

Between Text and Practice: The Reception of Ja'far bin Abi Thalib's Hadith in the *Nyusur Tanah* Tradition

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Abstract

Keywords:

Hadith;
Nyusur Tanah;
Cultural
Acculturation;
Ja'far bin Abi Thalib.

This study examines the *nyusur tanah* tradition in Dayeuhluhur Village, Cilacap, as a concrete manifestation of living hadith, where Islamic teachings are continuously reinterpreted through local cultural practices. Although post-death rituals are widely practiced among Muslim communities, there has been limited scholarly focus on how specific hadiths, such as the narration concerning Ja'far bin Abi Thalib, are integrated into communal traditions. This research employs a qualitative, phenomenological method grounded in postpositivist philosophy, involving fieldwork through in-depth interviews and participant observation with religious leaders (*kiai*) and residents. The study reveals a unique practice in which neighbors, not the bereaved family, prepare food for mourners, an inversion of dominant funeral customs. This practice is rooted in the Prophet's instruction to support grieving families, reflecting how hadith operates as a dynamic moral guide rather than solely a textual source. The *Kiai* are vital as cultural brokers, aligning tradition with Islamic values. This study contributes to the discourse on living hadith by demonstrating its role in sustaining cultural identity while maintaining religious authenticity within a plural cultural landscape.

Abstrak

Kata kunci:
Hadis; Nyusur Tanah;
Akulturasi Budaya;
Ja'far bin Abi Thalib

Penelitian ini menyelidiki tradisi nyusur tanah di Desa Dayeuhluhur, Cilacap, sebagai manifestasi konkret dari hadis yang hidup, di mana ajaran Islam secara terus menerus ditafsirkan ulang melalui praktik-praktik budaya lokal. Meskipun ritual pasca-kematian banyak dipraktikkan di kalangan masyarakat Muslim, namun masih sedikit penelitian yang membahas bagaimana hadis-hadis tertentu seperti hadis tentang Ja'far bin Abi Thalib diintegrasikan ke dalam tradisi masyarakat. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif fenomenologis yang berlandaskan pada filsafat postpositivisme, yang melibatkan penelitian lapangan melalui wawancara mendalam dan observasi partisipatif dengan para pemuka agama (*kiai*) dan penduduk setempat. Penelitian ini mengungkapkan sebuah praktik unik di mana para tetangga, bukan keluarga yang berduka, yang menyiapkan makanan untuk para pelayat-sebuah pembalikan dari kebiasaan pemakaman yang dominan. Praktik ini berakar pada instruksi Nabi untuk mendukung keluarga yang berduka, yang mencerminkan bagaimana hadis beroperasi sebagai panduan moral yang dinamis dan bukan hanya sebagai sumber tekstual. Para *kiai* memainkan peran penting sebagai perantara budaya, menyelaraskan tradisi dengan nilai-nilai Islam. Studi ini berkontribusi pada wacana tentang living hadis dengan menunjukkan perannya dalam mempertahankan identitas budaya sambil mempertahankan keaslian agama dalam lanskap budaya yang majemuk.

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INTRODUCTION

One of the enduring religious phenomena among Muslims involves post-death rituals, including prayers, charity, and various cultural practices surrounding the deceased (Moheet, 2013). Deeply rooted in community traditions, these customs often combine Islamic teachings and pre-Islamic belief systems in the Nusantara, such as Hinduism, Buddhism, and animistic worldviews. In particular, spirit reverence evolved into Islamic rituals, such as prayers for the deceased, reflecting a historical pattern of religious acculturation (Dozan, 2020). These practices are not limited to ritual obligations but also serve essential social, emotional, and spiritual functions, offering consolation in grief and strengthening community cohesion (Shaleh et al., 2022).

Although these traditions are widely practiced, scholarly attention has centered chiefly on theological debates about their permissibility, especially regarding *tahlilan* and communal meals offered after funerals (Seise, 2021). Previous studies have emphasized normative Islamic legal perspectives or anthropological accounts of cultural expression. However, few have delved into how specific hadiths are received, interpreted, and embodied within these local customs, such as research by Nasir (2019) on Slametan, which is an essential ritual for Javanese Muslims in the form of prayers and eating together to mark life phases such as birth and death. Similar research by Sirait (2016) regarding Tahlilan, one of the forbidden traditions not practiced by modernist Muslims in Yogyakarta. The concept of *living hadith*, where hadith is not just textual but lived in practice, remains underexplored in this context (Kaptein, 2023). On the other hand, Brown (2017) examines the methodology of collection, scholarly criticism, and controversies over the authenticity of hadith from the classical to the modern era, including in the context of contemporary Arab phenomena. Works by Hartini (2021), Saleem et al., (2021), and Yani (2021) have described the forms and variations of these rituals but have not analyzed the specific role of the hadith of Ja'far bin Abi Talib in shaping local traditions like *nyusur tanah*.

This study addresses that gap through living hadith by examining the *nyusur tanah* tradition in Dayeuhluhur Village, Cilacap. Specifically, it aims to trace the tradition's origins, development, and religious significance, with attention to how the hadith about Ja'far's death is embedded in communal behavior. Unlike in many communities where the bereaved are expected to provide food for guests, the *nyusur tanah* tradition in Dayeuhluhur is a distinctive practice that sets it apart from the broader Javanese cultural customs. Its uniqueness lies in the collective involvement of residents from the same neighborhood, who come to the bereaved family's home to offer moral and material support, including cooking together. After the funeral, a communal buffet meal is held as a gesture of solidarity and respect. This tradition reflects the strong values of cooperation and the social dimension of death rituals in Dayeuhluhur society. This shift suggests a deliberate application of hadith to shape and justify communal norms and traditions.

The central hypothesis of this research is that the *nyusur tanah* tradition is not merely a remnant of pre-Islamic culture or a product of local innovation but a meaningful internalization of Islamic values through the reinterpretation of hadith. The Dayeuhluhur community's understanding of the hadith about Ja'far, which recounts how neighbors prepared food for his grieving family, is seen as religiously authoritative and practically relevant. This local interpretation serves as a foundation for resisting criticisms that view post-death rituals as *bid'ah* (religious innovation) or cultural excess.

Therefore, this paper contributes to the broader discourse on living hadith and Islamic acculturation by offering a grounded ethnographic account of how Islamic teachings are interpreted and practiced within local traditions. It emphasizes the dynamic nature of hadith reception, not as a static textual reference but as a living source of guidance mediated through culture and community. Doing so provides a case study of how Islamic norms are adapted and preserved through localized, socially meaningful religious practices in the Indonesian context, particularly within Islamic educational settings such as pesantren and among culturally embedded Muslim communities.

METHODS

This research adopts a postpositivist paradigm, which perceives social reality as holistic, complex, dynamic, and imbued with deep meaning. In line with this philosophical outlook, the study employs a qualitative method to explore social phenomena in their natural settings. Within this framework, the researcher acts as the primary instrument, emphasizing the depth of meaning rather than generalization (Sugiyono, 2016). The research will be conducted in Dayeuhluhur Village, Cilacap, with fieldwork scheduled for late March 2024. Dayeuhluhur showcases a unique cultural identity through the nyusur tanah tradition, distinguishing it from typical Javanese and Sundanese customs. This communal death ritual involves neighbors voluntarily bringing rice and side dishes to the grieving family's home, preparing and serving food buffet-style after the burial. The practice highlights strong social solidarity and gotong royong while embedding Islamic values through local cultural forms. It is often found in pesantren settings and deeply rooted Muslim communities in Dayeuhluhur.

A phenomenological approach is employed to explore the Nyusur Tanah tradition. This method is particularly well-suited for qualitative research, as it seeks to grasp the essence of lived experiences and their meanings. This study's phenomenology is closely connected to the concept of living hadith, as reflected in Abu Dawud no. 3132, Tirmidhi no. 998, Ibn Majah no. 1610, and Ahmad 3:280. The aim is to uncover how Islamic teachings, especially hadith, are experienced and practiced in daily communal life, particularly in the Nyusur Tanah tradition following death, which is accompanied by a selamatan ritual. (Qudsy & Imron, 2013).

Rooted in the philosophical ideas of Edmund Husserl, phenomenology differs from empiricism in that it emphasizes subjective meaning over mere observable facts. As noted by Creswell, the goal of phenomenology is to distill individual experiences into a common, universal essence (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). This study employs in-depth interviews and participant observation to collect primary data from key informants, such as Kiai and residents. Secondary data is gathered from documents, local archives, and relevant literature. Data analysis is conducted through thematic interpretation, aiming to capture the core meanings embedded in the tradition. The findings are presented descriptively and supported by empirical evidence to ensure academic rigor and validity. To strengthen data credibility, the study incorporates triangulation across data sources and methods, along with member checks to validate interpretations with participants.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Living Hadith Study

The study of living hadith explores how the sayings of Prophet Muhammad SAW are practiced and embodied in Muslim communities' traditions, rituals, and social behaviors (Salleh et al., 2019). This research encompasses various forms of hadith application, including written texts, recitations, and practical observances. Additionally,

living hadith examines how Muslims respond to and interact with hadith, positioning it as a socio-religious phenomenon (Saputra et al., 2024). Living hadith refers to behavioral patterns within society that emerge based on the teachings of the Prophet's hadith (Nawawi et al., 2024). This approach expands the scope of hadith studies beyond textual analysis to include socio-cultural perspectives, with religious communities as the primary focus of research (Bevelander & Page, 2011).

Living hadith refers to patterns or responses within society that originate from the Prophet's hadith, whether in written, oral, or practical forms. The living hadith tradition in written form can be found in various texts circulating in society, such as the phrase cleanliness is part of faith (Salleh et al., 2019). Many Indonesians regard this as a hadith of the Prophet, although research has shown that this statement is not authentic. In its oral form, the living hadith develops through recitations or traditions passed down within Muslim communities. For example, in pesantren (Prayogi, 2023), particularly those led by *Kiai* who are hafiz of the Qur'an, the recitation during the Fajr prayer on Fridays tends to be longer than on other days. As for its practical form, living hadith manifests in customs widely practiced among Muslims (Faizah, 2021). One example is the tradition of female circumcision, which actually predates the arrival of Islam but has since been associated with religious teachings (Munawwarroh, 2013).

Another example related to the study of living hadith is the celebration of the Prophet's Mawlid in various Muslim countries. This celebration commemorates the birth of Prophet Muhammad (SAW) and represents a living hadith where the teachings about honoring and loving the Prophet are expressed through cultural festivities. Another example is the use of technology in religious practices. Applications that provide prayer time reminders illustrate how hadith is brought to life in a modern context, particularly within contemporary society (Hidayah, 2024).

The virtues of living according to the hadith serve as essential guidance for Muslims. Following the hadith means following the teachings and example of Prophet Muhammad SAW, the best role model for leading a meaningful and righteous life. One of the key virtues emphasized in hadith is the importance of seeking and imparting knowledge. Seeking knowledge is both necessary and an obligation for every Muslim (Al-Nahdi & LI, 2025). Without knowledge, one may stray from the path of truth and be unable to contribute to the advancement of civilization or even improve oneself. This underscores the significance of education, as it is a fundamental duty for every Muslim (Kamal et al., 2022).

Implementation of Living Hadith Studies

This research explores the study of living hadith concerning the reception of the hadith of Ja'far bin Abi Thalib within the *nyusur tanah* tradition in Dayeuhluhur Village, Cilacap. Generally, the bereaved family carries out the practice of providing food as a form of hospitality. However, in the *nyusur tanah* tradition, this ritual occurs immediately after those who have participated in the burial return from the gravesite. The ceremony expresses gratitude to those who have assisted in the burial process (Admin, 2021).

Unlike in other communities, in Dayeuhluhur Village, Cilacap, it is not the bereaved family but their neighbors who are responsible for preparing and serving food. This practice is based on the concept of living hadith, drawing from the narration of Abdullah bin Ja'far RA, in which the Prophet (peace be upon him) said: "Prepare food for the family of Ja'far, for a matter has come to them that is keeping them occupied (HR. Abu Dawud no. 3132, Tirmidzi no. 998, Ibnu Majah no. 1610, Ahmad 3: 280).

The hadith reflects the compassion of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) toward families experiencing grief or hardship, as seen in the case of Ja'far bin Abi Thalib's family, who had just faced a calamity. Implementing this hadith in daily life can take various forms at the individual and community level. This hadith emphasizes the recommendation to assist families facing hardship or calamity, particularly in the form of food. It reflects empathy and social support. Preparing food for a grieving family is a recommended Sunnah. However, if the family already has sufficient food, this practice is no longer necessary (Hakim, 2023).

The textual reception of the hadith of Ja'far bin Abi Thalib is: "Prepare food for the family of Ja'far! Indeed, a matter has come to them that preoccupies them. This hadith is found in Abu Dawud no. 3132, Tirmidzi no. 998, Ibnu Majah no. 1610, Ahmad 3: 280. The hadith above has meanings that emphasize the importance of social concern, highlighting the need for mutual care and support within a community, especially when facing hardship or grief. Providing food in such situations is a tangible expression of empathy that helps ease the burden of those in mourning.

The hadith is a practical illustration of how Islamic values are applied daily. A simple act such as preparing food for those in distress demonstrates the real-world implementation of Islamic teachings, particularly within pesantren studies and culturally rooted communities. Moreover, offering food to those facing hardship helps ease their burden, as they may lack the time or energy to attend to basic needs like cooking. This form of support enables them to focus on more urgent concerns, reinforcing the importance of communal solidarity and compassion in Islam.

The Meaning of *Nyusur Tanah* Tradition

The meaning of the *nyusur tanah* tradition is to express gratitude to those who have assisted in handling the deceased, which is carried out after the burial. This tradition also serves as a means of fostering social bonds and strengthening relationships among family members and the community. In some contexts, *nyusur tanah* symbolizes reverence for the earth, which is seen as humanity's origin and final resting place. This tradition is often practiced as a form of respect and tribute to deceased ancestors. The community believes that by performing *nyusur tanah*, they demonstrate their reverence and devotion to the spirits of their forebears. In specific contexts, *nyusur tanah* is also regarded as a physical and spiritual purification ritual. People cleanse themselves of negative energy and seek blessings from God and their ancestors (Admin, 2021).

Nyusur Tanah is a traditional ceremony practiced in the Sunda and Java regions, performed after the burial of the deceased (Hartini, 2021). *Nyusur tanah* originates from *menyusur*, meaning "to trace" or "to follow." However, in this context, *nyusur tanah* refers to an act of charity given on the day of someone's passing. In Sundanese beliefs, death is considered a significant event that deserves commemoration, which is why traditional rituals accompany burial. This ceremony occurs immediately after those who have buried the deceased return from the gravesite, typically held at the bereaved family's home. In Sundanese culture, *nyusur tanah* is closely tied to Islamic practices, resembling a brief *tahlilan* (prayer gathering) conducted before the extended *tahlilan* ceremonies on the 7th, 40th, and 100th days after death.

The *nyusur tanah* ritual varies across different regions. In Java, for example, the ceremony, also known as *sur tanah*, symbolizes a gesture of *kulo nuwun*, a respectful greeting to the Divine, asking for permission to lay the deceased to rest. This ritual involves various forms of homage, such as blessings for the departed, filial devotion to parents, and seeking forgiveness from deities believed to safeguard food storage areas.

Beyond its religious and spiritual significance, *nyusur tanah* also serves as an expression of respect for the earth, which is regarded in both Javanese and Sundanese traditions as humankind's origin and final resting place. Additionally, the ceremony expresses gratitude to those who have assisted in the burial process while strengthening social bonds among families and the broader community (Suryana, 2021).

The *nyusur tanah* ritual is a funeral tradition involving several stages for family and community members. It begins with preparing the deceased, where loved ones gather to pay their final respects. The body is cleansed and wrapped in a shroud, and prayers and Qur'anic recitations are performed to bless the soul. Next is the *nyusur tanah* procession, meaning "tracing the earth," in which the deceased is escorted to the cemetery in a solemn walk, often following a meaningful path. Along the way, prayers and dhikr (remembrance of God) are recited as a spiritual send-off. After the burial, a commemorative gathering follows, often including *selamatan* or *kenduri*, where prayers are offered for the deceased and blessings are sought for the grieving family. In Dayeuhluhur Village, Cilacap Regency, unlike common funeral traditions, the neighbors, not the bereaved family, provide food during this ceremony to express communal support (Rohmana, 2013).

In the *nyusur tanah* tradition practiced by the Javanese and Sundanese communities, this ritual holds deep significance, as it is believed that the spirits of the deceased require a proper ceremony to be received in the afterlife. The tradition serves multiple purposes: it expresses gratitude to those who assisted in the funeral process, with the ceremony held at the home of the deceased's family; it provides an opportunity to pray for the soul of the departed, seeking God's forgiveness for any mistakes made during their lifetime; and it helps bring comfort to grieving family members by allowing them to pray together and share food with guests. Additionally, *nyusur tanah* is closely tied to Islamic practices, resembling *tahlilan*, a ritual performed on specific days after death, serving as a brief *tahlilan* before the extended ceremonies observed on the 7th, 40th, and 100th days. Lastly, the tradition honors the deceased, expresses gratitude, and offers prayers for their soul's well-being (Admin, 2019).

Table 1. Meaning of Nyusur Tanah Tradition

Activity	Meaning
<i>Nyusur Tanah</i> Tradition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Expression of gratitude to those who assisted in handling the deceased - Strengthening social bonds and reinforcing relationships among family and community members - Symbolizing reverence for the earth - A ritual of purification, both physically and spiritually
Traditional Ceremony Practiced in Sunda and Java Regions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Conducted after the burial process - A brief <i>tahlilan</i> (Islamic prayer gathering) - Filial piety and devotion to one's parents

Tradition of Giving Food to Relatives

In Islam, providing food to relatives has a strong foundation and is considered a recommended act of worship. This practice reflects love, compassion, and solidarity among family members and the community. As stated in a hadith, "Whoever feeds a believer until he is satisfied, Allah will admit him through one of the gates of Paradise, which no one will enter except those like him." (HR. Thabrani). Giving food to relatives falls under *sadaqah* (charitable giving), which carries numerous virtues in Islam, including blessings and great rewards. Providing food to relatives is also a means of strengthening family ties. Islam emphasizes maintaining good relationships with family and kin, as mentioned in another hadith: "Whoever wishes to have his sustenance expanded and his life prolonged should maintain family ties." (HR. Bukhari and Muslim).

On a social level, sharing food helps support neighbors struggling financially, reducing economic disparities within the community (Padli et al., 2025). This act fosters a sense of unity and solidarity among neighbors, demonstrating care and a willingness to help. Additionally, sharing food can effectively resolve minor conflicts or ease tensions between neighbors, as it conveys goodwill and a desire to live in harmony.

In religious teachings, providing food to others, especially neighbors, is considered a virtuous act that brings blessings. Many hadiths mention that sharing food can lead to greater sustenance. The Prophet Muhammad (SAW) consistently emphasized caring for one's neighbors. He said, "None of you truly believes until he loves for his brother what he loves for himself" (HR. Bukhari and Muslim).

In Islam, providing food is highly encouraged as it helps foster good relationships with neighbors and relatives. For this reason, the community in Dayeuhluhur Village practices a living hadith by providing food to grieving families. Unlike common practice, where the bereaved family is expected to serve food during funeral ceremonies, Dayeuhluhur, Cilacap Regency, has incorporated this hadith into their daily lives. They do not see it as a burden but rather as a cherished tradition within their community, something they naturally and willingly practice.

In society, living hadith is deeply intertwined with daily practices, shaping and influencing people's actions. Communities incorporate living hadith into their lives for various reasons, such as integrating tradition with Islamic teachings, as seen in the *nyekar* tradition before Ramadan, which serves as a reminder of death and self-improvement. It also allows communities to adapt the Prophet's Sunnah to their circumstances by interpreting and applying hadiths daily. Additionally, living hadith helps shape societal culture and identity, with practices like grave pilgrimage reinforcing both religious devotion and cultural heritage. It respects and preserves local traditions, such as the Javanese *creed* practice, which blends Islamic teachings with indigenous customs. Beyond that, it fosters greater religious awareness, helping people deepen their understanding of Islam (Budi Santoso et al., 2024), and serves as a bridge between generations, preserving communal identity through inherited traditions. Thus, living hadith plays a vital role in maintaining and developing cultural and religious identity while remaining faithful to Islamic teachings.

Geertz's view of the *Kiai* as a cultural broker has received mixed responses. Many scholars have been too quick to simplify the concept, portraying the role as passive, uncreative, and lacking proactiveness. As a result, many have supported Horikoshi's perspective, which argues that the *Kiai* is more than just a "filter" of cultural information but rather an active agent of social change. For instance, in *Islam Profetik*, Masdar Hilmy notes that Clifford Geertz saw the *santri* merely as "cultural brokers" whose role was to

selectively introduce cultural elements to society, positioning them as passive bridges between modernization and traditional communities. Hilmy further adds that, regardless of whether Geertz's interpretation was based on empirical reality, this misrepresentation prompted Horikoshi to offer a strong counterargument (Geertz, 1960).

Three key aspects must be considered to fully grasp Geertz's perspective on the Kiai as a cultural broker (Nisau & Widiyanto, 2024). First, this role can be examined through Redfield's framework of great and little traditions. Geertz identifies the great tradition as Meccan Islam, serving as the primary religious reference (Geertz, 1971), while the little tradition represents rural life, which forms the foundation of the Kiai's influence. During Indonesia's independence, the great tradition shifted toward nationalism and similar ideological movements, with the Kiai playing a pivotal role in socio-cultural consolidation (Fahmi, 2024). Second, the role of the Kiai as a cultural broker has continually evolved in response to Indonesia's shifting social, cultural, and political landscape. To remain relevant, Kiai must integrate religious scholarship with secular knowledge, both for their personal development and for the advancement of their pesantren. Third, the Kiai function as cultural brokers within Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), a political and religious organization with a structured hierarchy and coordination system resembling a state, extending from the central leadership to grassroots (ranting) levels. Consequently, the Kiai's role as a cultural broker is not an individual endeavor but a collective effort embedded within the broader institutional framework (Geertz, 1960).

This study demonstrates the role of the Kiai as a cultural broker, striving to bridge local traditions with Islamic teachings in several ways (Fauzi, 2012). First, the Kiai acts as a filter of tradition, assessing and selecting local customs to ensure they do not contradict Islamic teachings. Second, the Kiai serves as an agent of social change, educating the community on Islamic values and guiding them on integrating these principles with existing traditions. Third, the Kiai functions as an educator and mentor, playing an active role in religious education and providing a deeper understanding of Islamic teachings. Fourth, the Kiai acts as a conflict mediator, helping to clarify and resolve tensions between local traditions and Islamic teachings. Thus, the Kiai plays a highly complex and multifaceted role in maintaining a balance between cultural traditions and religious teachings, ensuring that society can live harmoniously while adhering to Islamic values.

Table 2. Tradition of Giving Food to Relatives

Activity	Concrete Form	Purpose
Giving Food as Worship	Form of Solidarity	Alleviating Economic Burdens
Integration of Local Tradition and hadith	<i>Nyekar</i> during Ramadan	Implementation of Living Hadith
Kyai / Religious Leader	Cultural Broker	Role of the Kyai in Society

CONCLUSION

The nyusur tanah tradition is not just a local cultural ritual, but a concrete manifestation of living hadith, where Islamic teachings are dynamically integrated into local cultural practices. This integration is active, not static; it shows how local communities reinterpret religious texts through cultural expressions to maintain the continuity of faith and traditional heritage. The role of Kiai in this context is significant not only as a cultural preserver but as an agent of social transformation that guides the community in adjusting religious norms to local realities.

However, this research has limitations. Geographically, this study is limited to one village, so the results cannot be generalized to a broader context, either on a national scale or among Muslims in general. With a larger and more diverse sample data, a more comprehensive understanding of the practice of living hadith will be obtained. This research contributes significantly to Islamic studies by showing how a contextualized approach to hadith interpretation can promote cultural sustainability without compromising religious integrity. The findings offer a valuable model for Muslim societies seeking to maintain harmony between tradition and religious values, especially in a multicultural environment.

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