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Tolerance In The Panginyongan Javanese Islamic Tradition: A Dialectic Of Theology, Culture, And Social Ethics

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Abstract

This study examines the concept and manifestation of tolerance within the Panginyongan Javanese Islamic tradition as a distinctive model of culturally embedded Islam in the Banyumasan region. This study employs a qualitative approach grounded in cultural hermeneutics and the sociology of religion. Cultural hermeneutics is used to interpret meanings contained in Islamic teachings, local symbols, linguistic expressions, and communal rituals, while the sociology of religion explains the social internalization of theological values. Data were analyzed through interpretative reading, conceptual categorization, and sociological contextualization of religious and cultural sources within the Banyumasan social sphere. The findings show that tolerance in the Panginyongan Islamic tradition emerges through the interaction between Islamic normativity and local cultural values. Egalitarian language, communal rituals, functional syncretism, and ethical principles such as *rukun* and *tepa slira* translate theological concepts of mercy, justice, moderation, and non-coercion into everyday social practices. As a result, tolerance is maintained through habitual social interaction, enabling both interreligious and intra-religious differences to be managed through mutual respect and communal solidarity. This study contributes to the fields of sociology of religion and Islamic studies by showing the role of local culture in shaping practical expressions of religious tolerance.

Keywords: Tolerance, Javanese Islam, Panginyongan Tradition

Introduction

Tolerance in Islam has generally been discussed through two major academic approaches. The first is the normative-theological approach, which emphasizes textual foundations derived from the Qur'an and Hadith as conceptual legitimization for tolerance within Islamic teachings (Azkyia *et al.*, 2025). In this perspective, tolerance is frequently associated with the Qur'anic declaration, "For you is your religion, and for me is my religion" (Q.S. Al-Kafirun: 6), which is commonly interpreted as recognition of religious distinction without coercion (Al Amin *et al.*, 2020). Another important theological foundation appears in the verse, "O humankind, indeed We created you from a male and a female and made you peoples and tribes so that you may

know one another” (Q.S. Al-Hujurat: 13), which affirms plurality as part of divine design (Sayaka *et al.*, 2025). These verses are often understood as theological principles that support the acknowledgment of diversity while maintaining clear boundaries of faith identity. In many Islamic studies, such scriptural references form the central basis for explaining that tolerance is not external to Islamic doctrine but deeply rooted in its primary sources.

The second major approach places tolerance within the political and national framework, especially in plural societies such as Indonesia (Hutabarat, 2023). In this perspective, tolerance is understood as an essential foundation for maintaining social cohesion in a multi-religious nation-state (Jamil & Firmansyah, 2025). Islamic scholars in Indonesia frequently argue that the historical development of Indonesian Islam demonstrates an ongoing synthesis between religious commitment and national coexistence. Tolerance therefore becomes not only a theological virtue but also a civic necessity that sustains democratic life and constitutional pluralism. Nevertheless, within both theological and political approaches, tolerance is often treated primarily as a normative ideal, discussed in formal discourse, legal policy, or doctrinal interpretation. The concrete lived expressions of tolerance at the local cultural level often receive less systematic academic attention.

In everyday social reality, however, tolerance frequently operates not through formal declarations but through ordinary practices embedded in local culture (Verkuyten & Kollar, 2021). From the perspective of the sociology of religion, tolerance may be understood as a social habitus, namely a set of internalized dispositions shaping collective patterns of perception, interaction, and conduct. Such a perspective allows tolerance to be examined not merely as an abstract principle but as a social ethic reproduced through routine cultural behavior. Language, ritual participation, customary institutions, and local leadership all contribute to forming this practical dimension of tolerance. In many communities, people may never explicitly articulate theological theories of tolerance, yet their social conduct reflects stable patterns of coexistence. This means that tolerance often survives most effectively when it becomes part of everyday social consciousness rather than solely a formal ideological commitment.

The Panginyongan Javanese Islamic tradition offers an important example of how tolerance develops through cultural practice (Roqib *et al.*, 2025). The Panginyongan cultural region includes Cilacap, Banyumas, Purbalingga, and Banjarnegara, together with surrounding areas commonly associated with Banyumasan culture (Rokhman *et al.*, 2022). One distinctive characteristic of this region is the Banyumasan dialect, which is known for its directness, egalitarian tone, and relatively low degree of linguistic hierarchy compared with court-centered Javanese speech traditions. This linguistic pattern reflects a social structure in which interpersonal relations are often more open and less stratified. Social interaction is built through familiarity, openness, and mutual accessibility, which indirectly strengthens tolerance as a normal mode of interaction. Consequently, cultural communication itself becomes an important medium through which tolerant attitudes are maintained.

Islam in the Panginyongan region also shows that local religiosity cannot simply be reduced to rigid categories such as traditional versus modern Islam. Although institutions such as pesantren continue to preserve normative orthodoxy, local values remain highly influential in shaping social ethics. Values such as rukun (social harmony), tepa slira (mutual sensitivity), and egalitarianism function as ethical frameworks that regulate daily interaction among community members (Nuriyanto *et al.*, 2025). These local principles do not weaken Islamic orthodoxy; instead, they provide a social environment in which doctrinal commitments can coexist with openness toward difference. In both interreligious and intra-religious relations,

differences are often managed through communal dialogue, social restraint, and collective consensus. This creates a practical synthesis in which theological conviction and local cosmology support each other rather than entering into conflict.

Such a pattern confirms that religion never develops in a cultural vacuum, but always interacts dynamically with local social contexts. In the Panginyongan tradition, tolerance does not appear as theological compromise or doctrinal relativism, but rather as a practical expression of the Qur'anic principle, "And We have not sent you, [O Muhammad], except as mercy to all creation" (Q.S. Al-Anbiya': 107) (Massofia, 2023). The concept of mercy for all creation becomes socially meaningful when embodied in everyday forms of coexistence, mutual recognition, and communal responsibility. Through long historical interaction between Islamic teaching and local culture, tolerance has become part of a collective ethical orientation rather than merely an external discourse.

Existing works on Sociology of Religion and Javanese Islam often discuss local religiosity in broad typological categories, yet they rarely examine the Panginyongan cultural sphere as a distinct locus of Islamic social ethics with its own linguistic, symbolic, and communal structures. This creates a research gap because the everyday practice of tolerance in the Panginyongan region has not been sufficiently analyzed as a historically formed social habitus shaped by the interaction between Islamic teaching and Banyumasan local wisdom. Based on this gap, the present study addresses the question of how tolerance is conceptually understood and socially practiced within the Panginyongan Javanese Islamic tradition, and how theological values are transformed into concrete cultural behavior through language, ritual, customary institutions, and patterns of social relation. The novelty of this article lies in its effort to position tolerance not merely as a doctrinal principle or public policy discourse, but as a culturally embedded ethical system emerging from the dialectical relationship between theology, local cosmology, and everyday social practice.

Method

The study employs a qualitative approach grounded in cultural hermeneutics and the sociology of religion to examine tolerance within the Panginyongan Javanese Islamic tradition (Subedi, 2023). Cultural hermeneutics is used to interpret the meanings embedded in religious texts, local symbols, linguistic expressions, and communal rituals, while the sociology of religion provides an analytical framework for understanding how theological values are internalized and reproduced in everyday social life. The primary data consist of doctrinal references from the Qur'an, Hadith, and classical Islamic thought, combined with cultural expressions found in the Banyumasan social sphere, including language practices, communal traditions, local ethical norms, and patterns of interreligious and intra-religious interaction (Mappasessu & Akmal, 2025). The study focuses particularly on the cultural areas of Cilacap, Banyumas, Purbalingga, and Banjarnegara as representative loci of the Panginyongan cultural tradition.

Data were analyzed through interpretative reading, conceptual categorization, and sociological contextualization (Gülpınar, 2024). The interpretative process first identified normative theological principles related to tolerance, such as rahmah, justice, moderation, and non-coercion in religion, and then examined how these principles are transformed into social ethics through local cultural mechanisms such as tepa slira, rukun, egalitarian linguistic patterns, and communal ritual practices. Analytical emphasis was placed on the dialectical relationship between orthodoxy and locality, showing how tolerance is not merely a doctrinal formulation but a lived social habitus sustained through language, symbolic interaction, customary institutions, and collective memory. Through this

method, the study seeks to explain tolerance as a culturally embedded ethical system in which Islamic normativity and local wisdom interact dynamically within contemporary plural society. Figure 1, shows a research method in this study.

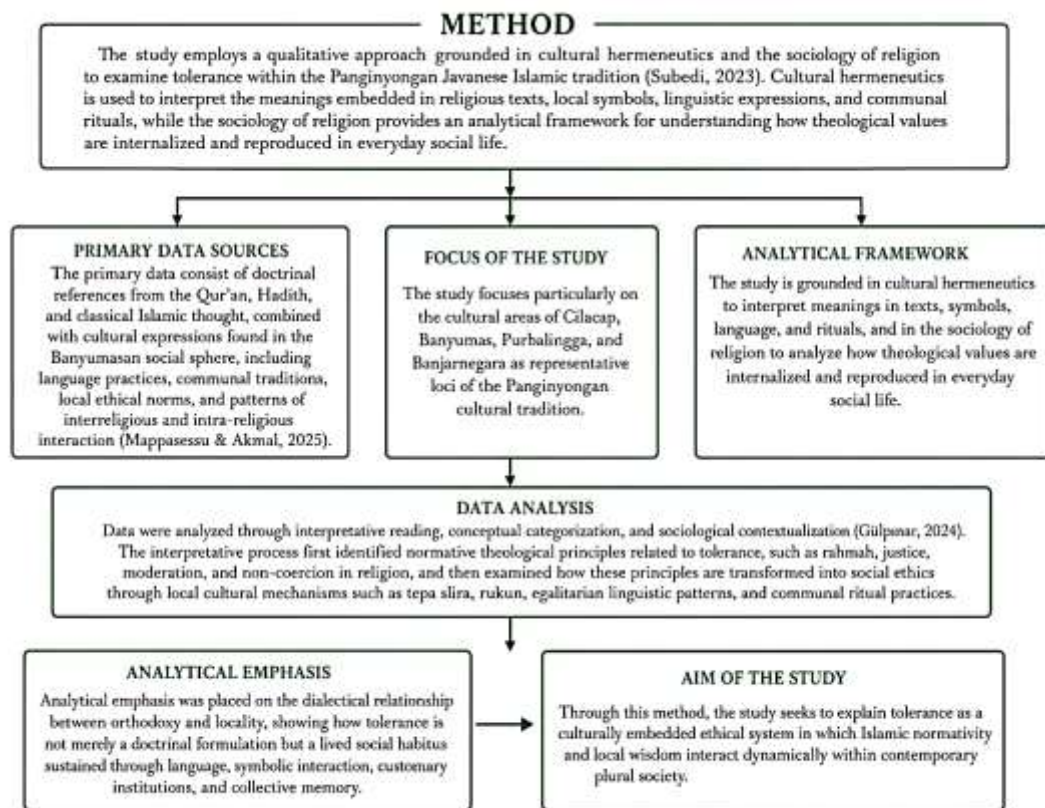


Fig 1. Research Method

Results and Discussion

Tolerance as a Socio-Religious Ethics

Tolerance in Islam is rooted in Qur'anic principles that recognize human diversity while maintaining clear boundaries of faith (Aderibigbe *et al.*, 2023). One of the most frequently cited foundations is the statement, "For you is your religion, and for me is mine" (Qur'an 109:6), which affirms the legitimacy of religious difference without requiring doctrinal compromise. This verse establishes that coexistence does not necessitate the dissolution of theological identity, but rather the acknowledgment that faith belongs to the sphere of personal accountability before God. In Islamic thought, such recognition is closely related to the principle that belief cannot be imposed externally because conviction is inseparable from conscience and moral responsibility. This is reinforced by another Qur'anic teaching: "There shall be no compulsion in religion" (Qur'an 2:256), which further clarifies that religious commitment must arise through awareness rather than coercion (Al-Ghoni *et al.*, 2025).

Beyond recognition of difference, Islamic tolerance is also grounded in the universal ethic of mercy. The Qur'an states, "And We have not sent you, [O Muhammad], except as a mercy to all creation" (Qur'an 21:107), showing that the prophetic mission carries an ethical orientation extending beyond communal boundaries. The concept of rahmatan lil 'alamin places mercy at the center of social interaction and demands that religious commitment generate benefit rather than

hostility (Setiawan, 2026). In social terms, mercy becomes a principle of non-discrimination, compassion, and justice in dealing with others regardless of religious affiliation. This ethical universality explains why classical Islamic civilization historically developed forms of coexistence with multiple communities under various political arrangements. The practical dimension of this principle can also be observed in the historical model of the Constitution of Medina, where different religious communities were recognized within a shared civic order.

At the sociological level, however, tolerance cannot be understood solely as the direct application of scriptural doctrine because religious values become socially effective only when internalized through symbols, language, and collective habits. In this sense, tolerance is better understood as a lived ethical structure formed through repeated cultural practices. Following Clifford Geertz, religion may be viewed as a symbolic system that shapes enduring moods, motivations, and conceptions of reality within society (Zurvani & Zarei, 2024). This perspective helps explain why religious tolerance often appears in local cultural expressions rather than in formal theological discourse alone. In the Panginyongan context, Islamic teachings are translated into social ethics through local categories that make abstract values socially intelligible. Religious principles become meaningful not merely because they are doctrinally correct, but because they are embedded in recognizable cultural forms that regulate daily interaction.

Within the Panginyongan cultural sphere, values such as *tepa slira*, *andhap asor*, and *rukun* function as ethical instruments that sustain tolerance in everyday life (Awalin *et al.*, 2026). *Tepa slira* encourages empathy and the ability to place oneself in another person's position, thereby reducing reactive social conflict. *Andhap asor* promotes humility and discourages excessive assertion of superiority, while *rukun* emphasizes harmony as a social obligation shared by all members of the community. These values do not weaken religious identity; rather, they provide a cultural mechanism through which strong convictions can coexist with social openness. In sociological terms, such values operate as a form of social glue that allows difference to remain present without threatening communal cohesion. Thus, tolerance in the Panginyongan Islamic tradition is produced through an ongoing dialectic between revelation and local ethical culture, creating a contextual form of religious coexistence that is socially rooted and collectively sustained.

Javanese Islam of Panginyongan: Cultural Characteristics

The Javanese Islam of Panginyongan represents a distinctive religious tradition shaped through a long dialectic between normative Islamic teachings and the Banyumasan cultural framework (Roqib *et al.*, 2025). Its character cannot be separated from the socio-historical configuration of the region, which is relatively distant from the central Javanese courts, resulting in a more egalitarian and open social interaction pattern. Islam in this context does not function as a force that eradicates local traditions; rather, it serves as a meaning-making system that Islamizes and reorganizes local symbols. This interaction demonstrates how normative religious principles are internalized through local language, rituals, and social structures, producing a unique cultural habitus. The tradition emphasizes the balance between adherence to Islamic norms and the respect for established social practices. As the Qur'an states, "For you is your religion, and for me is your religion" (Q.S. al-Kāfirūn: 6), showing recognition of religious diversity without compromising individual accountability before God.

One of the defining features of Panginyongan Islam is linguistic egalitarianism (Erlina, 2023). The Banyumasan dialect is characterized by directness, spontaneity, and minimal hierarchical speech levels compared to standard Javanese, which distinguishes between *ngoko*, *madya*, and *krama*. This linguistic structure is more than a communication tool; it represents social relationships. By weakening hierarchical language, social relations become more fluid, enabling a culture of openness toward diversity. Differences are not immediately framed as superior or inferior but rather as

variations within a shared social space. The Qur'anic principle, "Those who show mercy will be shown mercy by the Most Merciful," emphasizes that empathy is foundational for tolerance, and equal linguistic interaction nurtures this empathy as a social value.

Another characteristic is functional syncretism, where local traditions are integrated within an Islamic interpretive framework without losing their social function. Rituals such as slametan, sedekah bumi, and agrarian ceremonies are preserved as mechanisms of communal solidarity, while prayers and Qur'anic recitations frame these practices within monotheistic principles. The integration aligns with Islamic jurisprudence that recognizes custom as a legitimate consideration, provided it does not contradict faith. The Qur'an reminds humanity, "O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another" (Q.S. al-Hujurāt: 13). This highlights the ethical importance of recognizing diversity while maintaining social cohesion.

Functional syncretism also supports tolerance, as communal rituals become social spaces for interaction across religious backgrounds (Husna & Hamid, 2024). Non-Muslims may participate in social celebrations without engaging in formal acts of worship, maintaining a clear separation between faith and social life. This pattern resonates with the Medina Charter, which recognized theological differentiation alongside social and political integration. Ethical reinforcement is also reflected in prophetic guidance: "I have been sent to perfect noble character," emphasizing that the symbolic integration of local customs embodies the moral mission of Islam. Hence, the Javanese practice is not a deviation but an ethical articulation of the prophetic mission within local culture.

Moderation is a third defining trait, focusing on balance between religious observance and social harmony. This does not imply compromise of religious principles but is an ethical strategy for managing pluralism. The Qur'an instructs, "Thus We have made you a moderate nation" (Q.S. al-Baqarah: 143), showing the theological basis for balanced, equitable, and non-extremist practice. Moderation, or ummatan wasaṭan, ensures that societal cohesion and spiritual obligations are mutually reinforced. In daily life, Panginyongan Muslims avoid confrontational expressions of religiosity, managing differences in practice, such as prayer methods or Ramadan calculations, through dialogue and mutual respect. The ethos reflects that social stability is part of piety itself.

This moderateness is also grounded in legal and ethical accountability. The Prophet said, "Whoever wrongs a covenant, diminishes someone's right, overburdens them, or takes something without consent, I am their advocate on the Day of Judgment." This shows that safeguarding social justice and the rights of others is integral to individual piety (Waluyo & Iswandi, 2022). Religious moderation in Panginyongan thus emerges as both a sociological practice and a normative moral consequence of prophetic ethics. It aligns daily conduct with ethical frameworks that emphasize compassion, fairness, and communal responsibility.

The integration of educational, economic, and social institutions demonstrates this moderateness in interaction with non-Muslim communities. Collaboration in schools, markets, and communal projects often occurs without conflict, revealing that religious identity does not hinder participation in shared social spaces. Instead, it provides an ethical foundation that governs equitable and balanced relations. Such integration embodies a lived pluralism rooted in Islamic ethics, illustrating that faith and coexistence are mutually reinforcing rather than oppositional.

Javanese Islam of Panginyongan achieves a cultural and ethical synthesis by combining:

1. Egalitarian linguistic patterns,
2. Functional syncretism, and
3. Moderate religious practice.

Together, these characteristics generate a model of organic tolerance that grows from lived

experience, embedded within habitus, and reinforced by normative legitimacy from the Qur'an and Sunnah. The Prophet is described as "a mercy to all worlds" (Q.S. al-Anbiyā': 107), showing the universal dimension of compassion that transcends communal boundaries. This reinforces the notion that Panginyongan Islam is an ethical-historical articulation of mercy in a social landscape.

From a sociological perspective, this tolerance is not artificial or imposed by state policy but arises from the intergenerational internalization of values. It operates through language, ritual, pesantren education, and daily practices that embed social harmony as an element of piety. The dynamic between orthodoxy and local wisdom demonstrates that they are not mutually exclusive but can coexist through ethics of compassion, justice, and balance. In this framework, tolerance becomes a practical manifestation of living monotheism that thrives in the interplay of history and culture.

Manifestations of Tolerance in the Panginyongan Tradition

The Panginyongan community shows interreligious tolerance in daily life through cooperative interactions across faiths, particularly in social activities such as communal work (gotong royong), family celebrations, participation in national commemorations, and solidarity during disasters (Ramadhani, 2024). These interactions are not merely administrative formalities but are deeply embedded in social ethics passed down through generations and internalized as collective habits. From a sociological perspective of religion, this reflects the concept of "lived religion," where faith manifests in daily practices rather than doctrinal formulations. Tolerance emerges not from abstract discourse but from repeated social encounters that build trust and solidarity. Normatively, this pattern is anchored in the Qur'anic principle: "Allah does not forbid you from being kind and just toward those who do not fight you because of religion and do not expel you from your homes" (al-Mumtaḥanah [60]: 8). This verse provides a foundation for interfaith ethics: theological differences do not prevent social virtue and justice (Muqit, 2023). In Panginyongan, peaceful coexistence does not erase religious identity but frames it within harmonious social life.

Within the Islamic community itself, intrareligious tolerance is visible in managing differences in ritual practices, such as the Subuh qunut, tahlilan, or variations in determining Ramadan through different calculation methods (hisab-rukyat). These differences are guided by a local principle: "ora usah digedhekake" ("do not exaggerate"), showing a culturally rooted conflict resolution strategy emphasizing symbolic de-escalation and collective emotional control. In classical Islamic jurisprudence, such differences are categorized as ikhtilāf furū' (branch-level differences) rather than ikhtilāf uṣūl (core doctrinal differences). The Qur'anic maxim states: "There is no denial in matters of difference" (Lā inkārah fī masā'il al-khilāf), legitimizing plural opinions within scholarly debate. The Prophet Muhammad also emphasized: "When a judge exerts effort (ijtihad) and is correct, he receives two rewards; if he errs, he receives one", showing epistemological recognition of diversity in interpretation. Socially, the principle functions as a buffer that prevents disputes from escalating into open conflict, prioritizing communal harmony over uniformity.

Language in Panginyongan acts as a medium for tolerance, characterized by straightforward yet egalitarian communication that minimizes hierarchical distinctions. Linguistic structures that reduce symbolic distance among individuals contribute to social fluidity and equality. Humor, often spontaneous, satirical, and egalitarian, functions as a social safety valve, defusing tension without destructive confrontation. Through everyday speech, tolerance becomes performative, expressed in word choice, intonation, and strategies that avoid escalating differences. The Qur'an instructs: "And speak to people with good words" (al-Baqarah [2]: 83), a universal ethical guideline extending beyond Muslim interlocutors. The Prophet reinforces this: "Whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day should speak good or remain silent," emphasizing the moral weight of language in social

cohesion.

The dialectic between orthodoxy and locality in Panginyongan shows that religious practice is neither static nor uniform but interacts with historical and social contexts. Critiques of syncretism often assume a rigid notion of orthodoxy, yet hermeneutic perspectives reveal that tradition is a dialogue between normative texts and evolving social realities. A Qur'anic principle underlines non-coercion: "There is no compulsion in religion" (al-Baqarah [2]: 256), affirming that faith cannot be imposed by force and that plural communities require protection of freedom of belief (Galela *et al.*, 2025). Local religious authorities act as mediators, translating jurisprudential differences into inclusive social practices, demonstrating that cultural adaptation does not equate to theological compromise but is a form of contextual *ijtihad* aligned with *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* (objectives of the law).

Contemporary relevance of the Panginyongan model is evident amid rising identity polarization and identity-based politics in Indonesia. When religion is reduced to political symbolism, ethical and transformative dimensions are weakened, and social relations become arenas of competition rather than coexistence. In contrast, Panginyongan exemplifies religion as a source of public ethics, sustaining social cohesion through daily interactions, kinship networks, and harmonious communication. Relational trust formed in personal interactions often creates stronger social bonds than formal regulations. Normatively, this aligns with the Qur'anic instruction: "Indeed, Allah commands justice and good conduct" (al-Naḥl [16]: 90). Justice ensures equality of rights, while ethical conduct transcends mere legality to cultivate social virtue.

Tolerance in Panginyongan grows as a cultural inheritance rather than a top-down policy. Embedded in collective habits, it structures cross-group interactions organically, illustrating that internalized social values are more durable than imposed rules. The Qur'an emphasizes reconciliation: "So reconcile between your brothers" (al-Ḥujurāt [49]: 10), framing peacemaking as an ethical imperative. Such cultural internalization demonstrates that tolerance functions as *habitus*—an ingrained disposition manifest in rituals, language, and economic relations. This habitual practice ensures that tolerance is enacted spontaneously without the need for constant verbal justification.

Islamic ethics complement this social *habitus* through the internalization of *akhlak* (morality) (Rahma *et al.*, 2025). The Prophet stated: "I was sent to perfect noble character", linking faith to ethical conduct. In Panginyongan, the integration of moral teachings with social practice shows that tolerance is not merely a strategy but a consequence of faith. Individuals engage in respectful discourse, humorous interactions without insult, and open exchanges without compromising identity. Language thus becomes a cultural medium through which Islamic principles of mercy and justice are concretely enacted in everyday life.

Conclusion

Tolerance in the Islamic Javanese tradition of Panginyongan emerges from a long dialectical process between Islamic theology and local Javanese cosmology, representing a historical sedimentation rather than an instant ideological product. Rooted in the normative teachings of the Qur'an and Sunnah, it interacts dynamically with local social structures, language, and cultural symbols, producing a form of religiosity that preserves theological foundations while adapting to the practical needs of the community. Tolerance is not mere rhetoric or moral slogan, but a living social ethic manifested through everyday language, rituals, and relational practices. Egalitarian communication, functional syncretism, and moderate religious practices collectively create a cultural ecosystem conducive to coexistence, demonstrating that Islam is always incarnated in specific historical and cultural contexts without compromising its doctrinal essence. This cultural

embodiment reflects methodological flexibility recognized in classical uṣūl al-fiqh and maqāṣid al-sharī'ah, where maintaining social harmony is inseparable from safeguarding religion itself. The Panginyongan experience further shows that orthodoxy and locality are not necessarily antagonistic. Orthodoxy gains vitality through engagement with social realities, while local practices are ethically guided by normative Islamic principles. In contemporary Indonesian society, marked by identity fragmentation, the Panginyongan model shows that tolerance is most effective when it grows organically as a habitus internalized in speech, cooperation, and social care. Ultimately, in Panginyongan, tolerance is an active practice of building harmony without negating religious commitment, bridging faith and humanity, tauhid and social solidarity, orthodoxy and local wisdom, portraying Islam as a source of rahmah ethics that enlivens shared social space.

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