

Negotiating *Istiṭā'ah*: From Interpretations of QS. Āli 'Imrān 3:97 to Narratives of “Local Ḥajj” in Indonesia

Menegosiasikan Istiṭā'ah (Kemampuan Menunaikan Ibadah Haji): Dari Penafsiran QS. Āli 'Imrān 3:97 hingga Narasi “Haji Lokal” di Indonesia

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Abstract

This article examines how the Qur'anic condition of *istiṭā'ah* (capability) in QS. Āli 'Imrān 3:97 is negotiated in Indonesian practices described as “local ḥajj.” Combining comparative analysis of Qur'anic and exegetical sources with ethnographic material from Mount Lawu and Pamiñahan, the study shows that participants do not present these practices as fulfilling or replacing the canonical obligation of ḥajj in Mecca. Rather, they frame them as aspirational and symbolic forms of pilgrimage under conditions of limited access. Classical exegesis demonstrates that *istiṭā'ah* has been articulated through material, physical, security, and spiritual registers, while field narratives draw on intention, ease, and moral aspiration to interpret local ritual practice. Using Talal Asad's notion of Islam as a discursive tradition alongside scholarship on lived Islam, the article reads local ḥajj as a site where textual norms, local authority, and embodied practice are negotiated. It contributes to pilgrimage studies and the study of global Islam by showing how Indonesian Muslims localize ritual aspiration without claiming juridical equivalence with the canonical ḥajj.

Keywords: *istiṭā'ah*; local ḥajj; pilgrimage; lived Islam; ritual localization

Abstrak

Artikel ini mengkaji bagaimana syarat Qur'ani berupa *istiṭā'ah* (kemampuan) dalam QS. Āli 'Imrān 3:97 dinegosiasikan dalam praktik yang disebut sebagai “haji lokal” di Indonesia. Dengan memadukan analisis komparatif terhadap sumber Al-Qur'an dan tafsir dengan bahan etnografis dari Gunung Lawu dan Pamiñahan, penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa para pelaku tidak memosisikan praktik tersebut sebagai pemenuhan atau pengganti kewajiban haji kanonik di Makkah. Sebaliknya, praktik itu dipahami sebagai bentuk ziarah aspiratif dan simbolik ketika akses terhadap haji dibatasi oleh kondisi tertentu. Tradisi tafsir memperlihatkan bahwa *istiṭā'ah* telah dijelaskan melalui dimensi material, fisik, keamanan, dan spiritual, sedangkan narasi lapangan menggunakan konsep niat, kemudahan, dan aspirasi moral untuk memaknai ritual lokal. Dengan menggunakan konsep Islam sebagai tradisi diskursif dari Talal Asad serta kajian tentang lived Islam, artikel ini membaca haji lokal sebagai arena negosiasi antara norma tekstual, otoritas lokal, dan praktik yang dijalani. Kajian ini berkontribusi pada studi ziarah dan Islam global dengan menunjukkan proses pelokalan aspirasi ritual tanpa mengklaim kesetaraan yuridis dengan haji kanonik.

Kata kunci: *istiṭā'ah*; haji lokal; ziarah; lived Islam; lokalisasi ritual



Introduction

Hajj is one of the five pillars of Islam and occupies a central place in Muslim theology and devotional practice. The Qur'an, in QS. Āli 'Imrān 3:97, makes the pilgrimage obligatory for those who possess the requisite capability (*man istaṭā'a ilayhi sabīlā*), a formulation that opens a broad interpretive space around the meaning of *istaṭā'ah* (capability).¹ Classical exegetical and juristic traditions do not reduce capability to financial means; they also consider physical readiness, travel safety, socio-political conditions, and practical access. The obligation of ḥajj has therefore always been articulated in relation to the concrete circumstances of Muslim communities rather than as a purely abstract norm. Situating *istaṭā'ah* within pilgrimage studies makes it possible to examine how this normative condition is interpreted in social, symbolic, and historical practice.

Scholarship in contemporary Islamic studies has increasingly moved beyond exclusively textual-normative approaches toward analyses of religious practice in specific social settings. Through his concept of Islam as a discursive tradition, Talal Asad understands Islam as a tradition formed and reproduced through dynamic relations among sacred texts, ritual practices, religious discourse, and structures of authority and power.² Within this framework, the Qur'an does not function as a static entity outside history; it serves as a normative reference point that is interpreted, negotiated, and actualized in different historical and cultural contexts. Normative continuity and contextual variation therefore coexist within the same tradition. Expanding this perspective, Samuli Schielke's work on lived Islam foregrounds the tension between normative ideals and the complexities of Muslim everyday life.³ Religious practice often unfolds amid moral ambiguity, as believers pursue ideals of piety while navigating material, social, and structural limitations.⁴ Lived Islam is therefore useful here not as a contrast to normativity but as a way of analyzing how normative aspirations are pursued under non-ideal conditions. This lens helps situate local ḥajj between the canonical obligation of pilgrimage and the circumstances that

1 Al-Qur'an, QS. Āli 'Imrān 3:97; see also Muḥammad ibn Ismā'īl al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Kitāb al-Īmān, no. 8; Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, Kitāb al-Īmān, no. 16. For theological and social discussions of the centrality of ḥajj in Islam, see F. E. Peters, *The Hajj: The Muslim Pilgrimage to Mecca and the Holy Places* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2021); Dale F. Eickelman and James Piscatori, *Muslim Travellers: Pilgrimage, Migration and the Religious Imagination* (Routledge, 2013).

2 Talal Asad, "The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam," *Qui Parle* 17, no. 2 (2009): 1–30.

3 Samuli Schielke, *Second Thoughts about the Anthropology of Islam, or How to Make Sense of Grand Schemes in Everyday Life*, ZMO Working Papers 2 (Berlin: Zentrum Moderner Orient, 2010), https://www.zmo.de/publikationen/WorkingPapers/schielke_2010.pdf.

4 Samuli Schielke, "Ambivalent Commitments: Troubles of Morality, Religiosity and Aspiration among Young Egyptians," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 39, no. 2 (2009): 158–85, <https://doi.org/10.1163/157006609X427814>.

may prevent its performance.

Within modern academic discourse, religious journeys are examined under the broader category of pilgrimage. Since Arnold van Gennep's foundational work on rites of passage, sacred journeys have been understood as ritual processes involving separation, liminality, and reintegration.⁵ This framework was further elaborated by Victor Turner, who conceptualized pilgrimage as a social process generating *communitas*, an egalitarian form of solidarity emerging in liminal situations outside ordinary social structures.⁶ From this perspective, pilgrimage is not simply mobility toward a sacred site but a mechanism for meaning production, spiritual transformation, and collective identity formation. Subsequent developments in scholarship—through phenomenological approaches, religious tourism studies, and the geography of religion—demonstrate that pilgrimage is a dynamic phenomenon that continually negotiates between sacrality, personal quests for meaning, and transformations within the contexts of globalization and mobility.⁷

In the Islamic tradition, the canonical form of pilgrimage is embodied in the ḥajj to Mecca. Yet modern scholarship demonstrates that *ḥajj* cannot be reduced to a set of formal rituals alone. Dale F. Eickelman and James Piscatori argue that ḥajj shapes the global religious imagination of Muslims by expanding social, intellectual, and political networks across regions.⁸ William R. Roff further situates the ḥajj within the contexts of colonialism, modern mobility, and social transformation.⁹ The history of Indonesian ḥajj shows that pilgrimage to Mecca was long constrained by risks, high costs, and colonial regulations, placing access to Islam's sacred center under political and material constraints. In response, dynamic local pilgrimage traditions, such as visits to the tombs of *wali*, emerged as important expressions of Muslim piety, sustaining spiritual orientation toward the horizon of ḥajj without claiming

5 Arnold van Gennep, Monika B. Vizedom, and Gabrielle L. Caffee, *The Rites of Passage* (University of Chicago Press, 1961), <https://doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226027180.001.0001>.

6 Victor Turner and Roger D. Abrahams, *The Ritual Process* (Routledge, 2017), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315134666>.

7 Valene L. Smith, "Introduction," *Annals of Tourism Research* 19, no. 1 (January 1992): 1–17, [https://doi.org/10.1016/0160-7383\(92\)90103-V](https://doi.org/10.1016/0160-7383(92)90103-V); Erik Cohen, "A Phenomenology of Tourist Experiences," *Sociology* 13, no. 2 (1979): 179–201; Ruth Blackwell, "Motivations for Religious Tourism, Pilgrimage, Festivals and Events," *Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage Festivals Management: An International Perspective* (2007): 35–47; Vitor Ambrosio, "Sacred Pilgrimage and Tourism as Secular Pilgrimage," *Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage Festivals Management: An International Perspective* (2015): 130–45.

8 Eickelman and Piscatori, *Muslim Travellers: Pilgrimage, Migration and the Religious Imagination*.

9 William R. Roff, "Sanitation and Security: The Imperial Powers and the Nineteenth-Century Hajj," in *The Rise and Fall of Modern Empires, Volume I* (Routledge, 2017), 389–406, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315237343-24>.

to replace it.¹⁰

Despite these developments, scholarship on local pilgrimage in Indonesia has largely approached the subject through anthropological, historical, or tradition-based perspectives and has rarely connected such practices explicitly to the Qur'anic concept of *istiṭā'ah*. Yet the phrase *man istaṭā'a ilayhi sabīlā* indicates that the obligation of ḥajj is inseparable from concrete conditions of capability. Recent work on Qur'anic reception emphasizes that scripture operates not only through formal texts and written exegesis but also through practical reception, ritual embodiment, oral transmission, and lived religious experience. The resulting question is not whether local pilgrimage can replace the canonical ḥajj, but how Muslims interpret and sustain the aspiration to perform ḥajj when objective conditions restrict access to Mecca.

This analytical gap remains insufficiently addressed in existing scholarship. On the one hand, pilgrimage studies have extensively mapped the dynamics of sacred journeys, including their modern transformations. On the other hand, Indonesian Islamic studies have examined both the history of ḥajj and the development of saint veneration in considerable depth. Yet an explicit bridge between the Qur'anic concept of *istiṭā'ah* and local pilgrimage practices has rarely been constructed. The absence of approaches that treat the Qur'an as a living scripture in this context has produced a disconnect between textual exegesis and practical studies. Attending to how sacred texts are embodied in concrete situations, however, offers an opportunity to understand Islam as a dynamic and contextually negotiated tradition.

Building on this gap, the article reads local pilgrimage through the Qur'anic condition of *istiṭā'ah*. It argues that Indonesian practices described as local ḥajj are better analyzed as forms of ritual aspiration and negotiation than as juridical substitutes for the canonical pilgrimage. Drawing on pilgrimage studies, the social history of Indonesian ḥajj, Qur'anic exegesis, and ethnographic material from Mount Lawu and Pamijahan, the study treats ḥajj as both a binding ritual obligation and a moral horizon that continues to shape religious imagination under conditions of structural constraint. Methodologically, it combines comparative textual analysis with ethnographic interviews and observations, using Islam as a discursive tradition and lived Islam as interpretive frameworks.

10 Syaifudin Zuhri, *Wali Pitu and Muslim Pilgrimage in Bali, Indonesia: Inventing a Sacred Tradition* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2022), <https://www.torrossa.com/it/resources/an/5384657>; Henri Chambert-Loir and Claude Guillot, *Ziarah dan Wali di Dunia Islam* (Penerbit Serambi, 2007).

Hajj in Qurʾanic Exegetical Discourse: Negotiating *Istiṭāʿah* in QS. Āli ʿImrān 3:97

Exegetical engagement with QS. Āli ʿImrān 3:97 reveals that the meaning of *istiṭāʿah* (capacity) is articulated through a range of distinct and sometimes competing formulations rather than a single, unified definition. Early exegetical materials tend to construe it in relatively delimited material terms, most notably as the availability of provisions (*al-zād*) and transport (*al-rāḥilah*), as reflected in reports associated with figures such as Muqātil ibn Sulaymān, Sufyān al-Thawrī, and ʿAbd al-Razzāq. However, later exegetes do not simply reproduce this formulation. Al-Ṭabarī, for instance, questions the sufficiency of such reports and expands the notion of capacity to include situational accessibility, while al-Māturīdī reasserts the authority of hadith in maintaining its definitional limits. Al-Rāzī further systematizes the concept by incorporating a broader set of legal, physical, and financial conditions, whereas Sufi exegetes such as al-Qushayrī reinterpret *istiṭāʿah* within a spiritual framework that extends beyond material capability. Taken together, these interpretive trajectories indicate that *istiṭāʿah* in QS. Āli ʿImrān 3:97 is not presented in the tafsīr tradition as a fixed prerequisite, but as a concept whose meaning is progressively elaborated, delimited, and reoriented across different exegetical contexts.

In the early exegetical tradition, the articulation of *istiṭāʿah* is embedded within polemical and interreligious contexts, reflecting the formative conditions of Qurʾanic interpretation. In the exegesis of Muqātil ibn Sulaymān, for instance, the verse is understood not only as establishing the obligation of ḥajj, but also as situated within a theological polemic between the Muslim community and Jews and Christians. It is read in continuity with verses 95–96, which respond to claims that the Prophet Abraham belonged to their respective traditions. These claims are countered by affirming that Abraham performed ḥajj to the Kaʿbah—a practice known to them—such that denying ḥajj is framed as a rejection of God’s signs, including manifest symbols such as *maqām Ibrāhīm*. Accordingly, the command to follow the *millah* of Abraham as a ḥanīf (QS. Āli ʿImrān 3:95) is concretely interpreted as following the practice of ḥajj, while simultaneously affirming that Abraham was neither Jewish nor Christian. Within this argumentative sequence, verses 96–97 reinforce the status of the Kaʿbah in Bakkah as the first sanctuary established for humankind and establish ḥajj as an obligation for those who possess the requisite capacity.¹¹ In this early horizon, *istiṭāʿah* is primarily defined in material terms—namely, the availability of provisions and a mount—as also reflected in reports attributed to Sufyān al-Thawrī¹²

11 Muqātil ibn Sulaymān, *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān* (Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Tārīkh al-ʿArabī, 2002), 291.

12 Sufyān al-Thawrī, *Tafsīr Sufyān al-Thawrī* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 1983), 78.

and ‘Abd al-Razzāq al-Ṣan‘ānī,¹³ which draw upon Prophetic traditions interpreting it as *al-zād wa-l-rāḥilah*.

This relatively delimited understanding, however, becomes the object of critical expansion in later exegetical discourse. Al-Ṭabarī, for example, subjects such reports to scrutiny by questioning their evidentiary strength, particularly in terms of their chains of transmission, and thus rejects their use as a sufficient interpretive basis. In doing so, he marks an epistemological shift from reliance on transmitted reports toward a more contextualized and rationally mediated understanding. For al-Ṭabarī, the notion of capacity must be evaluated in relation to each individual’s concrete circumstances and therefore cannot be reduced to the mere possession of provisions and transport. The term *sabīl* (way) is thus interpreted as the real and unobstructed possibility of undertaking the pilgrimage. A person is obligated to perform ḥajj only when such access is genuinely available—namely, when not hindered by illness, physical incapacity, threats from enemies, lack of water, insufficient provisions, or inability to travel. Through this move, al-Ṭabarī expands *istiṭā‘ah* into a broader framework of lived accessibility, thereby reconfiguring it as a relational and situational condition rather than a fixed material threshold.¹⁴

In contrast, al-Māturīdī represents a reassertion of hadith-based authority in delimiting the concept. He critiques positions that treat geographical obstacles—such as the presence of the sea—as inherently negating capacity, arguing that such reasoning introduces conditions not sanctioned by Prophetic explanation. For al-Māturīdī, it is not permissible to extend the definition of *istiṭā‘ah* beyond what is established in hadith, namely provisions and transport. Yet, his position is not rigidly formalistic: he acknowledges that genuine impediments may justify postponement and do not render delay sinful. His approach thus reflects a different epistemological configuration—one that seeks to preserve the normative authority of transmitted knowledge while accommodating practical realities without redefining the conceptual boundaries of *istiṭā‘ah* itself.¹⁵

Meanwhile, al-Rāzī offers a more expansive and systematic formulation of *istiṭā‘ah*. In his view, *istiṭā‘ah* pertains to the possibility of reaching the site of pilgrimage, such that its criteria encompass physical health, security from threats posed by wild animals or enemies, the availability of food and drink, sufficient financial means to secure provisions and transport, freedom from debt, and the ability

13 ‘Abd al-Razzāq ibn Hammām al-Ṣan‘ānī, *Tafsīr al-Qur‘an li-l-Imām ‘Abd al-Razzāq ibn Hammām al-Ṣan‘ānī*, ed. Muṣṭafā Muslim Muḥammad (Riyadh: Maktabat al-Rushd li-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzī‘, 1989), 126.

14 Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī: Jāmi‘ al-Bayān ‘an Ta’wīl Āy al-Qur‘an* (Cairo: Markaz al-Buḥūth wa-l-Dirāsāt al-‘Arabiyyah wa-l-Islāmiyyah bi-Dār Hajar, 2001), 5:598–623.

15 Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī, *Ta’wīlāt Ahl al-Sunnah* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 2005), 2:427–39.

to fulfill obligations such as returning entrusted property and providing maintenance. Accordingly, within al-Rāzī's framework, *istiṭā'ah* is not merely understood as the possession of material means, but as a comprehensive condition that enables the safe and valid performance of ḥajj. In addition to elaborating the concept of capacity, al-Rāzī also affirms the irreplaceable status of the Ka'bah as the central locus of ritual practice. He explains that the Ka'bah was constructed in accordance with the pattern of *al-Bayt al-Ma'mūr*, and that valid *ṭawāf*, within this framework, can only be performed at this divinely authorized structure. Since the Qur'an designates the Ka'bah as *al-Bayt al-Ḥarām*, its status cannot be substituted by any other structure, nor can the specific rituals assigned to it be transferred elsewhere. This emphasis is significant, as it demonstrates that even as the meaning of *istiṭā'ah* is expanded, the ritual object of ḥajj remains firmly preserved as a sacred and non-substitutable locus.¹⁶

In other exegetical traditions, a number of scholars address conditions of incapacity, particularly through the practice of *ḥajj badal* (proxy pilgrimage) for those who are physically unable to perform ḥajj. In this regard, al-Tha'labī explains that the obligation of ḥajj is contingent upon the fulfillment of several conditions, including legal maturity, sound intellect, adherence to Islam, freedom, security of travel, and the availability of sufficient time, all of which are subsumed under the concept of *istiṭā'ah* as material and physical capacity encompassing provisions, transport, and bodily ability. Within this framework, he cites the opinion of Imām al-Shāfi'ī, who distinguishes between two forms of *istiṭā'ah*: first, direct capacity, defined as physical readiness and sufficient financial means to perform ḥajj independently; and second, physical incapacity—such as chronic illness or permanent weakness—combined with sufficient financial resources to delegate the performance of ḥajj to another person, whether for compensation or without it. It is this latter form that underpins the legitimacy of *ḥajj badal* within the Shāfi'ī school. However, this position is not universally accepted among the leading jurists. Imām Mālik and Abū Ḥanīfah, as reported by al-Tha'labī, do not recognize the obligation of ḥajj under such conditions of physical incapacity and therefore do not consider *ḥajj badal* a valid alternative. This divergence demonstrates that the juristic tradition is concerned not only with defining *istiṭā'ah*, but also with determining whether and to what extent incapacity may be addressed through alternative mechanisms.¹⁷

In contrast to juristic debates that focus on conditions, obligations, and the possibility of substitution through proxy performance, the Sufi exegetical tradition redirects attention from the journey to the House of God (*Bayt Allāh*) toward the

16 Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb* (Cairo: al-Maṭba'ah al-Miṣriyyah al-Amīriyyah, 1862), 7:166–68.

17 Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad al-Tha'labī, *Al-Kashf wa-l-Bayān 'an Tafsīr al-Qur'an* (Jeddah: Dār al-Tafsīr, 2015), 9:39–50.

journey to God Himself, the Lord of the House (*Rabb al-Bayt*). In this regard, al-Qushayrī offers a reading that expands the meaning of *istiṭāʿah* into the spiritual domain. According to him, QS. Āli ʿImrān 3:97 does not merely articulate an outward obligation for those who possess physical and financial capacity, but also points to a deeper inward dimension. He identifies multiple levels of *istiṭāʿah*: capacity through one's own body and wealth, capacity through the assistance of others, and capacity through divine aid—often overlooked in legalistic formulations. Furthermore, al-Qushayrī emphasizes that while the obligation to journey to the House of God applies to those with sufficient material means, the path toward the Lord of the House is never closed to anyone, including the poor. In this perspective, the physical journey to the Kaʿbah may be inaccessible due to material limitations, yet the spiritual journey toward *Rabb al-Bayt* remains universally open. He thus distinguishes between those who undertake a bodily journey to the Kaʿbah and those who undertake a journey of the heart toward God. This distinction, in turn, leads to a reinterpretation of the ritual elements of ḥajj: for instance, *iḥrām* in its outward sense entails abstention from specific prohibitions, whereas in its inward sense it signifies detachment from all attachments other than God.¹⁸ In this way, al-Qushayrī does not negate the formal obligation of ḥajj, but rather rearticulates its meaning within a spiritual framework.

A similar tendency toward spiritualization is evident in Ibn ʿAjībah's *al-Baḥr al-Madīd fī Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-Majīd*. He suggests that God has provided humanity with two “houses”: the physical Kaʿbah and the metaphorical house of the heart, understood as the locus of divine presence. As long as the heart remains devoid of divine light, one continues to long for the physical journey to the Kaʿbah; however, once the heart is illuminated by the divine presence as its true “inhabitant,” it no longer merely orients itself toward the outward *qiblah*, but instead becomes a *qiblah* for others. In such a state, the spiritual seeker (*sālik*) is no longer dependent on orientation toward anything other than the light of God, for the heart itself has become a kind of spiritual Kaʿbah, encircled by the effusion of inspirations, lights, *maʿrifah*, knowledge, and divine mysteries. Ibn ʿAjībah further elaborates that this illuminated heart occupies a central position as a cosmic axis, such that reality itself appears to revolve around it; within this perspective, longing for the physical Kaʿbah becomes relativized, as the heart assumes the role of the center of existential effusion. To illustrate this idea, he cites a poem attributed to al-Ḥallāj, which suggests that there exists an inward form of “ḥajj”—namely, a journey toward the divine presence through the self-sacrifice of the self, the soul, and even blood, rather than merely physical movement toward the House of God; accordingly, *ṭawāf* in its symbolic

18 Abū al-Qāsim ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Qushayrī, *Laṭāʾif al-Ishārāt* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, n.d.), 1:162–63.

(*ishārī*) sense signifies total orientation toward God, enabling a form of proximity in which the outward sanctity of the sacred precinct is no longer the sole focal point.¹⁹

Ibn 'Aḡibah also interprets the phrase *fīhi āyātun bayyinat* as an allusion to the reality of the heart as a locus filled with manifest divine signs. Within this inward “house,” he describes the radiance of the suns of *ma'rifah* and divine light, the expanse of spiritual heavens and mysteries, and the shining of the moon of *tawḥīd* over the earth of detachment (*tajrīd*) and singularization (*tafrīd*), while the stars of knowledge and wisdom appear upon the horizon of elevated spiritual aspiration (*himmah*); this imagery suggests that the purified heart is not merely a spiritual vessel, but a cosmological space in which divine knowledge is unveiled. Furthermore, Ibn 'Aḡibah understands *maqām Ibrāhīm* not only as a physical site near the Ka'bah, but also as a spiritual station of the monotheists, asserting that whoever “enters” this station attains security from estrangement and divine rejection until the Day of Judgment. Conversely, rejecting this inward station does not diminish God's majesty, for He is independent of all worlds. In his marginal gloss (*ḥāshiyah*) on the verse *wa man dakhlahu kāna āminā*, Ibn 'Aḡibah also cites the view that just as one who enters the Ka'bah attains safety, so too one who enters the heart of a saint attains spiritual security; this is based on the understanding that the heart of the *'arīf* constitutes a sacred sanctuary—a *ḥaram*—for vigilance (*murāqabah*) and witnessing (*mushāhadah*), a space in which continuous awareness of God and inward perception of the divine are realized.²⁰

A comparable inclination is found in the interpretation of al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī. He notes that Sufis interpret the hadith on provisions and transport symbolically: “provision” (*zād*) is understood as *taqwā*, in reference to the Qur'anic verse *wa-tazawwadū fa-inna khayra al-zādi al-taqwā*, while “transport” is interpreted as bodily well-being. In this reading, the material elements of ḥajj are not negated, but rather complemented by spiritual dimensions. Al-Rāghib further suggests a deeper meaning of the “House,” identifying it with a heavenly abode (*jannat al-ma'wā*), such that the journey to the Ka'bah may be read as an allusion to an ultimate eschatological orientation. Since no path leads to this “House” except through righteous deeds and devotion, ḥajj is thus understood not merely as a formal obligation, but as a paradigmatic model of the moral and spiritual journey toward ultimate salvation.²¹

19 Aḡmad ibn 'Aḡibah al-Ḥasanī, *Al-Baḥr al-Madīd fī Tafsīr al-Qur'an al-Majīd* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 2005), 1:383–85.

20 Ibn 'Aḡibah, *Al-Baḥr al-Madīd*, 1:383–85.

21 Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī, *Tafsīr al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī* (Riyadh: Dār al-Waṭan, 2003), 2:740.

The diversity of these interpretations indicates that *istiṭāʿah* and ḥajj within the Islamic tradition constitute a complex discursive field, shaped through layered negotiations across the domains of tafsīr, fiqh, and ṭaṣawwuf. On the one hand, exegetes such as Muqātil, al-Ṭabarī, al-Māturīdī, al-Rāzī, and al-Thaʿlabī consistently anchor ḥajj in concrete conditions of capacity—ranging from provisions and transport to broader considerations such as security, physical health, financial sufficiency, and legal responsibility—while simultaneously affirming the Kaʿbah as a fixed and non-substitutable ritual locus.

At the same time, Sufi exegetes such as al-Qushayrī and Ibn ʿAjibah re-signify these formulations by extending the concept into the spiritual domain. Within this hermeneutic register, *istiṭāʿah* is no longer confined to the capacity to reach the Kaʿbah as a physical locus, but is instead reoriented toward the inward journey to God, wherein “provision” is understood as *taqwā*, “travel” signifies an existential orientation, and the “House” encompasses both the sacred structure and the purified heart as loci of divine presence. This does not displace the legal obligation of ḥajj; rather, it situates it within a broader spiritual anthropology in which access to God is not constrained by material limitation.

***Istiṭāʿah* in QS. Āli ʿImrān 3:97 as a Framework for Negotiating Pilgrimage Capability in Local Ḥajj Practices**

QS. Āli ʿImrān 3:97 provides the normative framework within which Muslims negotiate the obligation of ḥajj, explicitly conditioning the pilgrimage upon *istiṭāʿah* (capability). In the field narratives examined here, this Qurʾanic verse becomes an interpretive resource through which participants explain religious aspiration under concrete conditions of limitation. Their use of the text does not alter the canonical location or rites of ḥajj; rather, it shapes the moral vocabulary through which local pilgrimage practices are understood and justified.

Field narratives indicate that some local pilgrims invoke *istiṭāʿah* to explain why the canonical ḥajj remains beyond their reach. An elderly pilgrim at Pamijahan Cave, for example, stated that he had wished to perform ḥajj since his youth but that health limitations and family responsibilities had made travel to Mecca unattainable.²² In this account, inability is not described as neglect of a religious obligation but as a limit recognized by Islamic teaching. QS. Āli ʿImrān 3:97 is thus read as a command whose applicability depends upon the individual’s actual capacity.

²² Interview with an elderly pilgrim, 7 August 2025.

This localized understanding of capability reflects a broader history of debate within the Islamic interpretive tradition, in which *istiṭāʿah* developed from a legal-material prerequisite into a multilayered framework. As discussed in the previous section, early commentators such as Muqātil ibn Sulaymān, Sufyān al-Thawrī, and ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Ṣanʿānī defined capability in concrete terms as the availability of provisions (*al-zād*) and transport (*al-rāḥilah*). Subsequent scholars broadened this baseline: al-Ṭabarī redefined capability as lived physical and financial accessibility, while al-Māturīdī and al-Rāzī systematized it into a comprehensive legal matrix covering health, safety, and debt clearance. Furthermore, discussions on proxy pilgrimage (*ḥajj badal*)—such as al-Thaʿlabī’s articulation of the Shāfiʿī distinction between physical and financial capacity—demonstrate that Islamic jurisprudence itself accommodated mechanisms for negotiation when direct performance was impossible.

Beyond these legal parameters, Sufi exegetes reoriented *istiṭāʿah* toward the spiritual domain, shifting focus from the physical journey to the House of God (*Bayt Allāh*) to the inward journey to the Lord of the House (*Rabb al-Bayt*). Al-Qushayrī distinguished the spatially restricted pilgrimage to Mecca from the universally accessible journey of the heart, while Ibn ʿAjībah and al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī metaphorically reframed provisions as *taqwā* (piety) and the purified heart as a spiritual Kaʿbah. Together, these developments across *tafsīr*, *fiqh*, and *taṣawwuf* reveal that *istiṭāʿah* has never been a static concept. Exegetes consistently balanced the strict legal requirements of canonical ḥajj with an inclusive spiritual framework—a conceptual flexibility that provides the foundation upon which local communities negotiate their own pilgrimage aspirations.

This pattern is also visible in local pilgrimage narratives described by participants as “ḥajj intentions” (*niat haji*) or *ngalap berkah haji* (seeking the blessing associated with ḥajj). Here, ḥajj is not reduced to physical mobility toward Mecca; rather, its symbols are reworked as forms of spiritual aspiration. At Mount Lawu, pilgrims reported wearing white garments resembling *iḥrām*, performing ablution before ascending, and circumambulating the Hargo Dumilah monument seven times while reciting prayers associated with pilgrimage.²³ A 47-year-old male participant explained, “We know this is not the Kaʿbah, but we follow the pattern so that our hearts can feel what the pilgrims in Mecca feel.” Another participant described fasting before the ascent as a form of spiritual preparation analogous to entering a state of consecration.²⁴

23 Interview with a pilgrim at Mount Lawu, 20 July 2025.

24 Interview with a participant at Mount Lawu, 20 July 2025.

Participants also invoke the ethical language of ease, capacity, and intention when explaining these practices. Rather than quoting hadith systematically, some interviewees referred in general terms to the idea that religion does not impose an unbearable burden. Others emphasized that God knows their intentions and connected this conviction to the hadith *innamā al-a'māl bi-l-niyyāt* ("actions are judged by intentions").²⁵ In these narratives, the hadith functions less as a juristic proof of ritual equivalence than as a moral reference through which participants explain the sincerity of their devotional aspiration.

These narratives place *niyyah* (intention) at the center of participants' accounts of worship, while treating the local ritual form as a situational means of sustaining religious aspiration. For them, an unrealized desire to answer the call of ḥajj may still carry moral value even when travel to Mecca is impossible. Local ḥajj therefore operates as a symbolic medium for maintaining an orientation toward pilgrimage; participants do not present it as the fulfillment of the formal juristic obligation.

Local ḥajj also illustrates the plurality of actors involved in religious interpretation. Formal institutions are important, but local traditions, community religious leaders, site custodians, and collective experience also mediate the meaning of ritual. At Mount Lawu and Pamijahan, village kiai, custodians, and traditional elders frequently explain practices through advice, stories, and references to sacred texts.²⁶ Their authority is discursive and relational rather than reducible to systematic fiqh argumentation.

From the perspective of Islam as a discursive tradition, these field materials suggest that the Qur'an is not abandoned in local ḥajj practices; rather, it is invoked through situational and relational interpretations. The sacred text functions as a source of moral imagination through which participants seek to remain within an Islamic normative horizon even when they cannot perform the canonical pilgrimage. Local ḥajj should therefore be analyzed neither as simple equivalence with ḥajj nor as self-evident deviation, but as a contested form of lived religious expression in the Indonesian context.

Local Ḥajj as Ritual Localization in Indonesia: Mount Lawu and Pamijahan

Ethnographic material from Mount Lawu indicates that local ḥajj practices are organized through deliberate analogies with selected rites of the canonical pilgrimage. In the Magetan–Karanganyar region, the mountain landscape is sacralized as a local

25 Muḥammad ibn Ismā'īl al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Kitāb Bad' al-Waḥy, no. 1.

26 Interview with informant AL, Mount Lawu, 20 July 2025.

ritual space. Pilgrims may wear white garments resembling *iḥrām* before ascending and follow a sequence of practices understood to evoke aspects of ḥajj. The analogy is symbolic rather than juridical: Mount Lawu functions as a performative setting in which pilgrimage motifs are rearticulated within a local landscape.

One of the central practices involves circumambulating the Hargo Dumilah monument at the mountain's summit. Participants interpret this movement as symbolic *ṭawāf*, consciously modeled on circumambulation of the Ka'bah. The circuit is accompanied by prayers and devotional intentions, and some pilgrims report completing seven rounds in deliberate reference to the canonical rite.²⁷ The practice therefore reflects an explicit attempt to evoke ḥajj symbolically rather than an unmarked or spontaneous ritual innovation.

Mount Lawu is also embedded in Javanese narratives of kingship, asceticism, and spiritual retreat, including traditions associated with Prabu Brawijaya V. These narratives contribute to the mountain's religious and cultural significance. A 54-year-old pilgrim explained, "We do not feel that we are replacing Mecca, but rather seeking a way to experience the sacred calling here."²⁸ Another participant described the ritual as spiritual preparation for a future canonical ḥajj. Such accounts reinforce the aspirational rather than substitutional framing articulated by participants.

The determination of the timing of pilgrimage to Mount Lawu also reflects deliberate religious reasoning. Many pilgrims choose to visit during the month of Dhu al-Hijjah, particularly in the days leading to Eid al-Adha, because these moments coincide with the ḥajj season in Mecca. Others perform the pilgrimage during the month of Suro (Muharram) in the Javanese-Islamic calendar, which is widely regarded as a sacred time for spiritual reflection. The convergence between Islamic ritual time and Javanese cosmological time demonstrates how global and local temporal frameworks intersect.²⁹ This alignment of sacred time reinforces the perception that the ritual journey participates symbolically in the broader spiritual atmosphere of the ḥajj season. As a result, the sacrality of Mount Lawu is produced not only through space but also through the conscious selection of sacred time.

Comparable dynamics appear in Pamijahan, Tasikmalaya, a pilgrimage center associated with the tomb of Shaykh Abdul Muhyi. The tomb complex and Safarwadi Cave are interpreted as spaces of sacred memory and spiritual movement.³⁰

27 Interview with pilgrims identified as AL during symbolic *ṭawāf* at the Hargo Dumilah monument, Mount Lawu.

28 Interview with elderly pilgrim AK, Mount Lawu, 20 July 2025.

29 Interview with pilgrimage coordinator AL, Mount Lawu, 20 July 2025.

30 Werner Kraus, "An Enigmatic Saint: Syekh Abdulmuhyi of Pamijahan (?1640–1715?)," *Indonesia Circle. School of Oriental & African Studies. Newsletter* 23, no. 65 (March 1995): 21–31, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022278X0000650>.

Participants describe processional movement through the site as a symbolic journey rather than a theological equivalent of ḥajj. Many pilgrims describe their journey as an attempt to experience the atmosphere of sacred travel associated with the pilgrimage to Mecca. One pilgrim stated, “We only emulate the meaning of the sacred journey, not replace the original obligation.”³¹ Pamijahan therefore functions as a local space in which Mecca is evoked as an imaginative and devotional horizon rather than reproduced geographically.

Pilgrimage to Pamijahan is also associated with sacred periods in the Islamic calendar. Mawlid, Rajab, and Dhu al-Hijjah are favored because pilgrims understand them as times of heightened blessing. A 38-year-old female participant explained, “When we come during the major Islamic months, it feels as though we are moving in the same current as Muslims across the world.”³² Such temporal synchronization links the local pilgrimage to a wider Muslim devotional calendar.

Pamijahan is further shaped by narratives of *karāmah* (saintly miracles) and by memories of Shaykh Abdul Muhyi’s role in the Islamization of West Java. These narratives contribute to a multilayered sacred landscape in which local history and devotional memory intersect. One pilgrim reflected, “Here we feel closer to Islamic history, as if Mecca is present in our hearts.”³³ These accounts support an interpretation of local ḥajj as a symbolic strategy for negotiating geographical limitation within a wider Muslim religious imagination.³⁴

The emergence of these practices is closely connected to how local communities interpret the Qur’anic concept of *istiṭā’ah* in QS. Āli ‘Imrān 3:97. In classical jurisprudence, this concept refers to the physical, financial, and security conditions necessary to undertake the pilgrimage to Mecca. However, among local pilgrims, the concept is often interpreted in a broader experiential sense that acknowledges the realities of everyday life. Many participants recognize the normative obligation of ḥajj while acknowledging that economic limitations, health conditions, or family responsibilities prevent them from fulfilling it. This is exemplified by the elderly pilgrim at Pamijahan Cave, whose desire to perform the pilgrimage had existed since his youth but remained unrealized.³⁵ Visiting local sacred sites, therefore, becomes a

org/10.1080/03062849508729831.

31 Interview with a pilgrim at Pamijahan Cave, September 2025.

32 Interview with pilgrim YS, Pamijahan, September 2025.

33 Interview with pilgrim AK, Pamijahan, September 2025.

34 Wan Khairul Aiman Wan Mokhtar et al., “Many Roads to Mecca: The Controversy of Safarwadi Cave Pilgrimage in the Local Muslims,” *LAS Journal of Localities* 2, no. 2 (2024): 109–24, <https://doi.org/10.62033/iasjol.v2i2.79>.

35 Interview with an elderly pilgrim at Pamijahan Cave, 30 September 2025.

symbolic expression of longing for the pilgrimage rather than a replacement for it.

Local religious leaders also play a crucial role in mediating these interpretations of Qur'anic teachings. Village *kiai*, custodians of pilgrimage sites, and respected elders frequently explain that local pilgrimage is not intended as a substitute for the canonical ḥajj. Instead, they describe it as a form of spiritual preparation or aspiration for believers who have not yet attained the conditions required by *istiṭā'ah*. A caretaker at Mount Lawu explained during an interview that the rituals serve as a way to remember the meaning of ḥajj and train the heart toward devotion. Through such explanations, Qur'anic teachings about capability are interpreted not only as legal requirements but also as ethical frameworks guiding religious aspiration. In this process, the Qur'an becomes a living source of interpretation embedded within everyday religious discourse.

Local ḥajj nevertheless remains contested. In contrast to local practitioners, puritan-oriented critics warn that local ḥajj may create the impression that the canonical obligation has been fulfilled. Their position draws on juristic accounts that preserve Mecca as the exclusive locus of the prescribed ḥajj rites. From this perspective, local analogues may be classified as *bid'ah* or as cultural practices lacking a sufficient basis in the shari'ah.³⁶ The disagreement places local ḥajj within a broader contest over the relationship between normative orthodoxy and lived religious practice.

Local pilgrims, however, do not generally present themselves as opponents of orthodoxy. They frequently invoke Qur'anic verses and hadith to explain the ethical and spiritual meaning of their practices. Local religious authorities, particularly village *kiai*, play an important role in interpreting Qur'anic teachings within the context of local pilgrimage traditions at Mount Lawu. In their sermons and informal teachings, *kiai* often refer to QS. al-ḥajj 22:27 as a reminder that the call to pilgrimage represents a broader invitation to respond to God according to one's capacity.³⁷ Rather than presenting the journey to Mount Lawu as a substitute for the canonical ḥajj, they frame it as a symbolic spiritual exercise that encourages repentance, humility, and remembrance of God. The physical ascent of the mountain is frequently interpreted as a metaphor for the believer's effort to approach God through moral self-improvement. Through this interpretation, the Qur'anic call to pilgrimage functions as an ethical resource rather than a claim that geography is irrelevant to the canonical ḥajj.

A similar interpretive approach can be observed in Pamijahan, where local *kiai* and custodians of the shrine of Shaykh Abdul Muhyi often explain pilgrimage

36 Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd* (Riyadh: Dār al-Ma'ārif, n.d.).

37 Interview with pilgrimage coordinator AL, Mount Lawu, 20 July 2025.

practices through the ethical teachings of QS. al-Baqarah 2:197. This verse emphasizes that pilgrimage should be accompanied by moral discipline, prohibiting *rafath*, *fusūq*, and *jidāl*. Local participants relate these ethical demands to self-restraint, reduced consumption, and the avoidance of conflict during their ritual period.³⁸ In guidance delivered to visiting pilgrims, *kiai* frequently highlight fasting, prayer, and *dhikr* as forms of spiritual preparation before entering the sacred spaces of the site. These practices are interpreted as ways of internalizing the ethical spirit of ḥajj rather than replicating its formal ritual structure. As a result, Qur'anic teachings are understood as moral guidance that shapes how pilgrims experience and interpret their devotional journey in Pamijahan. From a Qur'anic perspective, local religious leaders sometimes relate the localization of sacred space to QS. al-Baqarah 2:115, "wherever you turn, there is the Face of God." Their use of the verse does not erase the specific ritual status of Mecca; rather, it supports the devotional claim that closeness to God is not reducible to geographical proximity alone and also depends upon orientation, intention, and obedience.

Within the framework of Islam as a discursive tradition, these practices show that Qur'anic meaning remains subject to interpretive negotiation in concrete settings. The Qur'an does not operate solely as a fixed textual authority but as a source of meaning that becomes active within lived religious experience. Local ḥajj cannot be understood adequately through a binary of canonical equivalence versus simple deviation; instead, it should be understood as an expression of lived Islam.³⁹ These practices demonstrate how Muslim communities attempt to preserve a normative orientation toward Mecca while adapting devotional practice to social, historical, and geographical conditions. In this way, local pilgrimage becomes a concrete example of how Islamic ritual traditions are localized without losing their theological reference to Mecca. The Qur'an thus continues to shape Muslim devotional imagination beyond the geographical boundaries of the canonical pilgrimage.

Ḥajj as a Moral Horizon in Lived Islam

The case of local ḥajj practices in Indonesia invites a reconsideration of the dominant legalistic paradigm that has long shaped the study of pilgrimage in Islamic studies. Much of the existing literature on ḥajj tends to focus on normative compliance with jurisprudential prescriptions and the centrality of Mecca as the only legitimate locus of pilgrimage. While such perspectives remain essential for understanding

³⁸ Interview with pilgrimage coordinator AL, Mount Lawu, 20 July 2025.

³⁹ Magnus Marsden, *Living Islam: Muslim Religious Experience in Pakistan's North-West Frontier*, 1st ed. (Cambridge University Press, 2005), <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511489549>.

the doctrinal foundations of the ritual, they often overlook how Muslims in diverse social contexts experience and interpret ḥajj as a continuing religious aspiration within everyday life.⁴⁰ Ethnographic evidence from Indonesian pilgrimage traditions demonstrates that the meaning of ḥajj extends beyond its canonical performance in Mecca and continues to operate as a moral and symbolic orientation shaping religious life.⁴¹ In this sense, ḥajj functions not merely as a ritual obligation but as an ethical horizon that informs the moral imagination and devotional practices of Muslim communities. This perspective resonates with broader discussions in the study of lived religion that emphasize how religious meaning is produced through everyday practices and embodied experiences rather than solely through formal doctrines.⁴²

Understanding ḥajj as a moral horizon expands the analytical framework of pilgrimage studies beyond questions of ritual validity toward a broader exploration of how sacred meanings circulate within lived Islam. In the Indonesian context, the phenomenon of local ḥajj should not be interpreted as an attempt to replace the canonical obligation of pilgrimage but rather as a symbolic mechanism through which believers maintain their orientation toward Islamic norms despite structural limitations.⁴³ Economic constraints, health conditions, and long waiting periods for official pilgrimage quotas often prevent many Muslims from performing ḥajj in Mecca. In response to these conditions, local ritual practices emerge as forms of devotional engagement that allow believers to remain connected to the spiritual meaning of pilgrimage. Such practices function as mediating structures that bridge the gap between religious aspiration and social reality.⁴⁴ The presence of these symbolic rituals illustrates how Muslims creatively negotiate the tension between normative ideals and lived circumstances without abandoning the authority of Islamic teachings.⁴⁵

40 Meredith B. McGuire, *Lived Religion: Faith and Practice in Everyday Life* (Oxford University Press, 2008).

41 Moh Soehadha, *Antropologi Haji: Haji dalam Tradisi Lokal di Indonesia* (Yogyakarta: SUKA-Press, 2024).

42 James W. Jones, *Living Religion: Embodiment, Theology, and the Possibility of a Spiritual Sense* (Oxford University Press, 2019).

43 Moh Soehadha, Ustadi Hamsah, and Khairullah Zikri, "Beyond Pilgrimage: Exploring the Dynamic Spirituality of the Hajj for Shaping Social Engagement in Rural Indonesia," *MIQOT: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Keislaman* 50, no. 1 (2026): 33–55.

44 Ruth Blackwell, "Motivations for Religious Tourism, Pilgrimage, Festivals and Events," *Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage Festivals Management: An International Perspective*, 2007, 35–47.

45 Mahatva Yoga Adi Pradana, Darsono Wisadirana, and Ahmad Imron Rozuli, "Integration of Islamic Religious Values and Javanese Culture in the Development of Pilgrimage Tourism in Ngawonggo, Indonesia," *International Journal of Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage* 11, no. 6 (2024): 11.

From the perspective of Living Qur'an studies, these practices demonstrate how scriptural teachings operate within everyday religious experience as living interpretive resources. Scholars of Living Qur'an have emphasized that the Qur'an does not function solely as a textual authority interpreted within scholarly exegesis but also as a dynamic source of meaning that becomes embodied in social practices, rituals, and communal narratives.⁴⁶ Within this framework, Qur'anic concepts such as *istiṭā'ah*, intention (*niyyah*), and moral discipline during pilgrimage are interpreted not only through formal legal discourse but also through lived religious reasoning. Believers draw upon these scriptural concepts to interpret their own circumstances and justify symbolic forms of devotional practice. The Qur'an, therefore, operates simultaneously as a normative reference and as a living text that shapes ethical reflection within everyday Muslim life. Such an understanding aligns with broader scholarship on the reception and cultural history of scripture, which emphasizes how sacred texts acquire meaning through ongoing interpretation and social performance.⁴⁷

The interpretive flexibility evident in local ḥajj practices also reflects a broader phenomenon recognized in comparative studies of scripture. Scholars have long noted that sacred texts rarely function solely as written documents but often operate within oral, performative, and embodied traditions. William A. Graham's influential work on the oral dimensions of scripture highlights how religious texts become meaningful through recitation, ritual enactment, and communal transmission rather than through textual interpretation alone.⁴⁸ Similarly, studies of scriptural traditions in non-literate contexts emphasize that the authority of sacred texts often emerges through ritual practices and social performance.⁴⁹ In the Indonesian case, the symbolic reenactment of pilgrimage rituals—such as wearing garments resembling *iḥrām*, undertaking ritual journeys to sacred sites, or performing acts that echo the structure of ṭawāf—illustrates how scriptural meanings are embodied in local devotional practices. These ritual forms do not challenge the normative authority of the Qur'an but rather demonstrate how scriptural teachings are translated into culturally embedded forms of religious expression.

The findings of this study, therefore, reinforce the argument that the Qur'an in Muslim societies functions not only as a normative framework but also as a source of moral imagination that guide ethical reflection and communal action. Scriptural teachings concerning pilgrimage are often interpreted in ways that emphasize the

46 Rafiq, "The Living Qur'an."

47 Beal, "Reception History and Beyond."

48 Graham, *Beyond the Written Word*.

49 Clifford Geertz, "Religion as a Cultural System," in *A Reader in the Anthropology of Religion*, ed. Michael Lambek (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2001).

transformative ethical goals of the ritual rather than its procedural formalities alone.⁵⁰ The Qur'anic emphasis on moral discipline, sincerity, and humility during ḥajj is frequently invoked in local religious discourse to explain the spiritual significance of pilgrimage practices. This inward dimension can be clarified through Riyanto and Abror's reading of Frithjof Schuon's Five Divine Presences, which positions rū ḥānī (spirit/intellect) as the bridge between the human and the Divine. Read in relation to pilgrimage, the model helps explain why spiritual transformation cannot be reduced to physical movement: outward discipline becomes spiritually meaningful insofar as it shapes the soul's orientation toward God.⁵¹ Within this interpretive framework, the value of ḥajj lies not only in the completion of its ritual sequence but also in the cultivation of moral virtues such as patience, sincerity, and solidarity. Local pilgrimage rituals thus become spaces in which these ethical ideals are rehearsed and embodied within everyday religious life.⁵² This interpretation resonates with broader theoretical discussions about the nature of scripture as a living tradition that continues to shape the moral imagination of believers across different cultural contexts.⁵³

The Indonesian case also contributes to a growing body of scholarship that challenges the assumption that Muslim societies outside the Arab world function merely as passive recipients of religious norms produced by supposed centers of Islamic authority. Instead, the findings of this study demonstrate that Indonesian Muslims actively participate in the production of religious meaning through processes of ritual localization and interpretive negotiation. By grounding their practices in Qur'anic teachings while adapting them to local social conditions, believers engage in a form of religious creativity that remains rooted in Islamic textual traditions.⁵⁴ Within this framework, Indonesia should not be viewed simply as a peripheral or exceptional case but rather as an important site for theorizing how Islam operates as a dynamic and contextually adaptive discursive tradition. The practices observed in local pilgrimage traditions reveal that the relationship between scriptural authority and ritual practice is inherently dialogical rather than strictly hierarchical.

50 A. Kevin Reinhart, *Lived Islam* (Cambridge University Press, 2020).

51 Waryani Fajar Riyanto and Robby Habiba Abror, "Frithjof Schuon (1907–1998) on the Transcendent Unity of Five Divine Presence," *African Journal of Religion, Philosophy and Culture* 7, no. 3 (September 2026): 197–204, <https://doi.org/10.31920/2634-7644/2026/v7n3a10>.

52 Pierre Fournié, "Rediscovering the Walisongo, Indonesia: A Potential New Destination for International Pilgrimage," *International Journal of Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage* 7, no. 4 (2019): 77–86.

53 Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *What Is Scripture? A Comparative Approach* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993).

54 Henri Chambert-Loir and Claude Guillot, *Ziarah dan Wali di Dunia Islam* (Penerbit Serambi, 2007).

More broadly, these findings suggest the need for a more nuanced approach to ritual substitution and adaptation within the study of Islam. Practices that appear at first glance to diverge from canonical norms may represent strategies through which believers seek to maintain their commitment to Islamic moral ideals. Pragmatic flexibility in ritual practice does not necessarily imply theological relativism; rather, it can function as a mechanism through which religious continuity is preserved in the face of changing social conditions. Local ḥajj traditions illustrate how Muslim communities negotiate the relationship between scriptural authority, ritual practice, and lived experience in ways that sustain the moral significance of pilgrimage. In this sense, the center of Islamic ritual life in Mecca does not erase the dynamics of religious creativity occurring in other parts of the Muslim world. Instead, it interacts with these local practices through complex processes of interpretation and negotiation.

Ultimately, the phenomenon of local ḥajj demonstrates that the meaning of pilgrimage extends far beyond the physical journey to Mecca. The Qur'an provides the normative framework through which the ritual is understood, yet its significance continues to resonate through diverse forms of devotional practice across the Muslim world. By examining how these scriptural teachings are interpreted and embodied within local pilgrimage traditions, this study contributes to broader debates about Islamic authority, ritual, and lived religion. Contemporary Muslim piety emerges not simply from adherence to textual prescriptions but from ongoing negotiations between sacred texts, inherited traditions, and the social realities of everyday life.⁵⁵ Within this dynamic process, ḥajj continues to function as a powerful moral horizon that shapes the ethical orientation and spiritual imagination of the global Muslim community.

Conclusion

This article has examined local ḥajj in Indonesia as a form of lived religious negotiation under social, economic, physical, and structural constraints. The practices described by participants do not replace or fulfill the canonical ḥajj obligation; rather, they function as symbolic means of sustaining an aspiration toward pilgrimage. Read through the frameworks of Islam as a discursive tradition and lived Islam, the Qur'an appears as a normative source whose meaning is interpreted within concrete settings. The concept of *istiṭā'ah*, together with the ethical language of intention and ease, provides participants with a vocabulary for relating religious obligation to human capability.

55 Samuli Schielke, "Being Good in Ramadan: Ambivalence, Fragmentation, and the Moral Self in the Lives of Young Egyptians," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 15, no. S1 (2009): S24–S40, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9655.2009.01540.x>.

Ethnographic materials from Mount Lawu and Pamijahan show that local pilgrimage may involve structured ritual analogies, ascetic discipline, sacred narratives, and practices such as fasting, *tirakat*, night vigils, and symbolic circumambulation. These elements create liminal settings in which participants interpret spiritual transformation and cultivate an affective relationship to ḥajj. Such localization does not erase the distinctive sacred status of Mecca; it rearticulates selected ethical and symbolic meanings within accessible local spaces.

The cases also demonstrate that local ḥajj is an arena of contested religious authority. Scriptural scholars, local kiai, site custodians, and ritual practitioners draw on different forms of knowledge and legitimacy when defining the limits of acceptable practice. The article's main theoretical contribution is therefore the concept of ḥajj as a moral horizon within lived Islam: a framework that complements, rather than replaces, juristic analysis by examining how the pilgrimage shapes ethical orientation and religious aspiration beyond the moment of ritual performance.

By placing Indonesia at the center of analysis, the article contributes to the study of global Islam by treating non-Arab Muslim communities as active producers of religious meaning rather than merely recipients of transregional norms. The local ḥajj cases show how adaptation can occur while participants continue to acknowledge the canonical core of the pilgrimage. They therefore provide a basis for analyzing Islamic ritual, authority, and lived religion through the ongoing negotiation of texts, traditions, and social realities.

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Data Availability Statement

The article draws on qualitative interview materials. These materials are not publicly available because access is subject to ethical and confidentiality considerations. Inquiries regarding data availability may be directed to the corresponding author.

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