

Women's Communal Spirituality in the Gebluk Tradition: Understanding Living Islam through Local Religious Practices

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Abstract

This study examines Gebluk as a form of Living Islam practiced by a rural Muslim community in Kalisat Village, Pasuruan, East Java. Previous research has emphasized Gebluk as a medium of da'wah, Islamic education, and cultural preservation, while giving limited attention to women's communal religious learning and spirituality. The study analyzes how Gebluk transmits Islamic values, how women sustain the practice and develop practice-based authority, and how collective participation creates social and religious fellowship. Informed by Living Islam and religious ethnography, the qualitative study used participant observation, semi-structured interviews with seven purposively selected informants, chant manuscripts, and field documentation collected in 2019. Digital documentation and online reports were used only as secondary contextual evidence. Data were analyzed through condensation, display, and conclusion drawing, supported by triangulation and limited member checking. The findings show that Gebluk chants communicate aqidah, fiqh, and akhlaq through repetition, memorization, embodied participation, and peer learning. Women organize meetings, lead and teach chants, mentor new members, and preserve the tradition across generations, thereby exercising practical agency and practice-based religious authority. The strongest evidence of communal spirituality lies in repeated collective chanting, bodily coordination, shared learning, silaturahmi, and mutual support, rather than in uniform mystical or intense emotional experience. Gebluk therefore functions as a pedagogical, spiritual, and social space in which Islam is lived through the interaction of religious teachings and local culture. The study contributes to Living Islam scholarship by showing how women's communal religious work sustains Islamic learning, fellowship, and tradition at the local level.

Keywords:

Living Islam, Gebluk tradition, Muslim women, communal spirituality, community-based Islamic learning

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Introduction

Over the past several decades, Islamic studies have shifted from normative-doctrinal approaches toward approaches that pay greater attention to religious experience in everyday life (Ammerman, [2021](#); McGuire, [2008](#)). This shift has given rise to the Living Islam perspective, which views Islam not merely as a set of texts and doctrines, but as a reality that is practiced, interpreted, and negotiated within particular social and cultural contexts (Fadil & Fernando, [2015](#); Schielke, [2010](#)). This perspective enables Islamic studies to move from discussions of what Muslims ought to do toward examining how Islamic teachings are experienced and manifested in everyday life.

As an approach that emerged from criticism of Islamic studies that were overly centered on texts and formal institutions, Living Islam positions religious experience as the outcome of interactions between Islamic teachings and social, cultural, economic, and political contexts (Bowen, [2012](#)). In line with this view, Ahmed ([2016](#)) conceptualizes Islam as a network of meanings encompassing social practices, cultural expressions, and spiritual experiences. Therefore, rituals, oral traditions, communal activities, and everyday practices constitute important sources for understanding how Islam is lived within society.

Within this context, local religious traditions provide important spaces for the internalization, transmission, and actualization of Islamic values. Through rituals, arts, oral traditions, and communal activities, Islamic teachings are translated into forms closely connected to people's lived experiences, making them easier to understand and transmit across generations (Woodward, [2011](#)). Thus, the relationship between Islam and local culture is dialogical, while the Living Islam perspective helps explain how religious values acquire form, meaning, and continuity through everyday social practices.

One aspect that still requires attention in Living Islam studies is the spirituality formed through communal religious practices. In contrast to perspectives that position spirituality as an individual experience (Pargament, [2007](#); Zinnbauer & Pargament, [2005](#)), various studies have shown that, within Muslim communities, spiritual experience is also constructed through collective rituals, religious study gatherings, dhikr assemblies, and socio-religious activities (Ammerman, [2021](#); McGuire, [2008](#); Schielke, [2010](#)). This perspective is supported by Durkheim's ([1912/1995](#)) concept of collective effervescence, Turner's ([1969](#)) concept of *communitas*, and Csordas's ([1990, 1994](#)) concept of embodiment, which emphasize that religious experience is shaped through collective participation, social relations, and bodily engagement in rituals.

Based on this framework, this study defines communal spirituality as a shared religious experience shaped through ritual repetition, collective learning, social relations, and bodily engagement in religious activities. Living Islam serves as the primary Islamic-studies framework for examining how Islamic teachings acquire social and cultural form, while lived religion provides a complementary vocabulary for interpreting everyday practice, embodiment, and communal religious experience (Ammerman, [2021](#); McGuire, [2008](#)). The two perspectives are related but are not treated as conceptually interchangeable. This formulation positions local religious practices as pedagogical and spiritual spaces in which Islamic values are collectively learned, experienced, practiced, and transmitted.

This perspective also provides scope for examining women's roles in the mediation and transmission of religious knowledge. Various studies have shown that women make important contributions to sustaining religious practices through religious study gatherings, *majelis taklim* (Islamic study assemblies), and local religious organizations (Bano & Kalmbach, [2012](#); Deeb, [2006](#); Mahmood, [2005](#)). Within local communities, religious authority is not always formal but may be established through the ability to organize activities, teach religious chants or texts, maintain the continuity of rituals, and transmit knowledge to community members. Thus, women are not merely participants but also actors who contribute to pedagogical, spiritual, and social spaces in which Islam is lived.

Within the context of rural Muslim communities in Pasuruan Regency, one local religious practice that is relevant for examination through this perspective is the *Gebluk* tradition. This tradition developed as a medium of *da'wah* that combines religious chants with elements of local performing arts (Yasmin, [2021](#)). The distinctiveness of *Gebluk* lies in its use of chants containing teachings on *aqidah*, *fiqh*, and *akhlaq*, which are collectively chanted to the accompaniment of rhythmic handclapping and the rhythmic beating of pillows (Yasmin, [2021](#)). This form of *da'wah* through poetic chanting and oral tradition is an important characteristic of Islam Nusantara, which developed through processes of adaptation to local culture (Woodward, [2011](#)). Because it is

performed collectively and repeatedly within a community setting, Gebluk can be viewed not only as a medium for communicating religious messages but also as a practice that enables the learning, internalization, and transmission of Islamic values to occur socially and in an embodied manner.

In practice, Gebluk has developed as a social and religious space involving women. Based on field observations, members of Muslimat and Jam'iyah Lailatul Qadar not only participate in the tradition but also organize regular meetings, teach the Gebluk chants to new members, and sustain the tradition across generations. These roles constitute a form of religious agency enacted through everyday practice and demonstrate that religious meaning and authority can be formed through community networks rather than solely through formal religious institutions.

Previous studies of Gebluk have generally positioned it as a medium of da'wah based on poetic chants and local performing arts (Yasmin, [2021](#)), a medium for conveying teachings on aqidah, fiqh, and akhlaq, and part of the preservation of local culture and Islamic traditions within society. These studies demonstrate Gebluk's position at the intersection of da'wah, Islamic education, and local culture. However, greater attention has been directed toward the content of its messages and the functions of the tradition, while the experiences of those who practice the tradition regularly have received limited scholarly examination.

This limitation becomes particularly important when Gebluk is examined through the Living Islam perspective. Previous studies have not sufficiently explained how this tradition functions as a space for community-based Islamic learning practiced and sustained by women, or how the repetition of practices, chanting of religious texts, engagement of the body and voice, and interactions among participants shape communal spirituality. Thus, the research gap lies in the insufficiently explained relationship between women as practitioners, Gebluk as a pedagogical space, communal practices as a formative basis of spirituality, and Living Islam as a process through which Islam is experienced in everyday life.

This research gap is also related to the issue of religious authority. Studies of women's religious practices have shown that women play an important role in sustaining everyday religious life (Bano & Kalmbach, [2012](#); Deeb, [2006](#); Mahmood, [2005](#)). In the context of Gebluk, this authority is not primarily formal but is constructed through the organization of activities, the teaching of chants, community mobilization, and the transmission of tradition. Therefore, this study views religious authority as something constructed and negotiated within community social networks, thereby broadening the Living Islam perspective on women's religious work at the local level.

Based on this research gap, this study poses three main questions: (1) how is the Gebluk tradition practiced as a space for learning and transmitting Islamic values within the women's community in Kalisat Village; (2) how do women perform their roles as organizers, teachers, community mobilizers, and preservers of Gebluk while contributing to practice-based religious authority through everyday practices; and (3) how do the communal practices of Gebluk shape spirituality, social and religious fellowship, and the continuity of Islamic values within the community?

This study aims to analyze Gebluk as a Living Islam practice that functions not only as a medium of da'wah and cultural preservation but also as a pedagogical, spiritual, and social space actively maintained by women. The study focuses on Gebluk's function as a medium for community-based Islamic learning, women's roles in organizing and preserving the tradition, and the formation of social and religious fellowship. This study is contextual in nature and is not intended to generalize all women's religious traditions in Indonesia.

The contribution of this article lies in its argument that local religious traditions can serve as pedagogical-spiritual spaces in which Islam is learned, experienced in an embodied manner, practiced collectively, and transmitted through women's religious work. Gebluk demonstrates that the transmission of Islam occurs through a combination of poetic chants, voice, movement, ritual repetition, social interaction, and community organization. Accordingly, Gebluk is understood not merely as a cultural artifact or a medium of da'wah but as a Living Islam practice that brings together Islamic pedagogy, communal spirituality, and community-based religious authority.

Empirically, this study provides ethnographic evidence of the roles played by women in Jam'iyah Lailatul Qadar in sustaining tradition, Islamic learning, and social relations at the community level. Conceptually, the study broadens Living Islam scholarship by demonstrating that Islamic life at the local level is produced through communal practices that are educational, spiritual, embodied, and social. It therefore enriches scholarship on local religious traditions in

Pasuruan while demonstrating the importance of women's religious spaces in the transmission of Islamic knowledge, the formation of shared spirituality, and the development of practice-based religious authority.

Methods

This study employed a qualitative approach informed by the perspectives of Living Islam and religious ethnography. The Living Islam perspective was used to understand how Islamic teachings are interpreted, practiced, and experienced through local religious traditions (Ahmed, 2016; Hefner, 2000), while religious ethnography was used to capture religious practices, religious experiences, social interactions, and the meanings constructed by practitioners (Ammerman, 2021). Through this approach, Gebluk was understood not merely as a ritual or medium of da'wah, but as a religious practice that serves as a space for Islamic learning, the formation of communal spirituality, and the transmission of tradition, actively sustained, particularly by women in Jam'iyyah Lailatul Qadar.

The study was conducted in Kalisat Village, Rembang District, Pasuruan Regency, East Java. The primary ethnographic data were obtained through fieldwork conducted in 2019 using participant observation, semi-structured in-depth interviews, and documentation. The observations focused on the stages of the Gebluk practice, the performance and learning of the chants, patterns of interaction among participants, women's involvement, and the forms of social and religious fellowship that emerged during the activities.

Informants were selected purposively based on their level of involvement in and knowledge of the Gebluk tradition. The study involved seven informants, comprising Jam'iyyah organizers, a religious figure who also taught the chants, Jam'iyyah members, and representatives of the community and village government. Several informants performed more than one role within the community. The key informants included RA, an organizer of Jam'iyyah Lailatul Qadar, and KM, a religious figure who also composed and taught the Gebluk chants. All informants' identities were anonymized using initials to maintain confidentiality.

Semi-structured interviews with the seven informants were conducted to explore the history and meaning of Gebluk, participants' experiences of attending the activities, the process of learning the chants, women's roles, social and religious functions, and the continuity of the tradition. After informed consent had been obtained, all interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Field documentation complemented the observation and interview data, while digital documentation, online media reports, and social media publications were used only as contextual data concerning the public representation and possible continuity of the tradition following the fieldwork (Fakultas Agama Islam Universitas Yudharta Pasuruan, 2025; Gempur News, 2025; Pemerintah Kabupaten Pasuruan, 2019; Wartabromo, 2025).

The study distinguished three groups of data sources based on their analytical functions. First, the primary ethnographic data from 2019, obtained through observation, interviews, and field documentation, served as the principal basis for all findings concerning Gebluk practices, practitioners' experiences, the learning of chants, women's roles, social interactions, and religious meanings. Second, academic literature and previous studies were used to construct the conceptual framework, map the development of Gebluk scholarship, and identify the research gap. Third, digital data were used as contextual corroboration to examine the public representation of the tradition and indications of its continuity beyond the fieldwork period. These digital data were not used to reconstruct the community's religious experiences in 2019 or as the primary basis for drawing conclusions regarding Gebluk practices.

Data analysis followed the interactive model of Miles et al. (2014), which comprises data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. After the transcription and organization of the data had been completed, the data were analyzed through open coding, grouped into categories with similar meanings, and subsequently developed into research themes. The main themes identified included the learning and transmission of Islamic values, women's agency, the preservation of tradition, communal spirituality, social and religious fellowship, and community-based religious authority. These themes were subsequently interpreted through the Living Islam perspective to explain the relationship between local cultural practices and the community's religious experiences.

The trustworthiness of the findings was enhanced through data-source and method triangulation by comparing observations, interviews, and documentation. Interpretive validity was further strengthened through limited member checking with several key informants, researcher reflexivity as an outsider, and the maintenance of an audit trail to ensure the traceability of analytical decisions.

All participants provided informed consent before data collection. Participation was voluntary, informants' identities were anonymized using initials, and all data were used solely for academic purposes in accordance with the principles of confidentiality and qualitative research ethics.

Results

Gebluk Practice as Community-Based Islamic Learning

The findings of the 2019 field research show that the Gebluk tradition was actively practiced within Jam'iyyah Lailatul Qadar in Kalisat Village, Rembang District, Pasuruan Regency. The activity was conducted regularly through rotating meetings at members' homes and, on certain occasions, at the village mushalla (small prayer hall). It was also performed at various religious and community events, such as religious gatherings and commemorations of Islamic holidays. These findings indicate that Gebluk functions not only as an expression of local culture but also as part of the community's socio-religious practices (Ammerman, [2021](#)).

Gebluk participants were predominantly women from various age groups and with different levels of experience, ranging from homemakers and Muslimat members to women who had participated in the activity for many years. Some participants became acquainted with Gebluk through their families, while others joined through the activities of Muslimat and Jam'iyyah Lailatul Qadar. This situation demonstrates that the continuity of the tradition is supported by processes of transmission within families and the community, although this study was not intended to draw conclusions about systematic patterns of regeneration.

Observations showed that the learning process occurred through direct participation in the activity. Participants sat together and recited religious chants accompanied by rhythmic handclapping and the rhythmic beating of pillows, while members who had not yet mastered the chants learned by listening to, imitating, repeating, and memorizing the chants performed by more senior members. This pattern demonstrates that religious knowledge was transmitted informally through collective practice without formal learning mechanisms (Lave & Wenger, [1991](#)).

Women's roles were an important factor in the continuity of this practice. RA, an organizer of Jam'iyyah Lailatul Qadar, explained: "The older women are the most active participants at present. They organize the regular meetings, train new members, and ensure that the Gebluk chants continue to be performed. Women have always been the most actively involved." (Interview with RA, August 17, 2019).

This account indicates that women participated not only as attendees but also as activity organizers, mentors for new members, and custodians of the tradition's continuity. This finding was reinforced by KM, who stated that the Muslimat group regularly organized meetings, recited the chants, and taught the chants to the next generation. Thus, the continuity of Gebluk relies on women's collective practices through which they maintain and transmit the tradition in regular religious activities.

In addition to serving as a space for religious learning, Gebluk also functioned as a space for social interaction. Before and after the activity, participants used the occasion to discuss family matters, religious activities, and Jam'iyyah activities. A member of Jam'iyyah Lailatul Qadar stated that they participated in Gebluk because it enabled them to learn about religion, meet other members, and preserve the tradition inherited from their parents. This experience indicates that practitioners understood Gebluk as a practice that connected religious learning, the preservation of tradition, and the strengthening of social relationships within the community.

Overall, the findings show that Gebluk constitutes a form of community-based Islamic learning conducted through women's collective participation. This tradition transmits religious knowledge through chants, repetition, and intergenerational role modeling while simultaneously strengthening social solidarity within Jam'iyyah Lailatul Qadar. Based on the 2019 field data, its pedagogical function, the preservation of tradition, and social fellowship were the most prominent empirical findings in Gebluk practice, whereas developments in the tradition after the research period were positioned as contemporary context rather than as the primary basis of the analysis.

Gebluk Chants and Their Islamic Values

The findings show that the chants performed in the Gebluk tradition contain fundamental Islamic teachings encompassing *aqidah*, *fiqh* of worship, and *akhlaq*. This finding was obtained through an analysis of the chant manuscripts, observations of Gebluk performances, and interviews with practitioners of the tradition. All of these religious teachings were conveyed in the local language and recited repeatedly in collective forums, enabling the chants to function as a medium of religious learning that was easy to understand, memorize, and transmit across generations.

This was emphasized by KM, a religious figure who also taught the Gebluk chants, who explained that the chants contained various fundamental Islamic teachings, including *tawhid*, prayer, fasting, *akhlaq*, and the legal provisions governing worship. According to KM, the use of chants constituted a learning strategy that facilitated the community's understanding of religious teachings through memorization and collective recitation.

"The content of the Gebluk chants is essentially religious instruction. It covers *tawhid*, prayer, fasting, *akhlaq*, and the legal provisions governing worship. In the past, many community members could not read *kitab*, or classical Islamic texts, so these teachings were conveyed through chants to make them easier to memorize." (Interview with KM, August 17, 2019).

This account demonstrates that practitioners of the tradition directly understood the pedagogical function of the chants as a means of transmitting religious knowledge. In this study, the explanation concerning the community's circumstances in the past is positioned as the informant's perspective, while the empirically verifiable finding is the function of the chants as a medium of religious learning in Gebluk practice.

Aqidah Content

An analysis of the chant texts shows that one of their main themes is the reinforcement of *aqidah*, particularly the affirmation of the oneness and perfection of Allah. One documented stanza reads:

*Iman dâh Allah dikâh tahuwâh,
Râjeh ben kenik, tuwâh ben mudhâh.*

...

*Badânè Allah tadâ' kabistânah,
Sarta badânè tadâ' bongkâsanah.* (Abidin, [n.d.-a](#), p. 4).

English gloss: All members of the community, young and old, are called to affirm faith in Allah, whose existence has neither beginning nor end.

The stanza affirms belief in Allah as the foundation of Islamic teachings while rejecting the attribution of the characteristics of created beings to Allah. The presentation of the concept of *tawhid* through poetic chanting indicates the adaptation of Islamic subject matter from the local Islamic scholarly tradition into a form that is easy to sing and memorize. In Gebluk practice, *aqidah* is taught through collective recitation and repetition, enabling knowledge to be transmitted informally through community participation.

Fiqh of Worship Content

In addition to *aqidah*, the Gebluk chants contain material on the *fiqh* of worship, particularly the procedures and requirements for performing prayer. One documented stanza presents the sequence of the essential elements of prayer, including intention, *takbirat al-ihram*, the recitation of *al-Fatihah*, bowing, *i'tidal*, prostration, *tashahhud*, the concluding salutation, and proper sequence.

*Rukune shalat aja' ta' uning,
Niat ben takbir kelaban jarnah,
Moco Fatihah kelaban raksa,*

...

Ben kudu tertib kabeh kalakone. (Abidin, [n.d.-a](#), p. 9).

English gloss: The chant lists the essential elements of prayer, including intention, *takbirat al-ihram*, the recitation of *al-Fatihah*, bowing, *i'tidal*, prostration, *tashahhud*, the concluding salutation, and the proper sequence.

The presentation of fiqh material in poetic form demonstrates that teachings concerning worship were not merely conveyed normatively but were also structured through rhythm and repetition, making them easier for participants to memorize. Consistent with the observational findings presented in the previous section, learning occurred through listening, following, repeating, and memorizing collectively. Thus, the chants functioned as a medium of religious pedagogy that enabled fiqh knowledge to be transmitted collectively within the community.

Akhlaq Content

Another prominent dimension is the akhlaq content. According to the informants, the Gebluk chants teach not only religious obligations but also provide guidance concerning respect for parents, children's education, relations with neighbors, and social relationships. These values are reinforced by chants adapted from the work of KM, a local religious scholar, particularly those concerning akhlaq toward one's parents.

*Dabune Allah ning al-Qur'an,
Pabagus ka ring tuwanah.
Ja' sampe mantak poleh dabunah,
Ja' ngoja ahus poleh alarangnah.* (Abidin, [n.d.-b](#), p. 83).

English gloss: Allah commands in the Qur'an that people should treat their parents well and should not address them with harsh words.

The stanza emphasizes the obligation to show devotion to one's parents as a teaching derived from the Qur'an and prohibits the use of harsh words toward them. This connection to the Qur'an reinforces the religious basis of the moral message conveyed. Thus, Gebluk not only preserves a local performance tradition but also serves as a medium for transmitting Islamic ethical values rooted in the pesantren (Islamic boarding school) tradition. However, this study limits its findings to the presence of these values in the chants and does not conclude that participants experienced behavioral changes, as such a conclusion would require longitudinal evidence.

Symbolic Meanings in the Performance

In addition to the textual content, the study found that practitioners of the tradition also attributed religious meanings to elements of the Gebluk performance. The rhythmic beating of pillows was understood as symbolizing a mother waking her child to perform prayer and seek knowledge, while rhythmic handclapping was interpreted as a call for children not to neglect their religious obligations. These meanings constitute the community's interpretations of the performance elements and demonstrate the connection between artistic expression and messages of Islamic education within family life.

Overall, the Gebluk chants contain three principal groups of Islamic teachings, namely aqidah, fiqh of worship, and akhlaq, which are conveyed in the local language and recited collectively during the activities of Jam'iyyah Lailatul Qadar. Repetition, memorization, and peer learning make the chants a medium for transmitting religious knowledge that remains alive in community practice. These findings demonstrate that Living Islam in the Gebluk tradition is evident not only in the content of the teachings conveyed but also in the manner in which these teachings are internalized through chants, shared practices, and everyday religious experiences.

Women as Organizers and Preservers of the Tradition

The findings show that the continuity of the Gebluk tradition in Kalisat Village depends substantially on the active involvement of women, particularly members of Jam'iyyah Lailatul Qadar and Muslimat. Based on field observations, women participated not only as attendees but also organized Gebluk activities, arranged meeting schedules, prepared venues and equipment, led the recitation of chants, and guided new members. These activities were conducted regularly through jam'iyyah meetings, allowing Gebluk to be sustained as a community-based religious practice.

The division of roles among members occurred informally based on experience. More senior members led the recitation of the chants, regulated the rhythm, and served as models for participants who had not yet mastered the chants. Younger members, by contrast, learned the

tradition through direct involvement in each meeting. This pattern indicates that knowledge was transmitted participatively through intergenerational interaction without a formal learning mechanism.

This role was explained by RA, an organizer of Jam'iyah Lailatul Qadar:

"At present, it is indeed the women who carry out the tradition. The meetings rotate from one house to another. There, we perform the chants, practice together, and invite new members so that they can also participate in Gebluk." (Interview with RA, August 17, 2019).

This account demonstrates that women were the principal actors in maintaining the continuity of Gebluk through the organization of activities, the teaching of chants, and the mentoring of new members. This finding indicates women's practical agency in preserving the tradition, although it does not indicate the existence of formal religious authority. This view was reinforced by KM, who stated that the continuity of Gebluk was strongly supported by the consistency of the Muslimat group in organizing regular meetings and teaching the chants to the next generation (Interview with KM, August 17, 2019).

In addition to maintaining the continuity of the practice, women sustained an informal process of knowledge transmission through collective participation. Observations showed that new members learned the chants by listening, following the pronunciation, repeating the lines, and receiving direct corrections from more senior members. A Jam'iyah member explained:

"At first, I only listened because I had not memorized the chants. Gradually, I began reciting them together with the others and then memorizing them little by little. Usually, the senior members help correct us when our recitation is not quite accurate." (Interview with IS, August 18, 2019).

This experience indicates that the ability to participate in Gebluk was acquired through repeated participation rather than through formal instruction. The process also demonstrates that the tradition was transmitted collectively through intergenerational relationships within the community.

Overall, the findings show that women are the principal actors sustaining Gebluk through three interrelated roles: organizing activities, teaching the chants, and preserving the tradition across generations. The regular activities of Jam'iyah Lailatul Qadar not only maintain the continuity of Gebluk practice but also constitute the primary space for transmitting religious knowledge and preserving local traditions in Kalisat Village.

Maternal Symbolism in Gebluk Practice

The findings show that Gebluk is understood not only as an artistic and religious activity but also as containing symbolism associated with the maternal role within the family. This symbolism is particularly evident in the use of pillows and rhythmic handclapping as central elements of the performance. Based on observations and interviews, these two elements were interpreted by the community as representations of a mother's responsibility to guide, remind, and educate her children. In this study, these meanings are positioned as the community's interpretations of Gebluk practice rather than as objective meanings inherently embedded in the tradition.

A community figure explained that the use of pillows symbolized the role of a mother who wakes her child to perform prayer, recite the Qur'an, and attend school.

"The pillow symbolizes a mother waking her child from sleep to pray, recite the Qur'an, and go to school. Therefore, it is not merely a musical instrument, as it also conveys an educational message." (Interview with a community figure, August 18, 2019).

In addition to the pillow, rhythmic handclapping was also interpreted as symbolizing a mother calling a child who had become neglectful of religious obligations. According to IS, the clapping represented an invitation for children to remember prayer, Qur'anic recitation, and their religious responsibilities (Interview with IS, member of Jam'iyah Lailatul Qadar, August 18, 2019). These interpretations indicate that the performative elements of Gebluk were understood as a medium for conveying moral messages concerning religious discipline and the importance of the family's role in educating children.

Overall, maternal symbolism constitutes an important element of Gebluk practice because it connects artistic expression with the values of Islamic education in family life. Through the symbolism of pillows and rhythmic handclapping, the tradition presents a representation of the mother's role as the first educator who guides and reminds children to practice religious teachings. This finding demonstrates that the symbolic dimension of Gebluk is inseparable from the religious

meanings that remain alive among practitioners of the tradition, without making broader claims concerning its effects on changes in family behavior in general.

Gebluk as a Space for Women's Fellowship

The findings show that the Gebluk tradition functions not only as a medium for preserving Islamic teachings and local culture but also as a space for women's fellowship in Kalisat Village. This regularly conducted activity brings together women of various ages and backgrounds in a single forum to perform religious chants while building social relationships with other community members. Observations showed that participants interacted before, during, and after the activity, discussing family matters, religious activities, and social issues within the village. This finding demonstrates that Gebluk constitutes a space for social encounters that strengthens relationships among community members.

The practitioners of the tradition directly acknowledged this social function. A member of Jam'iyyah Lailatul Qadar explained:

"When Gebluk is held, we can gather with our friends, greet one another, and maintain good relationships. It is therefore not only a form of religious learning but also an opportunity for *silaturahmi*." (Interview with IS, member of Jam'iyyah Lailatul Qadar, August 18, 2019).

In addition to serving as a means of *silaturahmi*, Gebluk also functioned as a space for collective religious learning. Through the recitation of chants, participants collectively learned teachings concerning *aqidah*, *fiqh*, and *akhlak*. KM emphasized that Gebluk had been developed from the outset as a medium of religious learning that the community could easily understand through memorization and the recitation of chants (Interview with KM, August 17, 2019). Thus, the fellowship established through Gebluk was not merely social but also strengthened the transmission of religious knowledge within the community.

Observations also showed that the Gebluk forum provided a space for women to share life experiences. Conversations concerning children's education, family life, and social activities occurred informally before and after the performance of the chants. According to RA, these meetings enabled members to ask about one another's well-being, share experiences, and provide support when facing difficulties (Interview with RA, August 17, 2019). This indicates that fellowship within Gebluk was maintained through repeated and mutually supportive social interactions.

Overall, the Gebluk tradition functions as a space for women's fellowship that integrates *silaturahmi*, religious learning, and social support within a single community practice. The field data most directly demonstrate social and religious fellowship. Communal spirituality is therefore understood here as a shared religious experience formed through repeated chanting, bodily coordination, collective learning, and mutual support, rather than as evidence of uniform mystical experience, *communitas* in its full theoretical sense, or intense collective emotion.

Discussion

Understanding the Gebluk Tradition as Living Islam

The findings show that the Gebluk tradition in Kalisat Village constitutes a religious practice that integrates Islamic teachings with local culture. Chants containing teachings on *aqidah*, *fiqh*, and *akhlak* are regularly recited during the activities of Jam'iyyah Lailatul Qadar, thereby serving as a medium of religious learning embedded in the community's social life. This finding demonstrates that Islam is present not only through formal institutions such as mosques, madrasas, or *pesantren*, but is also actualized through cultural practices that remain alive within the community. In this context, Gebluk can be understood as a practice of Living Islam, namely a form of religiosity that is continually sustained, interpreted, and practiced in accordance with the community's sociocultural context (Hefner, 2000). This finding is consistent with recent studies showing that expressions of local Islam develop through negotiations between religious norms and community culture, producing contextual forms of religiosity without losing their Islamic orientation (Fadil & Fernando, 2021; Feener, 2019; Woodward, 2011).

The Living Islam perspective positions everyday practices as an important arena for understanding how Islamic teachings are enacted in real life. This is evident in Gebluk, where Islamic values are conveyed through chants, rhythm, symbols, and communal activities rather than solely through textual instruction. The use of Madurese and Javanese in the chants demonstrates that the transmission of Islamic teachings occurs through cultural media closely

connected to the community's experiences, thereby facilitating learning and the transmission of tradition. This phenomenon is consistent with Woodward (2011), who explains that the religious practices of Indonesian communities develop through the translation of Islamic values into local symbols, languages, and cultural expressions, enabling religion to be more readily accepted and transmitted across generations. The study by Fadil and Fernando (2021) in the Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute also demonstrates that everyday religious practices constitute an important space for the formation of authority, identity, and Islamic experience within society.

This interpretation is consistent with the concept of lived religion, which positions religion as a social practice experienced in everyday activities rather than merely as a system of beliefs or formal institutions (Ammerman, 2021). In the Gebluk tradition, religious learning occurs through regular meetings, the recitation of chants, and interactions among participants that integrate religious, social, and cultural dimensions. Thus, religiosity in Gebluk is reflected not only in the content of the chants but also in the collective practices that sustain community life. This approach is supported by the studies of McGuire (2008) and Ammerman (2021), which emphasize that religion is more appropriately understood through everyday religious practices because it is within this sphere that religious values, beliefs, and identities are continuously produced and reproduced. Anthropological studies of Islam in Southeast Asia have also shown that communal rituals constitute a primary medium for building social solidarity and internalizing religious values within community life (Feener, 2019).

This finding can also be interpreted through Ahmed's (2016) view of Islam as a living tradition encompassing diverse Muslim cultural expressions. From this perspective, Gebluk cannot be separated from Islam merely because it is manifested as a form of local art. Rather, the use of local languages, religious chants, rhythmic handclapping, and the rhythmic beating of pillows demonstrates how local culture becomes a medium for translating Islamic teachings into the community's concrete experiences. This pattern suggests that, in Kalisat Village, Islamic teachings have been articulated through cultural transformation rather than through the elimination of local traditions. This argument is consistent with various studies of Islam Nusantara, which show that the spread of Islam in Indonesia has occurred more extensively through cultural accommodation, symbolic adaptation, and the integration of local values than through confrontational approaches toward community traditions (Feener, 2019; Woodward, 2011).

Thus, the Gebluk tradition demonstrates a dialogical relationship between Islam and culture in Kalisat Village. Islamic teachings are preserved through cultural forms familiar to the community's everyday life, while local culture acquires religious meaning through the Islamic values conveyed within the practice. Based on the research data, this finding is more appropriately understood as a characteristic of the Muslim community's religiosity in Kalisat Village and is not intended to be generalized to all rural Muslim communities. Within the framework of Living Islam, Gebluk demonstrates that religious experience is formed through the encounter between Islamic teachings, local culture, and social practices that continue within community life. This finding reinforces a tendency in contemporary Islamic studies to view Islam as a tradition that is continually negotiated through social practices, community relations, and living cultural expressions, or lived Islam, rather than merely as a collection of normative doctrines (Ammerman, 2021; Fadil & Fernando, 2021; Feener, 2019).

Women's Communal Spirituality in the Gebluk Tradition

The findings show that spirituality in the Gebluk tradition is formed through women's collective practices in Jam'iyah Lailatul Qadar gatherings. The simultaneous performance of chants, rhythmic handclapping, the rhythmic beating of pillows, and regular meetings create a religious experience rooted in communal fellowship. Based on the field data, the most prominent dimension is not individual mystical experience but shared involvement in religious activities that strengthens social relationships among participants. Therefore, spirituality in Gebluk is more appropriately understood as a communal religious experience arising from collective participation. This finding is consistent with various studies of lived religion showing that spiritual experience is often shaped through participation in social practices, rituals, and community interactions rather than solely through individual experiences (Ammerman, 2021; Fadil & Fernando, 2021; Riis & Woodhead, 2010).

This interpretation is consistent with Victor Turner's (1969) concept of *communitas*. Turner explains that rituals create social spaces that strengthen solidarity and a sense of fellowship among participants. In the Gebluk tradition, women gather regularly, perform the same chants,

follow the same rhythm, and participate in religious activities within a relatively egalitarian setting. Nevertheless, the research data provide stronger evidence of social and religious fellowship than of *communitas* in its full theoretical sense. Therefore, Turner's concept is used as an interpretive framework rather than as an independent empirical conclusion. This interpretation is reinforced by the studies of Fadil and Fernando (2021) and Stringer (2013), which explain that religious rituals create a sense of belonging through shared participation, allowing social solidarity to emerge from repeated ritual interactions in everyday life.

This finding can also be interpreted through Emile Durkheim's (1912/1995) theory of collective effervescence, which explains that collective rituals can strengthen group solidarity and identity. In Gebluk, the simultaneous performance of chants and shared involvement in ritual indicate the formation of social bonds maintained through religious practice. However, this study did not find sufficient evidence of the intense collective emotional experience described by Durkheim. Therefore, the theory of collective effervescence is more appropriately understood as a possible interpretation of ritual dynamics than as a confirmed empirical fact. This finding is consistent with the study by Xygalatas et al. (2013), which shows that collective rituals more consistently increase social cohesion than they produce uniform emotional experiences among all participants. Similarly, Whitehouse and Lanman (2014) explain that ritual repetition plays a greater role in building group identity and social commitment than in producing identical religious experiences for every individual.

Communal spirituality in Gebluk is also constructed through social interactions that occur before and after the ritual. Regular meetings provide a space for women to share experiences, support one another, and discuss family matters and religious life. Thus, the meaning of spirituality lies not only in the performance of chants but also in the social relationships maintained through the practice. Based on the research findings, Gebluk functions as a space for social and religious fellowship for women in Kalisat Village that strengthens community solidarity while also facilitating the experience of Islamic values in everyday life. This interpretation is not intended to be generalized to the spiritual experiences of Muslim women in other contexts. This finding reinforces anthropological studies of Islam showing that women's religious forums serve as spaces for the formation of spirituality, the strengthening of social networks, and the transmission of religious values through everyday religious practices (Ammerman, 2021; Fadil & Fernando, 2021; Jouili, 2015).

Women's Agency in the Mediation and Transmission of Islamic Knowledge

The findings show that women in the Gebluk tradition serve not only as preservers of local culture but also as principal actors in the mediation and transmission of Islamic knowledge at the community level. Their roles include organizing activities, teaching the chants, transmitting the tradition to new members, and connecting Islamic teachings with the community's everyday experiences. Thus, women do not merely participate in rituals but act as agents who maintain the continuity of religious knowledge through sustained collective practices. This finding is consistent with studies showing that Muslim women mediate religious knowledge through community-based religious spaces, meaning that its transmission does not always depend on formal institutions or officially recognized religious authorities (Bano & Kalmbach, 2012; Fadil & Fernando, 2021; Van Doorn-Harder, 2006).

The field data demonstrate that RA played an important role in sustaining Gebluk by teaching the chants to members of Jam'iyyah Lailatul Qadar and organizing regular activities. This role shows that women do not passively receive religious knowledge but actively mediate and transmit it in response to community needs. Teaching and transmitting knowledge are therefore understood here as forms of community-based religious mediation, particularly in Muslim communities that rely on oral traditions and collective practices (Feener, 2019; Hoesterey, 2015).

This finding can be interpreted through the perspective of agency developed by Saba Mahmood (2005). In contrast to views that define agency solely as resistance to dominant structures, Mahmood demonstrates that agency can also be manifested through active engagement in religious practices that individuals believe in. In the context of Gebluk, women exercise agency by managing activities, teaching the chants, and maintaining the tradition across generations. Nevertheless, the research data provide stronger evidence of practical agency in maintaining the continuity of the tradition than of changes to formal structures of religious authority. This interpretation is supported by Fadil and Fernando (2021), who explain that agency

in everyday religious practices is more often manifested through acts of caring for, teaching, and reproducing traditions than through opposition to social structures.

This interpretation is also consistent with feminist anthropological studies that view women as producers of knowledge and cultural agents rather than merely as inheritors of tradition (Abu-Lughod, 1990; Moore, 1988). In Gebluk, women contribute to the formation of religious meanings through the ways in which they convey, explain, and contextualize Islamic chants within community forums. This process demonstrates that the transmission of knowledge occurs through social interaction rather than solely through the inheritance of texts. This finding is consistent with studies of women's religious authority in Muslim societies, which show that the legitimacy of knowledge is often established through experience, social proximity, and the ability to transmit religious teachings in everyday life rather than solely through formal education or institutional positions (Bano, 2017; Feener, 2019).

Furthermore, Gebluk practice demonstrates the formation of communal religious authority. Recognition of figures such as RA derives from their experience, ability to teach the chants, and consistency in maintaining the continuity of the tradition rather than from formal positions within religious institutions. Therefore, the authority identified in this study is more appropriately understood as practice-based religious authority that gains legitimacy through community recognition. This interpretation is consistent with studies of everyday religious authority, which explain that religious authority at the local level is often formed through social relationships, practices of service, and community trust in an individual's moral and pedagogical capacities (Bano, 2017; Fadil & Fernando, 2021).

Overall, the findings show that the continuity of Gebluk depends substantially on women's contributions as teachers, community organizers, and transmitters of tradition. From the perspective of Living Islam, these practices demonstrate that Islamic knowledge is mediated and transmitted not only through formal institutions but also through communal spaces that enable women to maintain local religious traditions. This finding is limited to Kalisat Village and is not intended to be generalized to women's roles in all rural Muslim communities. It supports scholarship that recognizes women as important actors in the mediation of knowledge, the formation of practice-based religious authority, and the continuity of Islamic traditions through everyday social practices (Fadil & Fernando, 2021; Feener, 2019; Van Doorn-Harder, 2006).

A Secondary Implication: Local Tradition and Muslim Identity in Kalisat Village

As a secondary interpretive implication, the Gebluk tradition may also contribute to the articulation and maintenance of Muslim identity in Kalisat Village. Through its regular practice, Gebluk combines da'wah, religious education, and cultural continuity, allowing Islamic identity to be expressed through everyday cultural practice rather than solely through formal institutions. This interpretation remains contextual and is consistent with studies showing that Muslim identity in local communities is shaped through cultural practices, communal rituals, and everyday religious experiences that connect Islamic teachings with their social contexts (Fadil & Fernando, 2021; Feener, 2019; Woodward, 2011).

The research data show that Gebluk chants contain teachings on aqidah, fiqh, and akhlaq conveyed in local languages, making them readily understandable to the community. This tradition serves as a medium of religious learning through the performance of chants, repetition, and collective participation. This finding demonstrates that the transmission of Islamic knowledge occurs through cultural mechanisms closely connected to the community's lived experiences rather than solely through formal education. This finding reinforces studies of lived Islam showing that local languages, oral traditions, and collective rituals constitute important media for the internalization of religious values and the intergenerational transmission of Islamic identity (Fadil & Fernando, 2021; Feener, 2019).

This interpretation is consistent with Clifford Geertz's (1973) view that religion operates through a system of symbols that gives meaning to social life. In the context of Gebluk, chants, local languages, rhythmic handclapping, and the rhythmic beating of pillows function as symbols connecting Islamic teachings with the community's everyday experiences. Based on the research data, these symbols primarily demonstrate pedagogical and religious functions within the context of Kalisat Village and are not intended to represent all local Islamic traditions. This interpretation is supported by anthropological studies of religion showing that ritual symbols constitute important media for shaping collective memory, strengthening solidarity, and transmitting religious identity

through cultural practices that are continually reproduced within community life (Whitehouse & Lanman, 2014).

The educational function of Gebluk also reinforces the view that Islamic learning can occur through the community's social and cultural institutions. As Azra (2012) argues, Islamic education in traditional communities does not always depend on formal institutions but also develops through collectively inherited cultural practices. In Gebluk, chants provide a medium through which Islamic teachings can be learned through memorization, repetition, and shared participation. This phenomenon is consistent with studies of community-based Islamic education showing that local cultural practices play an important role in developing religious literacy, expanding access to Islamic learning, and maintaining the continuity of religious traditions at the grassroots level (Feener, 2019).

The findings further suggest that Gebluk contributes to the articulation and maintenance of collective identity in Kalisat Village. Following Anthony D. Smith (1991), collective identity is formed through shared memories, symbols, and cultural practices transmitted across generations. These elements are evident in Gebluk through inherited chants, preserved performance symbols, and regular practices that strengthen participants' sense of belonging. Whitehouse and Lanman (2014) similarly show that repeated rituals can strengthen social cohesion, group belonging, and the continuity of collective identity through shared experience.

In this context, the Muslim identity of the Kalisat Village community is articulated through the integration of Islam and local culture. This finding is consistent with Robert W. Hefner's (2000) view of the development of Indonesian Islam as the result of a creative dialogue between Islamic teachings and sociocultural contexts. Shahab Ahmed's (2016) perspective also helps explain that Islam as a living tradition is present not only through normative texts and formal institutions but also through cultural expressions produced by Muslims as ways of experiencing religious teachings. This interpretation is supported by various recent studies emphasizing that local Islamic practices in Southeast Asia result from creative negotiations among Islamic traditions, local cultures, and social dynamics, producing contextual forms of religiosity without losing their normative orientation (Fadil & Fernando, 2021; Feener, 2019; Woodward, 2011).

Taken together, the findings suggest that Gebluk contributes to the articulation of Muslim identity by integrating da'wah, education, and cultural preservation within a single social practice. This interpretation is limited to Kalisat Village as the research setting. Gebluk therefore demonstrates how local culture can serve as a medium for actualizing Islamic values and sustaining community religious identity from a Living Islam perspective. This reading is consistent with contemporary studies that view Muslim identity as emerging from dynamic interactions among religious teachings, social practices, cultural memory, and everyday religious experience rather than solely from formal institutions (Ammerman, 2021; Fadil & Fernando, 2021; Feener, 2019).

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the Gebluk tradition in Kalisat Village, Rembang District, Pasuruan Regency, constitutes a manifestation of Living Islam through which Islamic teachings are actualized in local cultural practice. The tradition functions not only as a local performance and medium of da'wah but also as a space for religious learning that integrates aqidah, fiqh, and akhlaq through religious chants. Through Gebluk, the community integrates Islamic values with local cultural forms, allowing religion to be experienced in close relation to everyday social realities. This finding affirms that Islam is practiced not only through formal institutions such as mosques and pesantren but also through cultural traditions inherited and maintained by the community.

This study also found that women are the principal actors in sustaining the Gebluk tradition and transmitting Islamic knowledge at the community level. Through Muslimat activities and the Gebluk jam'iyah, women serve as teachers, transmitters, organizers, and custodians of the tradition across generations. These roles demonstrate practical agency and support a form of practice-based religious authority grounded in experience, service, and community recognition rather than formal office. The strongest evidence of communal spirituality lies in shared chanting, bodily coordination, collective learning, silaturahmi, and mutual support, rather than in uniform mystical or intense emotional experience. Gebluk can therefore be understood as a pedagogical, spiritual, and social practice connecting da'wah, education, local culture, and women's everyday

religious work. Its contribution to Muslim identity is treated as a contextual implication rather than a directly measured outcome.

This study is limited by its single-site design, seven purposively selected informants, and reliance on primary fieldwork conducted in 2019. The 2025 digital materials were used only to contextualize the public representation and possible continuity of the tradition and do not establish current practice or change over time. The findings therefore provide a contextual interpretation of Gebluk in Kalisat Village rather than a basis for generalizing women's communal spirituality across rural Muslim communities.

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Author contributions (CRediT)

Miftakhus Sifa' Bahrul Ulumiyah: Conceptualization, Methodology, Resources, Analysis, Validation, Investigation Writing – Original Draft. **Nur Kholis:** Validation, Investigation, Writing. **Abdullah Haidar:** Validation, Investigation, Writing.

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Data availability

Due to ethical and privacy considerations, the interview data supporting the findings of this study are not publicly available. De-identified excerpts are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Ethics approval

This study involved adult participants and was conducted in accordance with ethical principles of social research. All participants provided informed consent prior to data collection. No minors were involved in the study.

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The authors declare no competing interests.

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