

Purifying Ritual, Reworking Tradition: Muhammadiyah and the Transformation of Local Religious Practices in Indonesia

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Abstract

This article examines how Muhammadiyah's purification movement transformed local religious rituals in Indonesia without assuming that reform simply eliminated tradition. Using qualitative historical-anthropological document analysis, it interprets organizational texts, classical ethnographies, historical studies, and local case research published no later than 2022. The findings identify five recurrent modes of change: removing sacral claims considered incompatible with tawhid; simplifying ritual sequences; substituting communal recitation or social service for contested ceremonies; reinterpreting cultural symbols; and selectively accommodating practices classified as social custom rather than worship. Ritual transformation varied by region, generation, organizational authority, and the social functions performed by particular ceremonies. Purification strengthened scriptural authority, reduced costly obligations, and standardized worship, but it could also weaken reciprocal solidarity, aesthetic expression, and local legitimacy when implemented through categorical denunciation. Since the early 2000s, cultural *da'wa* has partially recalibrated this approach by distinguishing theological correction from cultural erasure. The article concludes that Muhammadiyah's historical impact is best understood as ritual reconfiguration: local traditions were contested, displaced, translated, or reproduced within a new reformist moral order.

Keywords: Muhammadiyah; purification; local rituals; cultural *da'wa*; religious change.

INTRODUCTION

Muhammadiyah has long been associated with the purification of Indonesian Islam from practices described as *takhayyul*, *bid'ah*, and *khurafat*: superstitious beliefs, unwarranted religious innovations, and legendary or magical claims. This reformist vocabulary shaped public images of Muhammadiyah as a movement that opposed grave veneration, ritual meals for the dead, spirit offerings, sacred objects, calendrical taboos, and other local practices lacking explicit authorization in the Qur'an and Sunnah. In many communities, joining Muhammadiyah therefore involved more than accepting new doctrines. It changed how families buried their dead, celebrated births, arranged marriages, visited graves, interpreted illness, organized village festivals, and participated in reciprocal obligations (Noer, 1973; Alfian, 1989; Peacock, 1978; Nakamura, 2012; Junaidi, 2022).

The standard narrative describes this process as a conflict between pure Islam and syncretic tradition. That binary is analytically inadequate. Local ritual is rarely a single theological proposition that can simply be accepted or rejected. A *slametan*, for example, may simultaneously express prayer, kinship reciprocity, neighborhood membership, commensality, respect for ancestors, protection from misfortune, and status. Participants do not necessarily agree about its supernatural meaning. Conversely, purification is not only a doctrinal judgment. It redistributes authority from ritual specialists and inherited custom toward texts, teachers, organizational rulings, schools, and standardized religious

knowledge. It also produces new collective practices, not merely absences (Geertz, 1960; Woodward, 1989; Bowen, 1993; Beatty, 1999; Pranowo, 2009).

The phrase 'shifting local rituals' in the present study therefore refers to changes in ritual form, meaning, sponsorship, timing, participation, and authority. Some ceremonies disappear among Muhammadiyah families. Others survive as social gatherings stripped of sacral claims. Some are replaced by Qur'anic study, public preaching, charitable giving, or a concise memorial lecture. Elsewhere, members attend relatives' ceremonies for social reasons while withholding theological assent. In still other settings, cultural da'wa modifies local symbols gradually rather than confronting them directly. These variations show that purification operates through negotiation as well as prohibition.

The historical problem is equally important. Muhammadiyah was founded in 1912 within the cultural world of Yogyakarta's Kauman neighborhood, not outside Javanese society. Ahmad Dahlan and several early supporters had court connections, used Javanese language and etiquette, and did not immediately construct a comprehensive campaign against all local cultural expression. Burhani (2006, 2010) argues that the movement's more sharply puritan profile consolidated during the 1930s as Majelis Tarjih expanded, non-Javanese reformist influences entered the organization, and religious positions became more systematically codified. This history complicates claims that Muhammadiyah possessed one unchanging attitude toward culture from its foundation.

Purification also generated uneven consequences. It could liberate households from expensive ritual obligations, fear of spirits, and dependence on specialists. It promoted direct prayer to God, scriptural literacy, hygienic burial, and more standardized worship. Yet categorical attacks on deeply embedded ceremonies sometimes alienated rural communities, fractured families, or made Muhammadiyah appear culturally dry and socially distant. Studies of local art and ritual report ambivalence among members who reject sacralization but still value communal solidarity, language, music, and inherited identity (Chamim et al., 2003; Khisbiah et al., 2003; Umar, 2017).

By the early twenty-first century, Muhammadiyah had formally articulated cultural da'wa as an effort to engage society's cultural capacities while maintaining purification. The concept, adopted through the 2002 Denpasar Tanwir and developed in subsequent organizational deliberations, distinguished cultural dynamization from the purification of elements considered contrary to Islamic teaching (Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah, 2004; Basit, 2011). This did not abolish doctrinal boundaries. Official guidance continued to reject ceremonies believed to transfer religious efficacy to the dead, spirits, objects, or calendrical sequences. The change lay in strategy, classification, and tone: culture was increasingly treated as a field of interpretation and transformation rather than an undifferentiated residue of pre-Islamic religion.

This article asks three questions. First, how did Muhammadiyah's purification movement alter local religious rituals across different historical phases and social settings? Second, through what mechanisms were practices removed, simplified, substituted, reinterpreted, or accommodated? Third, what religious and social consequences followed from these transformations? The article argues that Muhammadiyah did not simply cause

ritual decline. It reorganized ritual life around tawhid, textual authority, organizational discipline, pedagogical gatherings, and social service. The outcome was a reformist ritual order that remained locally negotiated and internally contested.

METHOD

This study uses qualitative historical-anthropological document analysis. It is not a systematic literature review and does not claim exhaustive retrieval or quantitative synthesis. The purpose is interpretive: to reconstruct changing organizational orientations and explain mechanisms of ritual transformation by reading official Muhammadiyah texts alongside historical and ethnographic scholarship. The source cutoff is 31 December 2022; no publication issued after 2022 is used as evidence or included in the references.

The corpus comprises four categories. The first consists of organizational documents and authoritative statements, including the *Pedoman Hidup Islami Warga Muhammadiyah*, *Dakwah Kultural Muhammadiyah*, *tarjih*-oriented guidance on contested ceremonies, and congress or *tanwir* formulations (Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah, 2000, 2004, 2010). These sources establish normative classifications but cannot by themselves demonstrate grassroots practice. The second category contains histories of Muhammadiyah and Indonesian Islamic reform, particularly works by Noer, Peacock, Alfian, Burhani, Nakamura, and Saleh. The third includes classic anthropological studies of Javanese and Indonesian ritual by Geertz, Woodward, Beatty, Bowen, Ricklefs, and others. The fourth comprises local case studies on cultural *da'wa*, ritual modification, artistic reproduction, and changing interpretations among Muhammadiyah communities.

Documents were read through a conceptual coding frame with six elements: the ritual object being contested; the theological diagnosis applied to it; the social functions attributed to it; the reform mechanism used; the institutional actors involved; and the resulting form of practice. Temporal comparison distinguished an early culturally embedded phase, a period of codified purification, a phase of organizational expansion and ritual standardization, and a later cultural-*da'wa* recalibration. The phases are analytical rather than sharply bounded; different branches moved at different speeds.

Ritual change was classified into five modes. Elimination refers to abandonment of a practice or its sacral component. Simplification reduces sequence, expenditure, or ceremonial personnel. Substitution replaces a disputed ritual with another collective activity, such as preaching, Qur'anic recitation, or charity. Reinterpretation retains an external form while changing its stated meaning. Accommodation permits a cultural practice when it is classified as custom, art, or social interaction rather than prescribed worship. These categories can overlap within a single event.

The analysis treats official doctrine, leader discourse, and member behavior as distinct levels. A *tarjih* judgment does not automatically describe what all members do. Likewise, a local hybrid practice does not necessarily represent organizational policy. This distinction is essential because Muhammadiyah is a large decentralized movement whose members participate in kinship and village networks extending beyond organizational

boundaries. The article therefore makes claims about dominant tendencies and documented variations, not uniform national compliance.

Three limitations should be stated. First, the accessible scholarship is geographically weighted toward Java and selected cases in Sumatra and Sulawesi. Second, ritual conflict is often narrated by organizational elites, while women, ritual hosts, artists, and non-Muhammadiyah neighbors are less fully represented. Third, historical labels such as syncretism and superstition can reproduce reformist or colonial classifications. The article uses them only when explaining actors' categories and otherwise analyzes practices through their multiple meanings and social functions.

Table 1. Analytical Periodization of Muhammadiyah's Engagement with Local Rituals

Period	Dominant orientation	Institutional mechanism	Typical ritual effect
1912-late 1920s	Reform embedded in Javanese social and courtly culture	Schools, preaching, exemplary practice, early organizational formation	Selective correction; continued use of local language, etiquette, and cultural media
1930s-1960s	Codification of purification and stronger boundary making	Majelis Tarjih, standardized rulings, cadre formation, national expansion	Rejection of sacralized custom; simplification of worship and life-cycle ceremonies
1970s-1990s	Mass institutionalization and differentiation from traditionalist Islam	Schools, mosques, publications, urban professional networks	Normalization of a distinct Muhammadiyah ritual style; local hybrid practices persist
2002-2022	Cultural-da'wa recalibration within continued commitment to tawhid	Tanwir formulations, cultural institutions, contextual preaching, revised methodological discourse	Reinterpretation and selective accommodation; purification reframed as desacralization rather than cultural erasure

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. From Culturally Embedded Reform to Codified Purification

The sources indicate that Muhammadiyah's relationship with local ritual was historically produced rather than fixed at its founding. Ahmad Dahlan emerged from Kauman, a neighborhood organized around the Yogyakarta court mosque. Early members included religious officials, merchants, teachers, and Javanese elites. Their reform language emphasized returning to scripture, correcting the qibla, modernizing education, strengthening charity, and making religion ethically consequential. It did not require the abandonment of Javanese speech, dress, etiquette, artistic media, or all inherited ceremonies (Burhani, 2010; Nakamura, 2012).

Early Muhammadiyah could therefore be culturally Javanese while religiously reformist. Burhani's historical work notes the organization's use of local idioms and its intimate relation to the court environment. A wayang performance reportedly accompanied the 1925 congress, demonstrating that cultural media were not inherently excluded. The foundational distinction was less between Islam and Java than between practices

considered morally or theologically defensible and those seen as obstructing rational devotion and social progress. The boundary remained fluid because institutional mechanisms for issuing and disseminating uniform rulings were still developing.

The formation and growing authority of Majelis Tarjih in the late 1920s and 1930s changed this configuration. Religious questions increasingly received formal answers grounded in textual evidence, comparative jurisprudence, and organizational deliberation. Expansion beyond Yogyakarta also brought reformist influences from West Sumatra and coastal Java, where polemics against customary religion and traditional authority could be sharper. Burhani (2006) identifies this period as an ideological movement from cultural tendency toward puritanical tendency. The point is not that cultural sensibility vanished, but that the official center of gravity shifted toward standardized boundary making.

Codification transformed purification into an organizational technology. Members no longer depended solely on a charismatic teacher's contextual judgment. Manuals, fatwas, sermons, schools, and cadre programs circulated classifications across branches. Practices associated with invoking spirits, seeking intercession from graves, assigning religious efficacy to incense or offerings, or fixing commemorations on the third, seventh, fortieth, hundredth, and thousandth days after death could be judged against a common doctrinal standard. The process created recognizable Muhammadiyah ritual identity even where members remained a minority.

The familiar TBC formula condensed this identity into a moral campaign. Takhayyul indicated imagined causal powers unsupported by revelation or evidence; bid'ah marked additions to prescribed worship; khurafat referred to legendary or superstitious beliefs. In practice, the categories often overlapped and were applied unevenly. Their rhetorical force lay in converting diverse customs into a manageable field of correction. Their weakness was that they could flatten distinctions among theology, symbolism, art, kinship, and reciprocal exchange.

Purification also aligned with the movement's modern educational project. Scriptural literacy, printed guidance, classroom instruction, and rational explanation displaced orally inherited ritual expertise. The authoritative religious actor became the trained preacher, teacher, or tarjih scholar rather than the dukun, shrine custodian, or elder who possessed localized esoteric knowledge. Ritual reform thus changed the sociology of knowledge as much as the content of belief (Peacock, 1978; Saleh, 2001).

2. Death, Commemoration, and the Reorganization of Communal Solidarity

Death rituals became one of the most visible fields of differentiation. In many Indonesian communities, burial is followed by communal meals and recitations held on calendrically significant nights. These gatherings distribute food, mobilize neighbors, reaffirm kinship, and provide emotional support. They may also be understood as transferring merit to the deceased or protecting the household from spiritual danger. Muhammadiyah criticism focuses primarily on fixed ceremonial schedules and beliefs that the sequence possesses prescribed religious efficacy without sufficient scriptural basis (Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah, 2021).

Among committed Muhammadiyah families, the resulting ritual style is usually shorter and less expensive. Burial, condolence, prayer, debt settlement, and assistance to the bereaved are retained, while recurring *selamatan* may be omitted. This can reduce financial burdens on households already facing loss. It also rejects the paradox in which the bereaved family must feed large groups to satisfy customary expectation. Purification in this domain therefore has an economic and ethical dimension in addition to doctrinal reasoning.

Elimination, however, is not the only outcome. Local Muhammadiyah communities have created substitutes such as *tabligh musibah*, a memorial sermon or gathering that provides consolation and religious instruction without reproducing the full traditional sequence. Comparative research on Bengkulu death ceremonies shows that such substitutes can perform functions resembling older customs even while claiming a different theological basis. Reform therefore generates new ritual forms whose distinction lies in authorized content, timing, and stated purpose rather than the absence of collective gathering.

Participation is further complicated by mixed families and neighborhoods. A Muhammadiyah member may decline to lead *tahlilan* yet attend a relative's event to maintain kinship, help with logistics, or offer condolences. Another may recite Qur'anic passages but reject the idea that the appointed day is religiously obligatory. Such practices demonstrate layered assent. The external act does not reveal a single belief, and organizational identity does not dissolve social obligations.

The social cost of uncompromising withdrawal can be significant. In villages where ritual attendance indexes neighborliness, refusal may be interpreted as arrogance, lack of sympathy, or rejection of communal life. The issue is not merely theological misunderstanding. Ritual meals operate as systems of reciprocity accumulated over decades. Withdrawing from them changes expectations about who will assist whom in future crises. Successful reform therefore requires alternative forms of solidarity rather than doctrinal prohibition alone.

Muhammadiyah's welfare orientation provides resources for such alternatives. Donations to the poor, support for funeral expenses, collective labor, orphan care, and medical assistance can translate remembrance into social benefit. The theological logic resembles *al-Ma'un*: devotion is validated through service. Yet the evidence suggests that substitution is inconsistent. Where a branch removes ceremonies without building equivalent support, local residents may experience purification as social subtraction rather than ethical improvement.

3. Life-Cycle Rites, Sacred Places, and Protective Practices

Purification affected a broad range of life-cycle rites beyond funerals. Birth, circumcision, pregnancy, marriage, house construction, harvest, and recovery from illness often carried offerings, auspicious calculations, protective objects, or prescribed ceremonial sequences. Muhammadiyah preaching questioned causal claims attributed to dates, directions, heirlooms, spirits, and ritual specialists. Prayer, medical treatment, informed planning, and ordinary social celebration were separated from acts understood to compromise *tawhid*.

The most direct reform mechanism was desacralization. A family meal after a birth could remain permissible as gratitude and hospitality, while an offering intended for unseen beings was rejected. A wedding could preserve local clothing, language, music, and communal celebration, but calculations believed to determine metaphysical compatibility could be treated as nonbinding. Grave visitation could remain as remembrance of death and prayer to God, while requests addressed to the deceased or expectations of supernatural power from the site were condemned. The same material practice could therefore move from forbidden to acceptable when its attributed efficacy changed.

This distinction appears clear in doctrine but is difficult to police in practice because symbols carry multiple interpretations. Incense may be used as an offering, a marker of sacred atmosphere, a fragrance, or an inherited aesthetic object. Food may be directed to spirits, shared with neighbors, or both according to different participants. A sacred spring may be a site of supernatural petition, communal identity, environmental value, and tourism. Purification often selects the theological interpretation as decisive, whereas anthropological analysis reveals a field of contested meanings.

The movement's emphasis on medicine and education also displaced ritual responses to illness. Clinics, hospitals, vaccination, hygiene campaigns, and health instruction provided institutional alternatives to divination and magical healing. This did not eliminate spiritual practices; prayer and Qur'anic recitation remained important. The difference lay in rejecting specialists who claimed autonomous occult power and integrating religious confidence with empirical treatment. In this sense, ritual change was embedded in a larger transformation of causal reasoning.

Sacred geography presented another tension. Muhammadiyah generally discouraged pilgrimage practices that treated graves or objects as mediators of blessing. This reform reduced the authority of custodians and local lineages whose status depended on sacred sites. Yet the movement did not erase historical memory. Ahmad Dahlan's grave, for example, is deliberately simple and functions symbolically as a sign of anti-cultic reform. Even an austere grave becomes a material carrier of collective identity, illustrating that purification cannot remove symbolism from religious life; it produces a different symbolism of simplicity and directness.

Local responses varied. In strong Muhammadiyah enclaves, reformist burial, marriage, and devotional forms became normalized and transmitted through schools and families. In mixed areas, members developed hybrids, separating private conviction from public participation. In settings where customary institutions were central to political and kinship authority, reform proceeded gradually through family engagement and reinterpretation. The Mappogau Hanua case in Sinjai shows cultural da'wa modifying understandings and stages of a customary ritual rather than demanding immediate wholesale abandonment (Umar, 2017).

4. Arts, Festivals, and the Boundary between Worship and Culture

The movement's relation to local art reveals the limits of a purely ritual analysis. Music, dance, theater, dress, and festival often accompany ceremonies. When the ceremony is classified as *bid'ah* or *shirk*, its artistic forms may be rejected by association even if they do not independently carry the contested belief. Research on Muhammadiyah and north-

coast Javanese art describes a narrowing of aesthetic space under the dominance of formal-juridical perspectives. Local arts linked to saint festivals, shrine traditions, or syncretic narratives could be viewed as religiously contaminated (Chamim et al., 2003).

This produced what critics called cultural dryness: a strong capacity for schools, hospitals, and administration but limited symbolic and aesthetic engagement with popular communities. The criticism should not be generalized to every period or branch. Muhammadiyah youth groups used marching bands, theater, songs, uniforms, and modern visual culture. Early leaders communicated in Javanese, and some preachers used wayang. The issue was not the absence of culture but the privileging of modern organizational culture over inherited ritual art.

The distinction between ritual and art is itself historically unstable. A wayang performance can be entertainment, moral education, court tradition, communal offering, or all of these. A village festival may include agricultural gratitude, spirit beliefs, market exchange, political display, and tourism. When purification requires a single classification, it risks either permitting theological elements under the label of culture or prohibiting cultural creativity because of its ritual genealogy.

Cultural da'wa attempts to address this problem through selective transformation. It affirms human beings as cultural agents and treats art as a medium for ethical communication, while continuing to purify elements considered contrary to tawhid. In this model, the task is not to preserve every inherited form unchanged. It is to identify beneficial meanings, remove sacral claims judged unacceptable, and reproduce artistic forms for new purposes. The result may be a festival that retains music and communal participation while replacing offerings with charity or public education.

This approach changes the preacher's role. Instead of approaching a community with a predetermined list of prohibitions, the preacher must understand internal meanings, power relations, and emotional attachments. Basit's (2011) comparison in Banyumas and Husein's (2017) discussion of cultural da'wa emphasize gradual change and diversified methods. Lubis (2021) likewise describes a movement between creedal-social emphasis and legalistic orientation. The scholarship therefore documents not a completed policy shift but an ongoing contest over method.

Cultural accommodation also encounters internal resistance. Some cadres fear that participation legitimizes forbidden practices or blurs Muhammadiyah identity. Others argue that rigid avoidance abandons cultural space to competitors and makes reform socially ineffective. This debate reflects different risk calculations: one prioritizes protection of doctrinal boundaries; the other prioritizes communication, social presence, and transformation from within. Both invoke *tajdid*, but they define the greater danger differently.

Table 2. Modes of Ritual Transformation in Muhammadiyah Contexts

Mode	Definition	Illustrative application	Potential consequence
Elimination	Abandonment of a rite or its sacral component	Ending fixed-day death feasts or offerings to spirits	Clear doctrinal boundary; possible loss of reciprocal social space

Mode	Definition	Illustrative application	Potential consequence
Simplification	Reduction of sequence, cost, specialists, or symbolism	Concise funeral observance centered on burial, condolence, and prayer	Lower household burden; more standardized practice
Substitution	Replacement by an authorized collective activity	Tabligh musibah, charity, Qur'anic study, or community service	Preserves gathering and solidarity while changing theological content
Reinterpretation	Retention of form with altered meaning or efficacy	Meal recast as hospitality rather than protection from spirits	Enables gradual change; meanings may remain contested
Accommodation	Acceptance as custom, art, or social convention rather than prescribed worship	Local dress, language, music, calendrical knowledge, or festival elements	Strengthens local legitimacy; may produce anxiety over boundary dilution

5. Institutional Mechanisms and Uneven Local Outcomes

The evidence identifies six mechanisms through which Muhammadiyah reshaped ritual practice. The first was doctrinal classification through *tarjih*. By distinguishing worship from social custom and authorized practice from innovation, organizational rulings supplied members with a portable decision framework. The second was pedagogical repetition through sermons, schools, women's study groups, youth organizations, and cadre training. Ritual reform became habitual because it was taught across generations.

The third mechanism was institutional substitution. Schools reduced dependence on hereditary religious specialists; hospitals displaced some ritual healing; orphanages and philanthropic bodies redirected commemorative giving; organizational mosques offered standardized worship; and formal funeral teams provided practical alternatives. Purification was most durable when supported by institutions capable of performing the functions previously supplied by custom.

The fourth mechanism was social differentiation. Distinct prayer styles, festival practices, and funeral observances marked Muhammadiyah identity relative to traditionalist Muslims. Boundary making strengthened internal solidarity but could also transform theological disagreement into group labeling. Ritual became a visible shorthand for organizational affiliation, even though actual beliefs and memberships were more fluid.

The fifth mechanism was negotiation within kinship networks. Many members could not impose organizational rules on extended families. They compromised by attending without leading, helping without affirming sacral claims, or moving contested elements outside their own household. This everyday negotiation explains why official purification never produced uniform practice. It also shows that women, who often manage food, visiting, caregiving, and kin relations, are central agents of ritual adaptation even when doctrinal accounts foreground male scholars.

The sixth mechanism was cultural reinterpretation through artists, local preachers, and younger intellectuals. Beginning before but gaining organizational recognition through cultural *da'wa*, this mechanism treated local symbols as resources for transformation. It was particularly important in rural or indigenous contexts where direct denunciation threatened social exclusion. Participatory approaches in Sinjai illustrate how reformers

could modify ritual stages and meanings through family engagement rather than external condemnation (Umar, 2017).

Outcomes depended on local organizational density. Where Muhammadiyah controlled schools, mosques, clinics, and leadership networks, its ritual style could become socially self-sustaining. Members found marriage partners, funeral assistance, and community life within the movement. Where institutions were sparse, individuals remained dependent on village customs and non-Muhammadiyah kin. Doctrinal compliance then carried higher social costs.

Class and urbanization also mattered. Urban professionals could more easily replace village reciprocity with formal services, monetary donations, and organizational associations. Rural households often relied on collective labor and ceremonial exchange for social security. The same purification ruling therefore had different material implications. A reform that appeared economically rational in a city could weaken mutual assistance in a village unless alternatives were deliberately organized.

Generational variation further complicated outcomes. Older cadres socialized during intense differentiation from traditionalist Islam often treated ritual boundaries as identity-defining. Younger activists influenced by anthropology, pluralism, and cultural studies were more likely to distinguish symbol from creed and advocate contextual engagement. Junaidi's (2022) study documents a shifting interpretation toward greater tolerance of local traditions, driven partly by ineffective rural da'wa and younger currents supporting moderation. The shift remains contested rather than complete.

Discussion

1. Purification as Ritual Reconfiguration, Not Simple Disappearance

The results challenge the assumption that religious purification produces a linear decline of ritual. Muhammadiyah eliminated particular practices, but it also generated new ceremonies, schedules, spaces, and symbols. Tabligh musibah, organized condolence, charitable memorials, standardized funeral teams, study circles, youth performances, and institutional anniversaries all ritualize reformist values. Even the refusal to conduct a feast can become a visible enactment of organizational identity.

Ritual theory helps clarify this outcome. Ritual is not confined to inherited ceremonies involving spirits or sacred objects. Repeated, symbolically marked, collectively recognized actions create moral order in modern organizations as well. Muhammadiyah's congresses, uniformed youth activities, coordinated prayers, and disciplined charitable campaigns produce belonging through formal procedures. Purification shifts sacral and social energy from lineage, locality, and esoteric specialists toward scripture, association, and public service.

The term reconfiguration is therefore more accurate than eradication. It captures changes in who authorizes ritual, what causal claims are permitted, how much households spend, which spaces are central, and what social benefit is emphasized. A local rite may disappear as prescribed worship yet persist as hospitality. A festival may lose an offering but gain a

health campaign. A grave may cease to function as a source of blessing yet become a site of historical memory.

2. Religious Authority, Rationalization, and the Politics of Classification

Purification reorganized religious authority through classification. By asking whether an action belonged to *aqidah*, *mahdah* worship, *muamalah*, custom, or art, Muhammadiyah transformed diffuse inherited practice into juridical categories. This rationalization increased consistency and allowed believers to question customs that had been treated as compulsory. It also elevated literacy and deliberative institutions over inherited status.

Yet classification is never neutral. Labeling a ceremony *bid'ah* removes it from the domain of negotiable culture and places it within religious error. Labeling the same activity '*urf* or social custom makes accommodation possible. Control over classification therefore becomes control over cultural legitimacy. *Tarjih* scholars, preachers, local leaders, artists, and households may disagree not only about evidence but about which domain a practice occupies.

The movement's methodological expansion toward *bayani*, *burhani*, and *irfani* reasoning creates resources for more complex judgments. Textual evidence remains foundational, while empirical knowledge can identify social consequences and cultural interpretation can recognize experiential meaning. The potential is to move from a binary question—whether the Prophet performed the exact custom—to a layered inquiry about creed, worship, harm, benefit, symbolism, and coercion. The risk is that methodological language remains at elite level while local preaching continues through simplified TBC rhetoric.

A historically defensible account must also avoid equating Muhammadiyah purification with Wahhabism. Both may criticize shrine-centered and innovative practices, but Muhammadiyah developed within Indonesian associational modernism, education, social welfare, nationalism, and collective *tarjih*. Its later cultural discourse and acceptance of local custom distinguish it from projects seeking comprehensive cultural Arabization. Similar ritual judgments do not imply identical institutional histories or political theologies (Latif et al., 2021; Junaidi, 2022).

3. Social Gains and Cultural Costs

Purification produced tangible gains. It weakened fear-based obligations to spirits and ritual specialists, reduced expenditure, encouraged medical treatment, made worship more intelligible to literate believers, and promoted direct responsibility before God. For women and poorer households, rejecting compulsory feasts could reduce labor and debt. Standardized guidance also allowed members moving between regions to participate in a common religious style.

These gains should not be romanticized as automatic emancipation. New authorities replaced old ones, and organizational standardization could become paternalistic. Members who valued a custom for kinship or aesthetic reasons were sometimes treated as doctrinally deficient. Local knowledge unrelated to prohibited theology could be discarded because it was packaged within ritual. The reduction of complex cultural forms to TBC categories made social change administratively efficient but intellectually crude.

Cultural costs were highest when reform removed a ritual without replacing its social functions. Ceremonies coordinate food sharing, labor, emotional care, and intergenerational memory. Their disappearance can individualize grief and weaken neighborhood reciprocity. Formal organizations may compensate through welfare programs, but access varies. A mosque committee or funeral team does not necessarily reproduce the intimacy of extended kinship.

The arts reveal another cost. When music, theater, and visual symbolism are viewed primarily through suspicion, the movement loses media through which ordinary people interpret moral experience. Chamim et al. (2003) describe both purification and cultural reproduction on Java's north coast, suggesting that members continually search for acceptable aesthetic forms. Cultural da'wa acknowledges this need, but its success depends on whether artists possess genuine authority or merely decorate messages already defined by legal specialists.

The relevant normative standard is not preservation for its own sake. Some rituals reinforce hierarchy, gendered labor, debt, magical fear, or exclusion. Nor is authenticity a sufficient defense; traditions are historically changing and can be criticized. The stronger standard asks whether reform preserves human dignity, reciprocal care, historical memory, aesthetic expression, and local agency while correcting coercive or theologically contested elements.

4. Cultural Da'wa as Recalibration and Its Limits

Cultural da'wa represents a recalibration rather than a reversal of Muhammadiyah's purification project. It retains the commitment to tawhid and scriptural reform but modifies how culture is approached. The starting assumption becomes that communities possess meanings and capacities that must be understood from within. Change should be gradual, participatory, and oriented toward dynamization as well as purification (Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah, 2004; Husein, 2017).

This recalibration responds to empirical failure. Direct attacks on popular ritual often made Muhammadiyah less persuasive in rural areas, where customs anchor social belonging. A movement can be doctrinally consistent yet strategically marginal. Cultural da'wa seeks to avoid the false choice between silent acceptance and frontal condemnation by identifying components that can be preserved, transformed, or redirected.

Its limitations are substantial. First, official endorsement does not guarantee local competence. Contextual engagement requires ethnographic listening, linguistic fluency, artistic knowledge, and patience—skills not automatically produced by religious training. Second, organizational incentives may still reward clear prohibitions more than ambiguous negotiation. A preacher who permits a modified ceremony risks accusation of compromising doctrine, while one who condemns it can claim textual firmness.

Third, cultural da'wa can become instrumental. Culture may be valued only as a vehicle for delivering a predetermined message, not as a source of knowledge capable of questioning organizational assumptions. Genuine dialogue requires the possibility that local practices reveal neglected values such as ecological care, collective memory, or social

reciprocity. Selective appropriation without shared authority reproduces a center-periphery hierarchy.

Fourth, accommodation can obscure power. Not every 'local tradition' represents the whole community; some are controlled by elites, male elders, royal institutions, or tourism authorities. Reformers must distinguish community agency from inherited domination. Cultural sensitivity should not immunize a practice from criticism regarding cost, gender, caste, or exclusion.

Cultural da'wa is therefore best understood as an institutional capacity for discriminating judgment. Its success is not measured by the number of traditions preserved or abolished, but by whether Muhammadiyah can explain its theological boundaries, protect social solidarity, enable local participation, and create ethically credible alternatives.

5. A Framework for Evaluating Ritual Reform

The study suggests a six-question framework for evaluating purification in local settings. First, what precise theological claim is being corrected? Reform should identify whether the issue concerns worship, mediation, causal power, obligation, or merely cultural form. Second, what social functions does the ritual perform? These may include grief support, redistribution, labor exchange, identity, ecological knowledge, and artistic expression.

Third, who bears the costs of the existing ritual and of its reform? A costly feast may burden poor families, while its abolition may isolate widows or elders. Fourth, what alternative institutions are available? Prohibition without replacement is weakest where customary networks provide essential welfare. Fifth, who participates in interpretation? Tarjih expertise is necessary, but women, youth, artists, customary actors, and affected households possess relevant knowledge. Sixth, how will outcomes be evaluated over time? Doctrinal compliance alone cannot show whether reform strengthens dignity, solidarity, and religious understanding.

This framework treats purification as both theological reasoning and institutional design. It recognizes Muhammadiyah's right to maintain distinctive convictions while rejecting the assumption that every inherited form must remain unchanged. It also makes the movement accountable for foreseeable social consequences. The central issue is not whether Islam may criticize culture—it inevitably does—but whether criticism is precise, proportionate, participatory, and capable of generating a better moral practice.

Table 3. Criteria for Assessing Muhammadiyah Ritual Reform

Dimension	Diagnostic question	Evidence required	Risk if neglected
Theological precision	Which belief, obligation, or form of worship is disputed?	Textual reasoning and clear distinction between creed, worship, and custom	Culture is condemned through vague TBC labeling
Social function	What care, reciprocity, memory, or identity does the rite organize?	Local observation and participant accounts	Reform removes solidarity together with contested belief
Distributional effect	Who pays, labors, gains status, or becomes excluded?	Household, gender, class, and generational analysis	Costs are shifted to less powerful members

Dimension	Diagnostic question	Evidence required	Risk if neglected
Institutional alternative	What replaces the abandoned function?	Funeral support, charity, education, health, or community mechanisms	Doctrinal victory produces practical abandonment
Participatory authority	Who helps interpret and redesign the practice?	Engagement with scholars, women, youth, artists, customary actors, and families	Central rulings lack legitimacy and contextual knowledge
Outcome accountability	Does reform improve faith, dignity, welfare, and cohesion?	Longitudinal evaluation beyond attendance or formal compliance	Purification becomes symbolic boundary making without public benefit

CONCLUSION

Muhammadiyah's purification movement profoundly altered local religious rituals in Indonesia, but its historical effect cannot be reduced to the destruction of tradition. The movement separated worship from custom, challenged sacral claims attached to spirits, graves, objects, dates, and ritual specialists, simplified costly ceremonies, and standardized religious practice through tarjih, education, preaching, and institutions. In doing so, it created a recognizable reformist moral order centered on tawhid, scriptural authority, rational explanation, and organized social service.

The transformation followed multiple paths. Some rites were abandoned; others were shortened, replaced, or reinterpreted. Cultural forms such as language, dress, art, communal meals, and festivals could be accommodated when classified as social convention rather than prescribed worship. Local outcomes varied according to organizational density, kinship composition, class, gender, generation, and the availability of alternative welfare institutions. Ritual change was therefore negotiated rather than mechanically implemented.

The movement's gains included reduced financial burden, weakened dependence on occult authority, stronger literacy, and more direct theological responsibility. Its costs included weakened reciprocity, aesthetic narrowing, conflict within families, and reduced local legitimacy when reform relied on categorical condemnation. These consequences demonstrate that theological correction and cultural erasure are not identical, but they can become entangled when social functions are ignored.

Cultural da'wa, formally articulated in the early 2000s, partially addressed this problem by combining purification with cultural dynamization and gradual engagement. It did not abandon Muhammadiyah's doctrinal boundaries. Rather, it expanded the interpretive task: reformers were expected to distinguish sacralization from symbolism, compulsory worship from social custom, and harmful hierarchy from valuable solidarity. Its implementation remained uneven through 2022.

Muhammadiyah's historical contribution is thus best described as ritual reconfiguration. The movement did not make religious life nonritual; it relocated ritual authority and generated new forms of collective practice. Future empirical research should examine how these transformations affect household debt, gendered labor, grief, intergroup relations, and local welfare over time. Such evidence is necessary to determine when purification becomes ethical renewal and when it merely substitutes one form of

cultural authority for another.

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