charity). Thus, it is qualified to be considered as '*urf shahih*' because it does not fall out of any Islamic teaching and therefore should not be classified as '*urf fasid*'.

More particularly, For Kudus people, *Rebo Wekasan* is categorized as '*urf sahih*' for several following reasons: 1) There is no specific argument and information on the meaning, history, procedures, and impact of *Rebo Wekasan* tradition found in either the Qur'an or Sunnah, 2) The whole aspects at the practice of *Rebo Wekasan* do not contradict to the Qur'anic teaching. Nor does it cause any difficulties and hardship. 3) The community knows about the meaning beyond every procedure and step of the tradition.

In another category, '*urf*' based on its scope consists of *al-'urf al-'am* (traditions in general) and *al-'urf al-khos* (traditions in certain areas). *Rebo Wekasan* in Kudus covers both *al-'urf al-'am* and '*urf khos*'. It qualifies the former because it is routinely carried out in various regions as mentioned above. Meanwhile, it becomes a part of the latter because of some distinctive features, particularly using old well water to drink in order to avoid calamity or disease after being prayed for together). The well is believed as a relic of Sunan Kudus which lies in Wali Al-Makmur Mosque. The use of this old well water is unique and distinctive compared to that of other areas.

In the context of Indonesia, '*urf*' (local practices) becomes an important aspect of the forming of the Indonesian *madhhab* (school) of law. Local practices of the community refer to daily practice habits that are continuously practiced by the society. However, local norms are not always compatible with the ideal values of Islamic *sharia*.<sup>60</sup> Sometimes, there found resistance toward local traditions and cultures. Various tensions and conflicts between Islam versus *Kejawen* (Javanese culture) were unavoidable and even became a major feature of the development of Islam in Java, especially in the 19th century or the time of Dutch colonialism. In fact, outside the five pillars of Islam, Muslim also performs other costume rituals to express their identity.

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<sup>60</sup> Agus Moh Najib, 'Reestablishing Indonesian Madhhab: 'Urf and the Contribution of Intellectualism', *Al-Jami'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies* 58, no. 1 (1 July 2020): 171-208, <https://doi.org/10.14421/ajis.2020.581.171-208>.

Some custom rituals have unclear origins but are tolerated or well maintained all of these practices have Islamic values.<sup>61</sup>

At the next development, acculturation of Javanese belief and Islamic teaching occurred in dialogical patterns. Both built good communication in the form of socio-religious structures.<sup>62</sup> This is in accordance with Taufik Abdullah's opinion that acculturation of Javanese and Islamic culture in Java has taken a place in the form of dialogue.<sup>63</sup> It is well supported by the assumption that Islam is not anti-culture. Instead, it straightens out and directs any cultural practice to the right path according to humanity and piety values. Islam does encourage any culture and traditions beneficial for human life to exist continually and dynamically. Therefore, Islamic jurists propose the rule which gives chance to the living tradition to be one of the Islamic law sources in the process of formulating Islamic law and is called '*urf*'.<sup>64</sup>

In the case of *Rebo Wekasan*, the Imam of Al Makmur mosque claimed that the hadith mentioned in *Mujarobat* is a scriptural base to accept the practice *Rebo Wekasan*. However, he admitted that most Kudus people do not know about the origin or related information. They simply followed what their ancestors did in welcoming the last Wednesday of the Safar month. In fact, according to him, some local customs match precisely with *fiqh* while others only match the ethical or values emanating from Islam, and *Rebo Wekasan* is a part of the latter category.<sup>65</sup>

Moreover, Islam also gives space to non-ritual worship (*ghairu mahdhoh*) which provides much chance for the merging with any tradition as an effort to maintain as well strengthen the tradition while preserving religious values embedded within. Muslims can also take

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<sup>61</sup> A. G. Muhaimin, 'The Ritual Practice', in *The Islamic Traditions of Cirebon, Ibadat and Adat Among Javanese Muslims* (ANU Press, 2006), 115–58, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt2jbkqk.11>.

<sup>62</sup> Umi Sumbulah, 'Islam Jawa Dan Akulturasi Budaya: Karakteristik, Variasi Dan Ketaatan Ekspresif', *EL-HARAKAH (TERAKREDITASI)*, 1 December 2012, <https://doi.org/10.18860/el.v0i0.2191>.

<sup>63</sup> Taufik Abdullah, 'Islam Dan Pembentukan Tradisi Di Asia Tenggara', in *Tradisi Dan Kebangkitan Islam Di Asia Tenggara* (Jakarta: LP3ES, 1989), 58–99.

<sup>64</sup> Idris Mahmudi, 'Islam, Budaya Gotong Royong Dan Kearifan Lokal', *Jurnal Penelitian IPTEKS* 2, no. 2 (2017): 138–47.

<sup>65</sup> Interview with Abdul Aziz, imam of al Makmur mosque, October 6<sup>th</sup>, 2021



much benefit from preserving the local customs through the concept of 'urf at least from three aspects: (1) broader chance to have nativization (*pribumisasi*) on very rich culture which has been deeply rooted among society (2) wider opportunity to do 'negotiation' by embedding Islamic values into traditions that potentially contain elements of deviation and (3) bigger possibility to discard any traditions that are principally contrary to the Islamic teachings as a form of "Islamization". In short word, efforts to merge Islam with living local culture can avoid any conflicts between established religious teachings and deeply rooted traditions that are actually very unfavorable.<sup>66</sup>

### **Conclusion**

Like in some other areas in Indonesia, *Rebo Wekasan* is a local practice of Kudus people on the last Wednesday of *Safar* month. It is related to a belief that it is the day of calamities so people are supposed to pray in order to be safe from any casualties. One of the important aspects of *Rebo Wekasan* in Kudus is getting *air salamun* (water *salamun*) which is believed to help people stay healthy. The water is taken from the old well and given *du'a* (prayers) led by religious leaders. *Zikir* and *wirid* were chanted during the ritual of *Rebo Wekasan* as well as specific *du'a* called *tolak balak*. In the perspective of Islamic jurisprudence, *Rebo Wekasan* can be categorized as the good 'urf. Local people believe that this tradition is in line with shari'ah according to Islamic scholars in their classical Islamic books. It is also deemed fulfilling the requirements of 'urf *shahih* instead of 'urf *fasid* and the local 'urf.

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<sup>66</sup> Ach Maimun, 'Memperkuat 'Urf Dalam Pengembangan Hukum Islam'.



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