
Social Construction of Cultural Acculturation in the Friday Legi Mass in Pohsarang Village, Kediri Regency, Indonesia

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Abstract

This study examines the dynamic relationship between the Catholic Church and local culture within the context of liturgical inculturation in Indonesia. As an institution historically rooted in Western traditions, the Catholic Church is required to engage in dialogue with the cultural diversity of the Indonesian archipelago, which is marked by complex symbols, values, and religious expressions. Liturgical inculturation represents an encounter between faith and culture that seeks to preserve the theological meaning of the liturgy while fostering the development of local religious identity. Within this context, the study aims to explore the forms, meanings, and social implications of inculturation practices in the Indonesian Catholic Church. The primary objective is to analyze the processes and meanings of inculturation in the implementation of Catholic liturgy, particularly in the adaptation of symbols, language, and local cultural expressions within the Eucharistic celebration. This research employs a descriptive qualitative method with a phenomenological approach, informed by the social construction theory of Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann. The findings reveal that liturgical inculturation in Indonesia is not merely aesthetic or symbolic, but constitutes a dialogical and reflective process that integrates Gospel values with local cultural traditions. Furthermore, inculturation strengthens the congregation's sense of belonging while broadening the understanding of catholicity as a universal communion that embraces cultural diversity.

Keywords: *Liturgical inculturation, Catholic Church, Local culture, Religious identity, Social construction*

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INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a multicultural society characterized by religious, cultural, linguistic, and traditional diversity coexisting within the same social space. In this context, religion functions not only as a belief system but also as a social practice that dynamically interacts with cultural and social structures. Koentjaningrat (2009) emphasizes that such diversity shapes distinctive patterns of social relations, including locally grounded religious practices. Interactions between religion and culture often give rise to acculturation processes, namely the encounter and adaptation of different cultural elements within social life. Acculturation is not merely a symbolic amalgamation but involves the restructuring of collective meanings that shape new social identities. In a religious context, this process demonstrates that religious practices are continuously negotiated and adjusted to the social realities in which they are embedded.

The concept of acculturation in religion is not new; it has historically accompanied the spread and development of religions across different societies, including Indonesia. Theoretically, Redfield, Linton, and Herskovits (as cited in Berry, 2005) define acculturation as a process in which groups with different cultural backgrounds engage in continuous, direct contact, leading to changes in the cultural patterns of one or both groups.

From a sociological perspective, social processes arising from cultural contact often generate negotiation, adaptation, and even tension within communities. Conflict and interaction emerging from such encounters may function not only as challenges but also as mechanisms that strengthen group identity and social cohesion, as explained in Coser's functional conflict theory (Iroth & Fauzi, 2025).

Within catholic religious practice, acculturation is commonly referred to as inculturation, namely in the integration of church teachings with local cultural elements without compromising the core of the Catholic faith. Numerous examples of inculturation can be found in Indonesia. Krismiyanto (2021) notes that catholic churches such as the Sacred Heart of Jesus Church in Ganjuran, Yogyakarta, have long practiced inculturation through Javanese-style architecture and liturgy, including the use of batik motifs and gamelan accompaniment during Mass. Similar practices are also evident in customary Masses in East Nusa Tenggara, where local languages and cultural elements are

integrated into Catholic liturgy, demonstrating the profound social and symbolic value of inculturation for the faithful.

A particularly compelling example of acculturation can be found in Pohsarang Village, Kediri Regency, East Java. This village is home to Pohsarang Church, one of Indonesia's prominent Catholic pilgrimage sites. Within this church complex, Catholics regularly celebrate the Friday Legi Mass, a special Mass held according to the Javanese calendar cycle of Friday Legi, which concretely integrates Catholic religious values with Javanese cultural traditions.

Sugiyanto (2019) explains that in this liturgical celebration, the use of the Javanese language plays a central role, as prayers and homilies are delivered in refined Javanese. Liturgical songs are no longer performed in Latin or standard Indonesian hymns but take the form of traditional Javanese *tembang*, often accompanied by gamelan music. This combination creates a worship atmosphere deeply embedded in local cultural sensibilities. The integration of culture into this religious ritual is not merely a routine liturgical practice but represents a concrete manifestation of Catholic inculturation within Javanese culture.

The cultural elements present in the Friday Legi Mass function not merely as liturgical ornaments but operate as cultural symbols that produce collective meaning within social life. Gamelan music, for instance, does not merely serve as musical accompaniment but represents the sacredness and serenity characteristic of Javanese culture, shaping a distinctive religious atmosphere. The use of refined Javanese language functions as a symbol of cultural intimacy, reinforcing the connection between Catholic religious practice and local identity. Meanwhile, the Friday Legi calendar and the nighttime celebration introduce symbolic dimensions of sacred time and space, understood in Javanese cosmology as moments imbued with special spiritual significance. The combination of these symbols creates a religious experience that is meaningful not only for Catholic residents but also as part of the village's shared social reality. This shows that religious practices are continuously shaped through interaction with local culture and social structures, forming a negotiated religious expression within society (Fauzi et al. 2018).

The Friday Legi Mass thus represents a complex symbol of acculturation in which

culture, identity, and local spirituality intertwine. However, the process of acceptance did not unfold smoothly. Based on observations and preliminary interviews with local residents, the practice initially drew objections from surrounding residents, most of whom are non-Catholic or of different religious backgrounds. Noise generated by gamelan music during nighttime hours was perceived as disturbing rest and environmental tranquility. Several residents voiced complaints directly, giving rise to natural forms of resistance. This situation marked an early friction between Catholic cultural–religious expression and local social norms prioritizing environmental calm. Such resistance illustrates how new religious practices undergo processes of social negotiation and construction before being accepted as part of shared community reality (Azizah & Fauzi, 2021).

This phenomenon indicates that inculturative practices are not universally accepted. Drawing on Berger and Luckmann’s (1966) theory of social construction, religious practices are understood as social actions that must undergo processes of externalization, objectivation, and internalization to be recognized as a shared social reality. Accordingly, the Friday Legi Mass can be viewed as a social arena in which religious meaning, local identity, and social negotiation are produced and exchanged.

Based on these dynamics, this study aims to analyze how the people of Pohsarang Village, both and non-Catholic, respond to and interpret the inculturative practice of the Friday Legi Masas as a part of their social life. Using a qualitative approach grounded in the sociology of religion, this research positions religious ritual as a social practice that shapes meaning, power relations, and social cohesion within a pluralistic society.

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative, descriptive research design. This approach was chosen because it enables an in-depth and comprehensive exploration of social phenomena occurring within society, particularly in understanding how the community of Pohsarang Village constructs meaning around the practice of cultural acculturation in the Friday Legi Mass. The research is grounded in the social construction theory proposed by Peter L Berger and Thomas Luckmann, which posits that social reality is formed through the processes of externalization, objectivation, and internalization. Accordingly, a qualitative method is considered highly appropriate, as it allows the researcher to closely examine

these social processes in detail. The study was conducted in Pohsarang Village, Semen District, Kediri Regency, East Java. The research period was planned to span six months, from May to October 2025.

Purposive sampling was employed to determine the research subjects. This technique involves deliberately selecting informants based on predetermined criteria relevant to the research objectives (Moleong, 2017). The subjects included key figures with authority or in-depth knowledge, such as religious leaders (priests, church administrators, or liturgical leaders). Local cultural figures or cultural practitioners who possess a strong understanding of Javanese traditions and their relationship with Catholic teachings, catholic congregants who regularly participate in the Friday Legi Mass, as well as non-Catholic residents living in the vicinity of the Mass location who are able to provide external perspectives on the continuity of the practice.

Several data collection techniques were utilized in this study, including:

1. Observation, conducted to directly examine cultural practices in the field, particularly during the implementation of the Friday Legi Mass.
2. In-depth interviews, which served as the primary data collection technique, were conducted by the researcher to capture detailed and nuanced perspectives from the informants.

Based on their sources, the data used in this study are categorized into two types:

1. Primary data, which consists of the main data collected directly by the researcher from research subjects in the field.
2. Secondary data, which includes supporting data obtained from existing sources that are relevant to the focus of the research.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Factors contributing to initial community resistance toward the Friday legi mass

Based on interview findings, the initial resistance of non-Catholic residents toward the Friday Legi Mass emerged from four main factors: acoustic disturbance, infrastructural

impact, psychological burden, and unfamiliarity with changes in the surrounding environment.

First, Acoustic Disturbance as the Most Dominant Factor. Among all non-Catholic informants, noise disturbance was the most frequently mentioned concern. Mr. Slamet stated that the sound of the gamelan and loudspeakers could be heard clearly from his house. He explained, “The sound of the gamelan and the speakers was very loud and reached our home. My family and I were initially disturbed, especially because the children had difficulty sleeping.”

However, community perceptions of the gamelan sound were not entirely negative. Mr. Slamet also noted, “The gamelan sound is loud but also soft in a way, sometimes it gives goosebumps, but at other times it feels calming.” This indicates that the disturbance experienced by residents was not merely physical, but also related to emotional and cultural experiences.

A similar perspective was expressed by Mr. Suyatno, who perceived the sound of the gamelan at night as creating a mystical yet soothing atmosphere, although it still had the potential to be disruptive, particularly late at night. Meanwhile, Mr. Samidi described a more practical response: “The sound reached my house; at first it was disturbing, but over time we became accustomed to it.” From the perspective of Catholic congregants, residents' complaints were considered understandable. Santoso acknowledged that “it is reasonable for some people to feel disturbed, because the Mass is held late at night.” Sentot expressed similar empathy, while emphasizing that the sound of the Mass is an integral part of church traditions.

Second, Infrastructural Impact and Mobility. Resistance also stemmed from issues with road access and parking during the Mass. Mr. Slamet explained that the large number of vehicles narrowed the roads and hindered residents' mobility. This was reinforced by Mr. Dhenny, who stated that the narrow village roads became increasingly congested and noisy during the event.

Nevertheless, some residents also recognized positive aspects. Informants such as Mr. Slamet and Mr. Samidi acknowledged that the crowd generated economic benefits for local food stalls, as many visitors purchased food and beverages. This suggests that residents did not focus solely on inconvenience, but were also able to recognize

accompanying benefits.

Third, Psychological Burden and the Process of Habituation. The psychological burden experienced by residents tended to be mild and emerged gradually. Mr. Slamet described it as a minor irritation whenever his sleep was disturbed, while Mr. Suyatno referred to it as discomfort that did not significantly affect daily life. Over time, habituation played a crucial role in reducing resistance. Several residents, including Mr. Samidi and Mr. Slamet, stated that their families gradually adapted and no longer experienced the same level of disturbance as before.

Fourth, Unfamiliarity with environmental change. A sudden change in the village atmosphere also triggered initial resistance. Mr. Suyatno recalled being surprised when, on Friday Legi nights, the usually quiet village suddenly became crowded with people and vehicles extending to the front of his house. This situation created a form of “cultural shock” that required time to adapt.

Adaptation and communication strategies implemented by Pohsarang Church

The adaptation strategies implemented by Pohsarang Church were not merely technical, but also reflected processes of symbolic communication and intergroup dialogue. The initial resistance processes of symbolic communication and intergroup dialogue. The initial resistance of non-catholic residents can be understood as a breakdown in early communication between the church institution and the surrounding community, in which ritual practices were perceived solely as disturbances, without adequate understanding of their religious and cultural context.

First, Informal dialogical communication. The most prominent characteristic of the negotiation process between the church and residents was its informal and non-bureaucratic nature. Mr. Slamet explained that when residents felt disturbed, they directly spoke with the church committee after the Mass without the need for formal meetings. Mr. Suyatno shared a similar experience, noting that discussions were typically small and casual, involving informal conversations between residents and church organizers. During these discussions, residents expressed their concerns and the committee responded by offering adjustments, such as lowering speaker volume or organizing parking to avoid blocking road

access. Such informal processes proved effective in preventing potential conflict escalation. Mr. Samidi emphasized that resolutions were usually straightforward: residents voiced complaints, the committee listened, and commitments to make improvements were given.

Mr. Dhenny added that economic benefits, such as increased activity at local stalls during the event, also made dialogue more fluid. This created a negotiation atmosphere that was not solely problem-oriented, but also considered shared benefits. Formal figures such as the village head and local security were present as mediators but did not impose authority. Santoso noted that their role was primarily to maintain constructive communication; in this process, church leaders, community figures, and village authorities functioned as opinion leaders who mediated messages, reduced tension, and framed the Friday Legi Mass as a legitimate religious cultural practice that did not threaten social order. This distribution of communicative authority prevented conflicts from escalating into open confrontation.

Second, Technical adjustments in implementation. The church also implemented several adjustments in response to its residents' concerns. Residents confirmed that the volume of the gamelan and loudspeaker had been reduced and was more tolerable compared to earlier periods. Mr. Slamet stated, "The gamelan is not as loud now; it can still be heard, but it's much more tolerable." Similar statements were made by Mr. Suyatno and Mr. Samidi, including the provision of advance notice for large events.

From the catholic congregants' perspective, these adjustments did not diminish the spiritual meaning of the Mass. Santoso explained that reducing the volume did not affect the essence of worship, as long as the liturgical sequence remained intact. Sentot added that although he initially felt some loss because the gamelan created a distinctive atmosphere, he understood the residents concerns and supported the adjustments to maintain harmonious relations.

Last, Transparency and ongoing communication. One strategy that residents found particularly helpful was the provision of advance information prior to major events. Residents felt more comfortable when informed in advance, especially about potential crowds or the use of loudspeakers. Mr Suyatno explained that such communication made residents feel respected and included in the process. Mr. Samidi also confirmed that church

organizers now more frequently provide information before specific events. This transparency helped minimize unexpected disruption that could trigger discomfort, while strengthening mutual respect.

Acceptance and internalization of the Friday legi mass as a shared cultural identity

Changes in non-Catholic residents' attitudes toward the Friday Legi mass did not occur instantly or spontaneously. The acceptance process developed gradually through mechanisms of social habituation, repeated communication, and symbolic adjustments made by the church. In this context, internalization reflected not only individual acceptance, but also the normalization of ritual practices within village social life.

First, Transformation of perceptions: from disturbance to appreciation. Non-Catholic residents experienced a significant shift in perspective. Initially, the Friday Legi Mass was perceived as disruptive due to crowd density and loud gamelan sounds. Over time, and with more open communication, residents began to understand the spiritual significance of the Mass for Catholic congregants.

Mr. Slamet explained that his perception changed after learning about the spiritual and traditional aspects of the Mass. Mr. Suyatno similarly noted that he now views the Mass not merely as a source of disturbance, but as an important form of worship for Catholics. As the Friday Legi Mass gradually became framed as a marker of the village's cultural identity in public discourse, the ritual was no longer understood solely as a Catholic religious activity, but underwent a shift in meaning into a socially naturalized cultural identity.

Although this transformation is often interpreted as a success of cultural dialogue, it must be examined critically from a sociological perspective. Acceptance of the Friday Legi Mass did not occur within a neutral social space, but through gradual normalization. Repetitive ritual, symbolic legitimacy provided by religious and village authorities, and economic benefits experienced by residents collectively fostered social habituation, positioning the Mass as something "normal" and difficult to contest. In this context, there is potential for symbolic hegemonization, in which certain cultural practices become naturalized as village identity without fully reflective consent. Nevertheless, this process also demonstrates ongoing negotiation between religious interests, cultural values, and social harmony within a plural society.

At the same time, internalization must be read critically. Social acceptance of the Friday Legi Mass is inseparable from subtle cultural power relations. Regular ritual practice, institutional support, and economic benefits contributed to the formation of social consensus that tended to suppress open resistance. In this context, tolerance emerged not solely from moral awareness, but also from symbolic normalization that framed the practice as “reasonable” and “acceptable.”

Second, Redefining tolerance in the local context. Informants narrative indicate that tolerance in Pohsarang Village is not understood passively. Instead, tolerance is perceived as an active process of mutual adjustment and consideration of each community's needs. Mr. Slamet defined tolerance as “mutual understanding and small adjustments,” while Mr. Suyatno emphasized the importance of restraint and the ability to coexist despite differences. This perspective suggests that tolerance does not require uniformity, but rather effective management of differences, which prevents social friction.

From the Catholic community perspective, tolerance was expressed through willingness to make technical adjustments, such as lowering the volume of the gamelan. Sentot stated that he accepted these changes to preserve harmony with surrounding residents. This indicates that both sides actively participated in negotiation processes.

Third, Economic impact as an integrative factor. Economic dimensions also played an important role in the internalization process. The Mass attracted many visitors from outside the area, thereby stimulating the local economy. Residents who owned food stalls experienced increased sales, while others were involved as parking attendants, security personnel, or vendors. Mr. Slamet acknowledged these positive impacts, while Santoso and Mr. Dhenny emphasized that economic benefits facilitated more familial and cooperative dialogue. This economic interdependence strengthened social relations between non-Catholic residents and Catholic congregants, fostering a sense of mutual reliance.

Fourth, Contributions to social harmony. Overall, both non-Catholic and catholic residents perceived the Friday Legi Mass as contributing to village social harmony. After initial tensions and prolonged negotiation processes, both communities developed greater mutual understanding. Mr. Slamet stated that the Mass served as an example of how religious differences do not necessarily lead to conflict. Similar views were expressed by Mr. Suyatno and Mr. Samidi, who observed increased understanding and closeness

between residents and Catholic congregants.

From the Catholic perspective, Sentot and Suwaji noted that the Mass encouraged congregants to be more sensitive to their surroundings, while non-Catholic residents learned to understand Catholic needs. This process reinforced a culture of coexistence amid diversity that has long characterized Javanese society, particularly in traditional villages such as Pohsarang.

CONCLUSION

This study finds that the initial resistance of non Catholic residents toward the Friday Legi Mass in Pohsarang Village did not stem from intolerance, but rather form a reasonable response to changes that disrupted everyday life, the sound of gamelan and loudspeakers late at night emerged as the primary source of disturbance, compounded by traffic congestion, restricted mobility, and recurring sleep disruption, in addition, residents were initially unaccustomed to the sudden transformation of the village environment into a crowded and lively space.

This resistance was not entirely negative. An element of cultural ambivalence was evident: while residents felt disturbed, they also continued to value the gamelan as part of Javanese cultural heritage. Changes in residents' attitudes occurred gradually through processes of habituation, increased understanding of the Mass's spiritual significance for catholic congregants, and recognition of the economic benefits generated for the village.

Adaptation strategies implemented by Pohsarang Church played a significant role in reducing social tensions. Communication between the church and local residents was informal and direct, facilitating the expression of complaints and enabling swift adjustments. These adjustments included lowering the volume of the gamelan, redirecting speakers, and reorganizing parking areas. The church also began providing prior information when large events were scheduled.

For Catholic congregants, these technical adjustments were not perceived as diminishing the spiritual meaning of the Mass. Instead, they were interpreted as expressions of mutual respect. Among non-Catholic residents, a shift in perspective occurred: the Mass, which was initially regarded as a disturbance, gradually came to be understood as an

important religious event and as part of the village's tradition. The Friday Legi Mass was not only accepted as a Catholic religious practice, but was also socially constructed as a marker of Pohsarang cultural identity. This process indicates that acceptance developed through the mechanism of symbolic normalization, repeated communication, and subtle cultural power relations operating within everyday social life.

This study affirms that inkulturative practices such as the Friday Legi Mass cannot be understood merely as natural expressions of cultural harmony. Rather, they function as arenas for the production of meaning, symbolic communication, and negotiation of cultural power. The case of Pohsarang Village demonstrates that tolerance and social cohesion are built through complex social processes involving initial resistance, habituation, and gradual symbolic legitimation. These findings contribute to the field of sociology of religion by positioning religious rituals as social practices that actively shape identity, power relations, and collective life within plural societies.

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