

## ISLAMIC EDUCATIONAL VALUES IN CUSTOMARY TRADITION: Symbolic Contestation of the *Nemat Kaji* Tradition in Malin Deman

Dedy Novriadi<sup>1</sup>, Nilda susilawati<sup>2</sup>, Syubli<sup>3</sup>, Fathudin Aziz Al Hanif<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1,3,4</sup>Universitas Muhammadiyah Bengkulu

Jl. Kp. Bali, Kec. Tlk. Segara, Kota Bengkulu, Bengkulu 38119, Indonesia

<sup>2</sup>Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia

Jl. Persiaran Tun Dr. Ismail, 86400 Parit Raja, Johor Darul Ta'zim, Malaysia

E-mail: <sup>1</sup>[dedynovriad@umb.ac.id](mailto:dedynovriad@umb.ac.id), <sup>2</sup>[nildaqila@gmail.com](mailto:nildaqila@gmail.com), <sup>3</sup>[Syubli@umb.ac.id](mailto:Syubli@umb.ac.id), <sup>4</sup>[alhanifaziz12@gmail.com](mailto:alhanifaziz12@gmail.com)

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**Abstract:** This study aims to analyze the contestation between substantive Islamic educational values and symbolic ceremonial practices in the *Nemat Kaji* tradition, a traditional wedding procession of the Malin Deman community in Mukomuko Regency, which represents a fusion of local culture and Islamic symbols. Through a qualitative approach using participatory observation techniques, in-depth interviews, and literature studies, this study found that although the *Nemat Kaji* tradition upholds Islamic educational values in the aspects of faith, worship, and morals, there is a shift in meaning between generations. The older generation tends to maintain the spiritual meaning of religious symbols, while some of the younger generation sees them as formalistic customary obligations. The role of religious scholars is also divided between maintaining customary forms and encouraging the reform of religious symbols. This study concludes that the *Nemat Kaji* tradition is at the intersection of cultural preservation and the revitalization of Islamic values, which demands a more reflective and contextual approach to Islamic education. These findings provide theoretical contributions to the development of studies on local culture-based Islamic education and enrich the discourse on the dynamic relationship between custom and religion in the context of Indonesian Muslim society.

**Keywords:** Islamic educational values; *Nemat Kaji* tradition; local wisdom; religious symbols; contestation of meaning

**Abstrak:** Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis kontestasi antara nilai-nilai pendidikan Islam yang bersifat substantif dengan praktik simbolik seremonial dalam tradisi *Nemat Kaji* dalam prosesi adat pernikahan masyarakat Malin Deman, Kabupaten Mukomuko, yang mempresentasikan perpaduan antara budaya lokal dan simbol-simbol keislaman. Melalui pendekatan kualitatif dengan teknik observasi partisipatif, wawancara mendalam, dan studi pustaka, penelitian ini menemukan bahwa meskipun tradisi *Nemat Kaji* menyimpan nilai-nilai pendidikan Islam dalam aspek akidah, ibadah, dan akhlak, terjadi pergeseran makna antar generasi. Generasi tua cenderung mempertahankan makna spiritual simbol-simbol religius, sedangkan sebagian generasi muda melihatnya sebagai kewajiban adat yang bersifat formalistik. Peran ulama pun terbagi antara mempertahankan bentuk adat dan mendorong reformasi simbol keagamaan. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa tradisi *Nemat Kaji* berada pada titik persilangan antara pelestarian budaya dan revitalisasi nilai Islam, yang menuntut pendekatan pendidikan Islam yang lebih reflektif dan kontekstual. Temuan ini berkontribusi secara teoretis bagi pengembangan pendidikan Islam berbasis budaya lokal serta memperkaya diskursus tentang relasi dinamis antara tradisi dan agama dalam konteks masyarakat muslim Indonesia.

**Kata kunci:** Pendidikan Islam; tradisi *Nemat Kaji*; tradisi lokal; simbol keagamaan; kontestasi makna

## Introduction

Indonesia is a country rich in diverse local traditions that coexist with religion, especially Islam as the majority religion.<sup>1</sup> These traditions not only function as cultural heritage but also become social instruments that help shape the religious identity of the community,<sup>2</sup> maintaining ancestral wisdom while fostering unity and harmony.<sup>3</sup> In various local contexts, cultural practices often contain Islamic symbols, both in the form of rituals, speech, and customary procedures,<sup>4</sup> such as traditional ceremonies before the wedding.<sup>5</sup>

In the coastal area of the west coast of Sumatra Island, precisely in Malin Deman District, Mukomuko Regency, Bengkulu Province, there is a tradition known as *Nemat Kaji* (*khatam al-Qur'an*). This tradition is part of a series of wedding customs for the people in Malin Deman. In practice, *Nemat Kaji* is carried out after the marriage contract, where a teacher of the Koran is given the trust to lead the *Nemat Kaji* procession. The event is attended by the bride and groom, the head of the clan, sharia officials, the families of the bride and groom, and the guests. Religious figures or people who are considered to have religious knowledge give a kind of prayer to the bride and groom.

The tradition of *Nemat Kaji* by the local community is seen as a form of Islamization of the marriage process. The presence of elements of

prayer, reading of the Quran, and the involvement of religious figures in the procession make this tradition have religious value. The community believes that the implementation of *Nemat Kaji* brings blessings so that the marriage can run well, in accordance with the values of Islamic education. However, in the era of modernization and increasing understanding of more normative Islam, a fundamental problem has emerged: does a tradition such as *Nemat Kaji* truly reflect the substance of Islamic education, or is it just a symbolic ritual in the name of religion? This is what then opens up space for debate, both among the community and academics, regarding the position of Islam in customary practices.

This debate not only concerns the aspect of the validity of the ritual but also touches on the educational dimension, namely how Islamic values are transmitted through tradition. In the context of Islamic education, values such as faith, worship, and morals should not stop at the symbolic level but need to be instilled substantially.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, it is necessary to explore further to what extent *Nemat Kaji* contributes to the formation of Islamic educational values in society.

In addition, there is a phenomenon of symbolic contestation between custom and religion in the implementation of *Nemat Kaji*. On the one hand, this tradition is maintained because it is considered a sacred cultural identity. On the other hand, some groups in society, especially the younger generation who have received formal Islamic education, are beginning to question the validity and relevance of this tradition within the framework of Islamic law.

This problem becomes increasingly complex when Islamic symbols in traditional traditions begin to lose their true meaning. Prayers and advice that should be a means of spiritual education are sometimes only read as ceremonial formalities. In fact, Islamic education emphasizes the internalization of values and behavioral change,<sup>7</sup> planned to comply

<sup>1</sup> Sindung Haryanto, "The Sociological Context of Religion in Indonesia," in *Research in the Social Scientific Study of Religion*, Volume 30 (Brill, 2019), 67–102.

<sup>2</sup> Mudzakkir Ali et al., "Culture, Religion, and Harmony: The Struggle for Roles in Diversity in Indonesia," *Revista de Gestão Social e Ambiental* 18, no. 3 (2024): 1–22.

<sup>3</sup> Syihabuddin Safiq Al-Mufid, "Transforming Tradition into Spiritual Harmony: A Study of the Bangbarongan Ritual in Bandung Regency, West Java," *Subhasita: Journal of Buddhist and Religious Studies* 2, no. 2 (2024): 81–94.

<sup>4</sup> Erlan Muliadi, Abdul Haris Rasyidi, and Ulyan Nasri, "Islamic Educational Values in the Patuq Tradition: A Local Culture of Kuta Village, Central Lombok," *Al-Hayat: Journal of Islamic Education* 8, no. 3 (2024): 1072–85.

<sup>5</sup> Ahmad Saefudin, Delia Vega Nanda Pangestuti, and Santi Andriyani, "Islamic Education Values of Barikan: Javanese Cultural Rituals as a Practice of Islam Nusantara," *El Harakah* 22, no. 2 (2020): 245.

<sup>6</sup> Dodi Ilham, "The Challenge of Islamic Education and How to Change," *International Journal of Asian Education* 1, no. 1 (2020): 9–20.

<sup>7</sup> Alif Achadah, Wahidmurni Wahidmurni, and Ahmad Fatah

with Islamic values,<sup>8</sup> and humanity that upholds the unity and integrity of the nation<sup>9</sup> not just symbols or ceremonies. This kind of condition raises critical questions: Is the *Nemat Kaji* tradition still relevant as a medium for Islamic education? Are the Islamic values contained in it truly understood and practiced, or are they just cultural symbols that are inherited without meaning? This is the focus of the study in this paper.

This study aims to examine the values of Islamic education in the *Nemat Kaji* tradition and understand how the community interprets these practices. It also examines the social dynamics between the preservation of customs and the application of Islamic teachings in the local context. This article is expected to provide a comprehensive overview of how Islamic education is represented in local culture. This study is not only academically significant but also has practical implications for efforts to harmoniously and critically integrate Islamic values and the preservation of local culture.

## Method

This research method uses a descriptive qualitative approach with a case study technique to understand the construction of culture in local religious practices, especially in the *Nemat Kaji* tradition in Malin Deman District, Mukomuko Regency, Bengkulu Province. This study combines participatory observation, in-depth interviews with customary actors, religious figures, and local communities, and analysis of documents related to customs and religious teachings. The data collected will be analyzed thematically, with a focus on the meaning of symbols in religious and cultural rituals,

as well as the interaction between Islamic religious values and local culture. This approach is expected to explore the relationship between religious and cultural symbols in the practice of *Nemat Kaji* customs, as well as understand the role of these symbols in shaping the social and religious identity of the local community.

## Result and Discussions

### Description of the *Nemat Kaji* Tradition

The *Nemat Kaji* tradition is one of the customs carried out in a series of weddings in the Malin Deman community, Mukomuko Regency. This study found that the implementation of *Nemat Kaji* consists of several stages; the first is family preparation involving both families of the bride and groom. The families of the groom and bride will hold a meeting to discuss the preparations for the wedding procession, starting from choosing the date and preparing food to arranging the venue.

After that, the second stage is the marriage contract stage itself, which is led by the Head of Customs and attended by the head of the clan and the sharia officer and the implementation of the marriage contract is carried out by officers from the Office of Religious Affairs (KUA). The third stage is the implementation of *Nemat Kaji* carried out by the bride assisted by several friends of the bride in reading the Qur'an specifically on the 30th verse and occasionally assisted by the groom. The implementation of *Nemat Kaji* is led by the bride's religious teacher and attended by the families of the bride and groom and the guests and closed with a prayer led by the imam or sharia officer, at this event a *punjung* is provided for the groom containing cake and a *punjung* for the religious teacher containing yellow rice and one grilled chicken. The fourth stage is the procession of the bride and groom accompanied by the reading of *dhikr* and continued with the final stage, namely the wedding party involving the entire community, both from the family and the surrounding neighbors. This procession is not only a banquet, but also an expression of gratitude and sharing happiness with the community.

Yasin, "Internalization of Character Education Values in Shaping Elementary School Students' Religious Behavior," *Al-Ishlah: Jurnal Pendidikan* 14, no. 4 (2022): 4723–34.

<sup>8</sup> Afiful Ikhwani, Oktio Frenki Biantoro, and Ali Rohmad, "The Role of the Family in Internalizing Islamic Values," *Dinamika Ilmu* 19, no. 2 (2019): 323–35.

<sup>9</sup> Saeful Anam et al., "The Moral Education and Internalization of Humanitarian Values in Pesantren: A Case Study From Indonesia," *Journal for the Education of Gifted Young Scientists* 7, no. 4 (2019): 815–34.

## Identification of Islamic Educational Values in the *Nemat Kaji* Tradition

**Aqidah Values:** One of the important aspects of the *Nemat Kaji* tradition found in this research is the emphasis on *aqidah*, or belief in Allah, which appears before the marriage contract takes place. In the Malin Deman community, the parties involved in the wedding procession are required to perform *dhikr*, or remember Allah, before starting the marriage contract, and before reading the Koran, they must make *istigfar* to ask forgiveness from Allah. This aims to purify intentions, ensure that the marriage is carried out with full blessings from Allah SWT, and ensure that the implementation of *Nemat Kaji* can run smoothly. The prospective bride and groom, their families, and wedding witnesses said prayers and listened to the reading of the Quran together to ask for His guidance and blessing. This practice shows that Islamic beliefs are highly respected in every aspect of life, including wedding customs, to ensure that all actions are carried out in accordance with religious guidance.

**Worship Value:** In the practice of the *Nemat Kaji* tradition, worship plays a very important role, especially in the form of reading verses from the Quran and prayers. Before the marriage ceremony begins, there is usually a reading of certain *surahs*, such as *surah Al-Fatihah* and *surah Al-Baqarah*, followed by the *Nemat Kaji* event, which reads several short *surahs* in the Quran that are believed to bring blessings to the marriage that will be held. The reading of this prayer is carried out by an imam or religious figure, who leads the *Nemat Kaji* procession. During the wedding procession, prayers are also read to ask for safety, smoothness, and blessings in the newly formed household. This shows that worship is an integral part of this tradition, which connects worldly life with the spiritual aspect of Islam.

**Moral principles:** this principle is highly emphasized in the *Nemat Kaji* tradition, especially in the interactions between families involved in the wedding procession up to the *Nemat Kaji*. One of the main values taught is mutual respect and maintaining ethics in social relationships. In interviews with several families in Malin Deman,

many stated that the *Nemat Kaji* tradition teaches them to always maintain good manners, both before and after marriage. Respect for the extended family, teachers, and older individuals, including the parents of the bride and groom, is considered a form of good morality. This is reflected in how the extended family of the prospective bride and groom visit each other and give advice and give a *punjung* to the *ngaji* teacher as an expression of gratitude for guiding the bride to be able to read and understand the Quran.

Overall, this study shows that in the *Nemat Kaji* tradition, Islamic educational values such as faith, worship, and morals are naturally integrated into the practice of marriage customs. Faith that emphasizes the reminder of Allah before the marriage contract, worship that involves reading prayers and holy verses, and morals that pay attention to ethics between families and respect for religious teachers all become inseparable parts of this tradition. Thus, the custom of *Nemat Kaji* in Malin Deman Mukomuko not only functions as a cultural tradition but also to strengthen self-identity through Islamic educational values in society.<sup>10</sup>

Culture plays an important role as the main foundation that supports the strength and stability of a society. It reflects various values, norms, and customs that form a shared identity. Not only does it strengthen social relations between members of society, culture also serves as a guideline in carrying out daily life.

In the study of Islamic Religious Education (PAI), culture is seen as an effective tool to instill Islamic values into the lives of society. These values contribute greatly to building harmony both socially and spiritually. PAI functions as a bridge that connects religious teachings with local culture in order to

<sup>10</sup> Chuanchen Chuanchen and Abdul Wahid Zaini, "Cultivating Cultural Synergy: Unifying Boarding Schools, Local Wisdom, and Authentic Islamic Values for the Enhancement of Islamic Identity," *Managere: Indonesian Journal of Educational Management* 5, no. 2 (2023): 187–97. Umar Abdullahi Maidugu and Adamu Tanko Isah, "Islamic Education and Its Value: A Vital Means for the Formation National Character," *Bulletin of Islamic Research* 2, no. 4 (2024): 725–44.



create a society that has a strong character, is ethical, and upholds the values of justice.<sup>11</sup>

Therefore, culture can be used as a means to form Islamic educational values in society so that they are more easily accepted. Preservation of culture should be in line with Islamic educational values to support the continued development of Islamic education in each generation.

### Symbolic Contestation: Substantive or Ceremonial Islam

The Islamic symbols used in the *Nemat Kaji* procession have complex layers of meaning. For some people, especially the older generation, the reading of prayers, religious advice, and the involvement of the traditional leader, clan leader, imam, and religious teacher are not just complementary events but are the spiritual core of the marriage. They believe that the blessing of marriage is very dependent on the spiritual power presented through these symbols.

However, there are also many who see that religious symbols are starting to experience a reduction in meaning, especially among the younger generation. These symbols are often only considered as part of customary obligations that must be carried out for the smooth running of the event, not because of a deep theological understanding. This shows a tendency towards formalization of religion in customs, where symbols are present without being accompanied by strong spiritual meaning. Some of the views of the older and younger generations are:

### Older Generation (Baby Boomer) View: Symbols as Reflections of Values

The Baby Boomer generation is the generation after the return of World War II veterans,<sup>12</sup> or as a

group born between 1946 and 1964.<sup>13</sup> Some views of the older generation still strongly believe that every symbol in *Nemat Kaji* contains substantive Islamic values. For example, the ritual of reciting the Quran is considered a collective prayer that unites families and communities in the values of monotheism. This procession is also believed to teach patience, respect, and the importance of parental blessings as part of Islamic morals. For them, symbols are not just a means of cultural communication but also a reminder of the relationship between humans and God. Therefore, they highly value the involvement of imams and religious teachers in the wedding procession because they are considered to maintain the sanctity and blessings of the sacred bond.

The older generation also tends to reject changes or simplification of traditions that are considered to reduce the element of religiosity, although indirectly the simplification process has occurred, because before the 90s, when the bride's *Nemat Kaji* memorized short letters in the 30th juice along with their meanings, it took months to prepare the *Nemat Kaji* tradition, while the current condition is that the bride only reads without having to memorize the Quran. Even in the past, women who did not carry out the *Nemat Kaji* tradition when they got married were considered "inferior" because the *Nemat Kaji* tradition was a symbol of a woman's ability to read the Quran and had completed reading the Quran well. So that when they become mothers, they are truly able to educate their children in Quran education.

### Young Generation (Z) Views: Symbols as Social Formalities

The younger generation (Generation Z) refers to individuals born from the mid-1990s to the late 2000s,<sup>14</sup> with its characteristics acting as a social

<sup>11</sup> Ardianto Ardianto, "The Nature of Culture as the Strength and Stability of Society: The Perspective of Islamic Religious Education," *World Journal of Islamic Learning and Teaching* 1, no. 4 (2024): 39–50.

<sup>12</sup> Britt Slagsvold and Thomas Hansen, "The Baby-Boomer Generation: Another Breed of Elderly People?," in *Generational Tensions and Solidarity within Advanced Welfare States* (Routledge, 2021), 154.

<sup>13</sup> Catherine Reiser, Victoria Van Vreede, and Elizabeth M Petty, "Genetic Counselor Workforce Generational Diversity: Millennials to Baby Boomers," *Journal of Genetic Counseling* 28, no. 4 (2019): 730–37.

<sup>14</sup> Elodie Gentina, "Generation Z in Asia: A Research Agenda," *The New Generation Z in Asia: Dynamics, Differences, Digitalisation*, 2020, 3–19.

influencer<sup>15</sup> and tend to see the *Nemat Kaji* tradition as part of a social obligation, no longer a deep religious experience. They recognize the importance of religious symbols in the wedding procession, but many do not understand the meaning behind it. Several young respondents stated that the presence of an imam or the reading of holy verses is only part of the “customary package” that must be fulfilled in order for the marriage to be blessed and accepted by society.

The younger generation also tends to want to simplify traditions for reasons of time and cost efficiency. This shows a shift in meaning, from substantive Islam to a more ceremonial Islam. However, some others are starting to be interested in exploring the spiritual meaning behind the symbol through digital media or Islamic study communities, which shows a variation in religious awareness within the younger generation itself.

## The Role of Ulama: Guardians of Meaning or Agents of Transformation

The role of customary leaders, clan leaders, and religious scholars, especially mosque imams and religious teachers, plays a very strategic role in maintaining the substance of Islamic teachings in the *Nemat Kaji* tradition. In many cases, they act as guardians of meaning, reminding the community about the importance of intention and sincerity in undergoing marriage. They also function as informal educators, explaining the interpretation of the verses read in the procession to the bride and groom's families. However, amidst social developments and the emergence of new views, some religious scholars have begun to adopt the role of agents of customary reform. Trying to simplify symbols or processions that are considered too burdensome or deviate from the substance of Islam. Islamic scholars and traditional figures tend to encourage more rational and educative practices, such as encouraging the

implementation of *Nemat Kaji*, even though it is only reading and does not have to memorize verses of the Qur'an and its translation, and changing its implementation from previously at night to during the day to facilitate the implementation process and can be attended by many people.

In order for the value of Islamic education in the *Nemat Kaji* tradition to remain alive and relevant, a more reflective and contextual educational approach needs to be taken, especially through strengthening Islamic literacy among the younger generation. Ulama and traditional leaders need to collaborate to maintain the substance of Islam in customs without eliminating local cultural identity.<sup>16</sup> In addition, revitalization of tradition can be done by inserting a deeper religious understanding in each symbol of the procession so that customary practices are not only ceremonial but also become a vehicle for internalizing Islamic values in community life.

The responsibility of the ulama as the leader of educational institutions is to create an educational environment that not only teaches the values of the Quran symbolically but also instills them deeply through real practices that are relevant to social challenges. This environment must support the spiritual, aesthetic, and social action development of students through a reflective and transformative educational culture approach.<sup>17</sup>

Creating a profound and transformative Islamic educational environment requires a strategic role from scholars as guardians and successors of Islamic culture. Scholars not only play a role in conveying religious teachings but are also responsible for guiding students and educational leaders to internalize the values of the Quran contextually and ethically. By encouraging reflection, *tazkiyah*, and social awareness, scholars play an important role in preserving a living, dynamic, and relevant Islamic

<sup>15</sup> Rohan Bhalla, Pinaz Tiwari, and Nimit Chowdhary, "Digital Natives Leading The World: Paragons and Values of Generation Z," in *Generation Z Marketing and Management in Tourism and Hospitality: The Future of the Industry* (Springer, 2021), 3–23.

<sup>16</sup> Abdul Manan and Muhammad Arifin, "Cultural Traditions in Death Rituals within the Community of Pidie, Aceh, Indonesia," *Miqot: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Keislaman* 43, no. 1 (2019): 130–44, <https://d1wgtxts1xzle7.cloudfront.net/68848380/359-libre.pdf?162971187;162971187>;

<sup>17</sup> Fella Lahmar, “Islamic Education: An Islamic ‘Wisdom-Based Cultural Environment’ in a Western Context,” *Religions* 11, no. 8 (2020): 409.

culture amidst the challenges of the times, as well as fostering a generation that is able to maintain the dignity, freedom, and noble values of Islam in community life. Islamic values are not always taught textually but are internalized through symbols, rituals, and collective practices.<sup>18</sup> This allows Islam and local culture to work together in fostering social cohesion and harmonious diversity.<sup>19</sup> The interaction between Islam and local traditions in Indonesian society shows that customary practices are not always positioned as opposed to religious teachings but can become a symbolic negotiation space where Islamic values are interpreted, transmitted, and internalized through the cultural expressions of the community.<sup>20</sup>

## Conclusion

The *Nemat Kaji* tradition in Malin Deman represents a form of acculturation between Islamic teachings and local customs. This tradition embodies Islamic educational values reflected in the dimensions of faith, worship, and morals through religious symbols such as the recitation of verses from the Quran, communal prayer, and the involvement of an imam in wedding ceremonies. However, its implementation presents a social dynamic in the form of a contestation of meaning between substantive understandings and practices that tend to be symbolic and ceremonial. The older generation generally interprets these symbols as expressions of sacred values that must be preserved, while some younger generations view them more as customary obligations without deepening their spiritual meaning. On the other hand, the role of religious scholars demonstrates an ambivalent position, namely between preserving tradition as a

cultural heritage and encouraging reinterpretation so that Islamic educational values remain relevant in the context of local life.

This research opens up space for further, more in-depth studies on the relationship between religion and local culture in other customary practices in the Mukomuko region and similar areas. Further research is suggested to explore aspects of the transformation of Islamic values in the digital generation, with a focus on how technology and social media influence the perception of the younger generation towards religious symbols in customs. In addition, comparative studies between the *Nemat Kaji* tradition and Islamic-based marriage traditions in other regions are also important to see patterns of integration or cultural resistance to religious values. The symbolic anthropology or sociology of Islamic education approach can be a rich methodological basis for exploring these dynamics more broadly.

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<sup>18</sup> Mustamin Mustamin et al., "Islamic Educational Values in Local Wisdom Traditional Tradition of Mappogau Sihanua Karampuang Sinjai District," *IJORE: International Journal of Recent Educational Research* 4, no. 2 (2023): 188–202.

<sup>19</sup> Fauziah Fauziah, "Islam and Local Wisdom: Harmony in The Land of Karo," *SOSIOEDUKASI: JURNAL ILMIAH ILMU PENDIDIKAN DAN SOSIAL* 14, no. 1 (2025): 349–54.

<sup>20</sup> Helfi Helfi et al., "Critique of Khatam Al-Qur'an: Between Orthodoxy and Customary Traditions in Minangkabau," *El Harakah: Jurnal Budaya Islam* 27, no. 1 (2025).

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