

## Ramadan and Thethek Molek as Religious Harmony in Indonesian Rural Society

By

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### Abstract

This study examined the rural life in Indonesia, especially religious activities which are increasingly integrated with the media during the pandemic. This study understands how people interpret and practice harmony amid a national religious conflict that has been heating up for more than four years in Indonesia. Using mediatization concept and conducts ethnographic design, the study observed the momentum of Ramadan and thethek molek in Tulungagung Regency. This study found that Tulungagung people have experienced direct and indirect mediatization during the pandemic. Tulungagung people had a strong social construction in the slogans of *guyub, rukun, ayem, tentrem, mulyo, lan tinoto*. They used those slogans as a social mechanism to understand media reality, practice Ramadan worships, and interpret thethek molek meaning. Media as social agents also adopt those slogans to frame reality. Both people's and media's commitment to upholding those slogans over group's religious practices keep social diversity in harmony. This research demonstrates mediatization as a comprehensive approach to media and social study, specifically in the realm of religion from a non-Western perspective.

**Keywords:**Diversity; Mediatization;Religious Harmony;Rural Society; Social Construction

### Introduction

Religion and beliefs are sensitive issues in Indonesia (Marshall, 2018). Religious conflicts can lead to riots that do not subside for years. Religious issues also become a veil to cover up the hidden motives for conflict, such as economic or political interests (Hasse & Hidayati, 2018; Santoso & Djauhari, 2019). In 2016, there was an occurrence related to religious issues that had a long impact. A group of Muslims was offended by the words of Jakarta's Governor Basuki Tjahaja Purnomo (BTP) when he visited Kepulauan Seribu. This group made police reports of alleged blasphemy committed by BTP and staged a large demonstration to sue the BTP court. At that time, BTP was an incumbent candidate for Jakarta's 2017 gubernatorial election. The mass insistence was followed by a losing vote for BTP and a two-year prison sentence in May 2017.

The mass keeps promoting religious sentiment even after BTP was free in January 2019. The mass used the momentum of the 2019 presidential elections, which was followed by Prabowo and Joko Widodo, by bringing up Muslim solidarity discourse and upholding the rule of law. The masses affiliated support to Prabowo and associated Joko Widodo's supporters as allies of BTP. The reason was that BTP was the deputy governor when Joko Widodo was Jakarta's governor in 2012. After the election, religious issues still color national social and political upheaval. Labeling emerges that Joko Widodo's supporters and government are pro-religious blasphemers. The public was divided (Lim, 2017) and berated each other (Santoso & Djauhari, 2019) on social media. Mass media also legitimized the social polarization by placing the figures from the two camps in opposition when they held a public discussion.

In line with religious friction, there are also conflicts of belief. Besides Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Confucianism as official religions (Presidential Decree 1/1965), there are 400 streams of belief with millions of adherents recognized as a traditional religion handed down by Indonesian ancestors. The government regulates, protects political rights, and worship (Constitution of Indonesia Article 28E / 1 & 2, 28I / 1, 29/2) so that the practice of religion is orderly and respects each other. For years, adherents experienced discrimination such as social isolation, negative stigma, burning of places of worship, difficulty registering marriages, rejection, and even dismantling graves due to lack of legality. Even though in 2017 belief has been recognized by the government, but adherents' freedom and practice of worship are still problematic and ambiguous (Marshall, 2018).

It turns out that not all regions in Indonesia experience social, political, or religious conflicts. Tulungagung is a rural area that does not show the national resonance of those conflicts. Media reported on joint prayers between religious leaders, positive internet user declarations, or peaceful mass actions to welcome elections in Tulungagung. Tulungagung also has religious and cultural diversity. There are various artifacts, houses of worship, religious schools, and 13 streams recognized among 33 identified belief streams (Sa'adah, 2017). People worship or carry out rituals of belief openly without causing social conflict. Some people embrace religion as well as beliefs and when they died, their family performed two rituals according to religion and belief. People surround understand and then work together to help the funeral.

The researcher assumes that Tulungagung people has certain social mechanisms to interpret and adopt reality in typical practices. Especially, the reality presented by the media, which relates to local communities to national issues. This study does not use media-centric theories because other social aspects besides the media play a large role in the dynamics of society. Likewise, this study does not use socio-centric theories because it is not enough to capture the role of media that has been integrated into all social aspects. The researcher prefers to use the concept of mediatization to explain the social situation as a linkage between society, reality, and the media. In other words, mediatization becomes a comprehensive concept that bridges the interrelation of the role of media and communication practices on the one hand and the socio-cultural dynamics on the other.

Scholars suggest focusing mediatization research on observing social phases that are not linear but have an 'eruption' (Krotz & Hepp, 2013). That is, determines the moment that has a certain character but still reflects the complexity of society. This study explores mediatization during the pandemic for three reasons. First, the pandemic moment has made people more connected with the media (Fuchs, 2020). Secondly, there is the momentum of Ramadan which shows the integration of media in Muslim worship. Third, the emergence of the Thethek Molek as a response of believers to Covid-19 as well as a form of community harmony.

For many years, scholars place the relationship between society and the media in two oppositional approaches, namely the mediacentric and the socio-centric (McQuail & Deuze, 2020). Mediacentric sees the media as a dominant aspect of society, whereas socio-centric considers the media only reflects social life. Among mediacentric and socio-centric, mediatization re-echos as an advanced approach (Couldry, 2012) or key concepts (Lundby, 2009) to understand the changes and relations of society with the media. Mediatization explains the interrelation between cultural and social transformation to the development of media and

communication practices (Hepp, 2014). In other words, mediatization sees the social dynamics as the accumulation of social transformation in which the media shapes communication and frames society. The breadth of mediatization makes it seem like an abstract concept (Deacon & Stanyer, 2014), although scholars (Hepp et al., 2015) explain that mediatization is a comprehensive concept that can be understood through various approaches, fields of study, even various arguments (Lunt & Livingstone, 2016).

Mediatization appears and explores much of the political field (Asp, 1986; Strömbäck & Esser, 2014). However, in the last two decades, scholars have expanded to the social and cultural field (Encheva et al., 2013; Hjarvard & Petersen, 2013), including religion (Hjarvard, 2008; Hoover, 2006). Scholars also conduct mediatization research in the West (Hjarvard, 2014; Lundby, 2014) or urban areas (Averbeck-Lietz, 2013; Strömbäck & Dimitrova, 2011) as they argued that the global influence of the West and urban modernity became a reference (Celinski, 2018; Van der Hoeven, 2017) to the mediatization study. However, also in the last two decades, many researchers have explored rural areas for observing the contribution of media development to the social system, cultural interrelation, and adaptation that is more dynamic (Jansson, 2010; Kaun & Fast, 2014; Rusten & Skerratt, 2008).

Generally, rural areas in Indonesia experience the internet digital divide (Purbo, 2017). Although, researches show that the internet contributes to microeconomics (Yuldinawati et al., 2018), local empowerment (Nurlaela et al., 2020), or local culinary (Aisyah Dwityas et al., 2020) in some rural areas. (Hjarvard, 2004) explains that rural people experience direct exposure and use of media (direct mediatization), while others are not exposed to media but have the knowledge or social transformation that refers to media (indirect mediatization). These direct and indirect mediatization shows the media's ability as not only an information channel but also creates reality and is integrated into social relations. Thus, media is no longer understood as newspapers, tv, or radio, but rather all medium that produces, changes, and influences communication (Krotz & Hepp, 2013). At the same time, mediatization has dissolved the context of personal, group, and even mass communication (Yudha & Irwansyah, 2018).

Beyond the debate and development of mediatization research, scholars agree that society is now mediatized because social life is increasingly integrated with media (Hjarvard, 2008; Livingstone, 2009; Lundby, 2009). Mediatization studies the development of media that is increasingly comprehensive (Strömbäck, 2008) and relates to various social aspects (Couldry & Hepp, 2017) to be able to shape culture and build discourse (Wohn & Bowe, 2014) as well as communication practices (Lilleker, 2006). Therefore, society is not determined only by the media (Lundby, 2014). But, on the contrary, all aspects and social processes are transformed (metaprocess) (Krotz, 2007) as they are all involved and connected with the various media (transmedia) (Jansson, 2013).

Scholars describe three approaches to understanding mediatization, namely the instrumental approach (Bolin, 2014) which sees changes in society as advances in media affordance, institutional approaches (Hjarvard, 2008; Strömbäck & Esser, 2014) which observes the transformation of institutions in adjusting and adopting media, and social constructivist approach which understands the process of society in interpreting media reality, changes in media use, and media contributions to the reality construction (Couldry & Hepp, 2017; Krotz, 2007; Lundby, 2014). This study uses a social constructivist approach to understand how people interpret reality, relate, and integrate religious activities with media. Those three different approaches do not mean the boundary, but rather a focus that does not

necessarily eliminate the linkages of the three (Lundby, 2014).

In Indonesia, mediatization in religion was researched by Fakhruroji(2013) about tausiah through SMS. Fakhruroji argued, tausiah as a communication practice has transformed due to religious leaders conveying via SMS as mediatization becomes a new form of spreading the message and shifting the role of leaders as a source of information. Fakhruroji uses an instrumental approach to describe how media can shape and organize culture. Compare to Fakhruroji's, this study will complement his research gap as it uses a cultural approach and emphasizes transmedia as a feature of mediatization.

Other research on the relationship between religious practices and media development in Indonesia has been conducted by (Humeira & Sarwono, 2019). They use a constructivist approach to understand the two perspectives of religious groups about the internet, namely the group that rejects the internet because it is identical to modernity and tends to be secular, and a group who sees the internet can support religious practices. They conclude that group responses are reflections of the principles, values of belief, goals, and discourse about the internet. Although not explicitly using the term mediatization, they explain the changes in social construction in accepting, negotiating, and adopting media as an understanding of mediatization. This study is more complex than their research because not only understanding the meaning and adaptation of a group to the media. However, this study explores religious practices and social context related to various aspects of rural life.

In mediatized society, the media replaced the role of religious institutions through three metaphors (Hjarvard, 2008), namely becoming conduits of communication by providing a source of religious ideas, becoming cultural environments by taking over the social and spiritual functions of institutionalized religion, and becoming language by forming religious imaginations. These metaphors especially relate to the internet which can converge (Jenkins, 2006) various media.

Internet-based media not only reports but also becomes a language that changes the ideas and authority of religious institutions while providing a discussion space. For example, ideas, representations, or imaginations are considered as superstitious or as banal religion because they are not legitimized by religious institutions (Hjarvard, 2011) but using the internet to appear in public discussions. I argue that media, which relate to social and cultural situations, create dynamics of religious practice in each society. Likewise, Tulungagung has its social order and practice to interpret media reality.

## **Methodology**

The researcher argues that every society constructs its own reality. Thus, this study uses the interpretive paradigm (Creswell, 2013) to understand the experience, religious values, and social patterns from a society perspective. Interpretive see the breadth of subjective meaning that is not limited. Thus, interpretive can be used to develop studies based on the informants' interpretation and explore unique local values. Including, bringing up the local language or culture as new knowledge.

In this study, culture is considered a cornerstone of social interactions and activities. That is culture becomes the basis of society in making social construction. This study uses

ethnography as a qualitative research design to explore the culture and the complexity of social life in a contextual and subjective explanation. This study gives open questions to capture the breadth of data and experiences written in the text.

The researcher starts from understanding the social context as a phenomenon of mediatization; where the interaction and practice of religion relate to the media. The study focuses on Ramadan and thethek molek as they are a visible and typical phenomenon in Tulungagung during the pandemic. The researcher builds relationships that are interconnected and immersive by blending, integrating, and feeling the informant's experience to understand how they live their lives, interpret reality, and attach cultural values. Finally, the researcher draws conclusions based on authentic knowledge as natural as possible, realistic, and without manipulation (Hale & Napier, 2013), which is the knowledge that is appropriate to the context and meaning of the local community.

This study determines informants purposively and selects locations by considering the clarity of place, the presence of phenomena, and social distinctiveness (Hamidi, 2004). Tulungagung was decided as a research site because, first, the researcher observes the transformation of people's lives is related to the media. Data (Table 1) shows that the need for media is in the high category because it is above 50% Tulungagung people use for communication tools (Statistics of Tulungagung, 2020). Second, Tulungagung also shows social harmony, a situation that contrasts with national media coverage of religious and social conflicts. This harmony is represented by the slogan *guyub, rukun, ayem, tentrem mulyo, lan tinoto* (togetherness, harmony, peace, prosperous, noble, and orderly). People then perpetuate those slogans in various public places (park, river, bus stop), name of the community, competition, or social movement. The researcher assumes *guyub rukun* becomes a people mechanism to maintain and regulate social interactions.

**Table 1:** Use of communication equipment in Tulungagung 2019-2020

Gender	2019		2020	
	Phone & Computer	Internet	Phone & Computer	Internet
Male	79,53 %	55,12 %	79,49 %	59,68 %
Female	71,09 %	49,82 %	74,74 %	58,8 %

**Source:** Statistics of Tulungagung, 2020

The researcher collects data from March 1<sup>st</sup>-July 30<sup>th</sup> 2020 from the Mosque Baitul A'la worshipers (Sobontoro Village) and thethek molek makers (Wajak Kidul Village) as they have involvement, understand the culture, religious values, and relations with the media (Table 2). The quality of this ethnographic research is trustworthiness, verification, and authenticity. The researcher pays attention to historical situatedness by explaining the situation context, historical background, and informant's social life. Triangulation is conducted by comparing observations, documentation, and confirming interviews.

**Table 2:** Informants' description

Initial Name	Age	Gender	Description
IM	50	Male	Mosque Imam
MS	45	Female	Mosque caretaker
SS	48	Female	Mosque worshiper
AH	42	Male	Mosque caretaker
S	82	Male	Thethek molek maker
K	71	Female	Thethek molek maker
Y	76	Female	Thethek molek maker
I	34	Female	Daughter of thethek molek maker
JM	33	Male	Culture and language teacher
BH	30	Female	Indonesian worker in South Korea
IDV	25	Male	Member of social organizations
MAH	53	Female	Local figure

**Source:** Informant's profile

## Result and Discussion

### *Ramadan in Tulungagung*

Muslims have worships that are only done once a year, namely tarawih, Zakat Al-Fitr, and Ramadan fasting. Ramadan impacts personal health (Beshyah et al., 2018), social (Toda & Morimoto, 2000), and even economy (Sonjaya & Wahyudi, 2016) both for fellow Muslims (Alghafli et al., 2019) and society (Ahmad et al., 2012). In Tulungagung, Ramadan is colored with tadarus (reciting Quran) all day long from mosque loudspeakers. People, including non-Muslims, practice special ethics during Ramadan. Such as, food stalls install blinds or open after sunset and people do not eat in front of other people or public places. Ramadan is also a moment of sharing. People donate clothes, food, or money as sellers or employers give work days off, parcels, and persenan (salary bonuses) for employees or partners.

People begin Ramadan with the tradition of nyekar (grave pilgrimage), which is to pray, visit, and clean the family grave. Nyekar is also to remember the deceased's kindness. They believe, only kindness is remembered after the person dies, no matter the wealth or religion of a person during life. Every night Muslims perform tarawih that is tucked with da'wah to remind them to increase patience, worship, and maintain social relations. In the last 10 days, Muslims carry out the tradition of Maleman (Figure 1) to welcome Laylat al-Qadr by praying and bringing food to be eaten and distributed to residents around the mosque. At the end of Ramadan, Muslims shares zakat Al-Fitr in the form of staple foods of at least 2.5 kg for the needy or poor.



**Figure 1:** Maleman tradition

There is also a tradition of mudik (homecoming) by immigrants or workers from Tulungagung. Aside from being a rural area, Tulungagung is the largest foreign labor-sending regency in East Java (Romdiati, 2012). The end of Ramadan is marked by Eid prayer which is also a moment for them to gather with the whole family. According to informant BH:

“I always go home for Eid prayers to meet family and relatives. We come to the mosque to pray and bring food to be eaten together guyub rukun (togetherness harmony) at the mosque.” (BH, personal interview, March 2020).

After the Eid prayer, Muslims perform sungkem as an expression of apology and prayer to an older person. As a form of acceptance of forgiveness and affection, the older give a sum of money. In addition to the family, sungkem is also carried out to neighbors without distinguishing social or religious background from ba'dan or halal bi halal. When receiving guests, the host provides the ketupat and opor as a typical Ramadan food. Ketupat symbolizes lepat (apology) and becomes a form of religious acculturation (Said, 2015) in the local culture so that the ancient accepted Islam.

### ***Virtual Ramadan***

During the pandemic, the government implements a safe physical distance protocol by restricting transportation, worship in the congregation, and mosque activities. Ramadan worship must integrate media so that it can still be done. The mosque caretaker gives distance for tarawih prayers (Figure 2). In the mosque, only one or two people recite or da'wah, while other worshipers join from homes via zoom or google meet. The da'wah also adds information about the Covid-19 health protocol. Informant IM stated:

“Ramadan becomes the peak of Islamic worship because the reward is multiplied. We convey to the worshipers via the internet that Covid-19 is a test of God. Then we must endeavor and pray. Moreover, the Covid-19 prevention protocol is also taught in Islam in the form of wudu'. Namely gargling, washing face, nose, ears, hands, feet at least five times a day. Da'wah through the media does not reduce the essence of worship.” (IM, personal interview, March 2020)



**Figure 2:** Tarawih is performed spacing for compliance with a health protocol

The thing that has changed the most is the mudik, sungkem, and ba'dan which must be practiced virtually. Immigrants who are not allowed to go home must order Ramadan food through an online courier. The others, do sungkem and ba'dan through Instagram account tags, WhatsApp status, or posts on Facebook. Whatsapp is the media choice for personal relationships, while Instagram and Facebook are for public relations.

Change is not only in Ramadan worship, which is the largest religion as 98.16% of people in Tulungagung are Muslims (Statistics of Tulungagung, 2020). There is a traditional belief that remains preserved by 11 people, but then it influences the social and even economic situation due to mediatization. The belief is that a mask named thethek molek can reject bad things, including a pandemic.

### ***Thethek Molek as Covid-19 "Antidote"***

Generally, Tulungagung people know Covid-19 through mass media, social media, or daily conversation. In Tulungagung, there are still many social activities held face-to-face such as social gatherings, the celebration of births, maintaining security, or cleaning the environment. Including, a group of elderly farmers in a remote village who learned about Covid-19 from daily conversations with neighbors because they rarely watch television, do not have a cellular phone, radio, or newspaper. They consider Covid-19 to be a pagebluk (plague) and believe it must be counteracted by a thethek molek, a mask made from coconut fronds and painted using limestone with creepy images. Thethek molek is displayed in front of the house so that the residents are safe.

An account of public social media uploaded a photo of thethek molek until it was widely discussed by netizens and mass media. Some commented on thethek molek as myth, tradition, superstition, belief, being disparaging, even blasphemous. Outside the citizens' debate, the Tulungagung people precisely put thethek molek in front of houses (Figure 3), police offices (Figure 4), even polyclinics (Figure 5).



**Figure 3:** People display thethek molek in front of the house





**Figure 4:** People display thethek molek at the police office



**Figure 5:** People display thethek molek at the polyclinics

People considers thethek molek as an ancestral belief. Although some people do not know the meaning or their religions do not adhere to it; they preserve thethek molek as a tradition. Informant S explained:

“I don't understand the meaning of thethek molek and only know Covid-19 from neighbor talks. When I was little, there was a massive sudden death from an unidentified illness. I think it was the same as the Covid-19. My parents said it is a pagebluk, then put on thethek molek.” (S, personal interview, March 2020).

Also, Informant I as the young farmer who actively uses social media agreed:

“I know Covid-19 from Instagram as respiratory disease, cough, fever. I was told by my parents to make thethek molek. Even though it is not a belief in my religion, but I preserve it as a tradition.” (I, personal interview, March 2020)

Thethek molek makers understand Covid-19 as a disease and choose medical treatment if exposed. They also obey the health protocol because it is their daily practice to wash hands or take a bath after returning from the fields or outside the house. Unfortunately, they are not accustomed to wearing masks or gathering around. They assume that the making of thethek molek is actually in line with health protocols to clean themselves. Informant MAH argued:

“Makers of the thethek molek must bathe, wudu, and pray first. Makers are required to

understand the value of cleanliness. Regardless of its original history in Hinduism or Buddhism, in the past, the government used thethek molek to checked outbreaks. People who displayed thethek molek means that they already know there is a pandemic and the government can do socialization to other homes that have not yet displayed.” (MAH, personal interview, March 2020)

Thethek molek is interesting even for people outside Tulungagung. They buy in large quantities and making thethek molek became a new income amid the national and global economic crisis. The makers even change its creepy characters with various funny or adorable characters.

### ***Religious Harmony and Social Transformation in Tulungagung during Pandemic***

Socially, religious worship is a way to strengthen ingroup relations. However, in Tulungagung people also keep social harmony while they practice those religious worships. People respect the worship of other religions, prioritize the value of social togetherness, and kindness to fellow humans. Informant MS explained:

“In Islam, we have to do habluminannas (maintaining good relations among humans) besides habluminallah (having good relations to Allah). Allah is all-forgiving, who has unlimited forgiveness no matter how big our mistakes are to Allah. But Allah will forgive our sins to others if the people we hurt have forgiven.” (MS, personal interview, March 2020)

MS’s statement about the importance of social harmony besides religious worship is in line with informant IDV. IDV said:

“I am not very diligent in worship. However, I don’t want to do lie, steal, or hurt others. For me, other people will judge the level of my faith and also my religion from my daily attitudes. That is why I always try to do good.” (IDV, personal interview, March 2020).

In Tulungagung, the manifestation of guyub, rukun, ayem, tentrem, mulyo, lan tinoto appears and is embedded in various cultural artifacts such as the name of the park, community, police slogans, or bus stop (Figure 6). Guyub rukun are cultural concepts that are preserved nationally. This means that harmony is affirmed as a shared value to maintain the unity of the Indonesian nation amidst the diversity of national cultures. The term guyub rukun also can be found in several areas that have Javanese cultural influences. However, various studies have shown that each community in Java has its elements of the locality which make a cultural value manifest in different patterns of action.



**Figure 6:** Guyub rukun becomes name of bus stop in Tulungagung

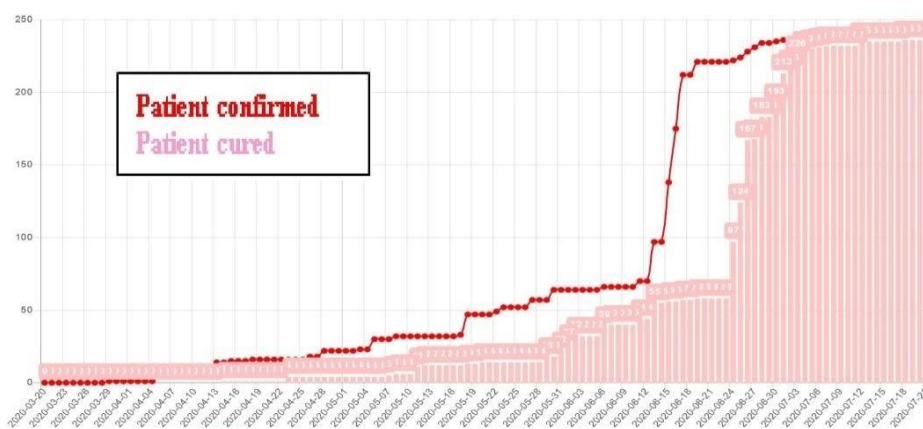
Mediatization in Tulungagung shows that the reflection of guyub rukun is reflected in the relationship between the people in understanding the reality of the media. Likewise, the media also builds discourse following the Tulungagung people's interpretation of the value of guyub rukun. In the pandemic issue, for example, people respect each other's beliefs and implement government regulations to minimize social conflict. Informant JM argued:

“In Tulungagung, people avoid debates and social differences as much as possible. People prefer to obey government rules. People believe, the government must side with the common good. Even if there are differences of opinion, usually people do not like to express it openly, especially in the media.” (JM, personal interview, March 2020)

*JM's argument is as MAH's statement:*

“Social media or local media in Tulungagung often cover things that do not trigger conflict. For example, rather than demonstrations, national protests, or brawls, I often read news stories about police successes, mass activities, or people achievements in Tulungagung. Or, sometimes if there is bad news, the event will be far from the relevance of the Tulungagung people, such as the war or robbery in another country.” (MAH, personal interview, March 2020)

During the pandemic, the researcher observes people compliance with health protocols as well as efforts to use and adapt to the media. People compliance contributes to the Tulungagung Covid-19 patient curve which continues to decline even its recovery reaches 97.9%, the highest in East Java (Kominfo jatim, 2020) (Figure 7). In contrast, East Java had the highest increase in patients (Piri D.R, 2020) among other provinces in Indonesia (Figure 8).



**Figure 7:** Tulungagung Covid-19 patient curves (East Java Covid-19 Task Force March 20<sup>th</sup> - July 21<sup>st</sup> 2020)



**Figure 8:** East Java Covid-19 patient curves (East Java Covid-19 Task Force March 20<sup>th</sup> -

July 21<sup>st</sup> 2020)

Mediatization of Ramadan and thethek molek has two things in common. First, both are based on a group belief. Second, the transformation involves the interrelation of social elements. During the pandemic, Ramadan worship runs using the media because of the support of religious leaders, Muslim compliance, internet infrastructure, regulations, and local governments. Likewise, thethek molek has emerged as a response to a pandemic, spread by the media, had historical value, and was accepted because of accommodative local wisdom. Even though Ramadan involves the majority and thethek molek spearheaded only by a handful of people, the media still relates and transform society so that mediatization occurred.

Ramadan worship and thethek molek are based on group beliefs practiced in the large society. The group suppresses exclusivity by acculturating social values and involving society. Muslims share and live together with residents regardless of religious or social background. Likewise, believers preserve thethek molek as an ancestral tradition, not as a religion. Besides, Tulungagung local wisdom guyub, rukun, ayem, tentrem, mulyo, lan tinoto accommodates the social diversity keeps harmony. Informants interpret guyub as togetherness and rukun as a stand on differences.

Media contributes to the religious mediatization as conduits of communication, cultural environment, language (Hjarvard, 2008), facilitating collective rhythm (Dayan & Katz, 1992), or ritual timing (Rothenbuhler, 1998). More than those functions, this study found the role of media as discourse framers, such as religious agents (Hjarvard, 2008) or new agenda setters (Wohn & Bowe, 2014). That is, the media becomes a thethek molek storyteller and presents Ramadan in a particular narrative.

Media in Tulungagung uses local wisdom as an anchor narration so that the people feel togetherness, origins, group ownership, and the ease of building relationships. In other words, the media understands religion and belief in the context of cultural and historical values (Hoover, 2006). The value similarity or horizons of meaning (Couldry & Hepp, 2017) is what makes social cohesion and harmony. Conversely, the absence of value similarity creates fragmentation or even social conflict. Like when citizens give a variety of comments because they do not understand the meaning of thethek molek.

Media changes the meaning of thethek molek from group value to ancestral tradition. The media also creates secularization (Norris & Inglehart, 2004) by linking thethek molek with the pandemic, not with belief. Thethek molek then appears on various media as if it became popular. Consequently, thethek molek has desacralized, so that people see it with a new image as a common culture or banal representation. Desacralization relates to media as a channel for religious symbols and teachings. That is, media content and format take over and change the role of the institution into public activity. Religious messages during the pandemic added health information that built relevance with a large society. Meanwhile, social media and messaging applications create formats that are not as formal as institutional information. For example, social media creates closeness by establishing two-way communication patterns, providing emoticon, editing features, displaying personal photos, and popular languages.

Media also builds emotional bonds and collective memories. For example, Muslims feel connected to the institution when attending da'wah via zoom or feel emotion when sungkem through WhatsApp. That is, people feel 'present' when connected to the media. As well, media shifts the function of families, schools, and institutions as religious information sources and moral guides. It means that the media can save and become a reference for religious

knowledge needed by society.

Ramadan worship is practiced by Muslims around the world, as the *tethek molek* exists in various Javanese and Balinese cultures. However, mediatization in Tulungagung shows that the sacred meaning is related to the attitude of the people who preserve it. Including, the media that build discourse and construct reality. The *tethek molek* is as simple as the practice of Ramadan that can be desacralized and even disappear when no people are practicing it. That is, in mediatization, the social construction of reality can change and be independent apart from the institution. In other words, social dynamics develop new meanings and group membership can be recognized when involved in building that reality.

## Conclusion

This study shows that some people in rural society are not directly exposed to the media, but they are being mediatized. In other words, their society still undergoes a transformation, has relevance, and refers to media issues as public discourse, although some of its members have different levels of media use. For example, this research found that some people (with a job as a farmer, old age, and living in remote areas) in Tulungagung do not use the media directly. However, they know about the Covid-19 issue from daily conversations or socialization by the government and local community leaders.

As a group, people use religion or beliefs as anchors to interpret social reality, including the reality of the media. This group performs cultural acculturation in practicing worship or rituals, as well as inserting local wisdom that should be applied in social relations. *Guyub, rukun, ayem, tentrem, mulyo, lan tinoto* slogan as local wisdom accommodates social diversity and is used by the media to frame reality. People interpret those slogans as a call to keep prioritizing direct interaction. However, when the media emerges as an interaction medium as well as a social actor, those slogans are practiced into narratives, ideas, and utterances that do not cause conflict or offense but instead build a discourse of harmony.

In social interaction, media shapes religion and belief image. Media then transforms them into popular culture, and shifts institutions' function to provide moral, spiritual, and togetherness. Media also builds communication patterns that become interactive, familiar, and informal. Media makes *guyub, rukun, ayem, tentrem, mulyo, lan tinoto* not just a myth or popular slogans, but as a similar value to eliminate social structure. The cohesiveness of all social actors in those slogans creates harmony in Tulungagung.

From the research results, we can draw some important points that must be taken into special consideration by the government, religious institutions, and media to implement discourse in harmony with the local wisdom. Even though *guyub, rukun, ayem, tentrem, mulyo, lan tinoto* is a philosophy in several regions, but its history, meaning, and practice may differ from place to place. However, as the interpretive paradigm and ethnographic method are contextual and subjective, the findings of this research cannot be generalized to other cultures or societies. The researcher suggests further studies to explore social dynamics in Indonesia, which are related to the digital divide.

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