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Tepa Selira: Toward a Javanese Empathetic Epistemology of Interfaith Knowledge

Rofikasari Mutmainah[1], Alfan Nawaziru Zahara[1], Lailatul Romadhina[2], Adib Khairil Musthafa[3]

[1] Universitas Islam NegeriMaulana Malik Ibrahim Malang, Indonesia
[2] Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta, Indonesia
[3] Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Kalijaga, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses interfaith literacy in Indonesian Islamic education through a decolonial critique of modern religious epistemological framework. Current discussions on *religious literacy* and *interreligious literacy* have contributed significantly to shifting religious education beyond doctrinal and essentialist approaches toward more historical, social, and contextual understandings of religion. Yet these frameworks often continue to approach religious difference through liberal-secular categories shaped by Western historical experiences. Consequently, other religions are frequently positioned as objects to be classified, interpreted, and managed rather than as subjects participating in the production of knowledge about themselves. Using library research and a critical conceptual review approach, this article analyzes recent scholarship on religious literacy, interreligious literacy, liberal pluralism, coloniality of knowledge, and Javanese local epistemologies. The study finds that interfaith literacy in Indonesian Islamic education is commonly framed within agendas of religious moderation and counter-radicalization, leading interfaith engagement to function primarily as an instrument of social stability and governance. Against this tendency, the article turns to *tepa selira* as a Javanese epistemic framework grounded in *rasa*, reflexivity, representational humility, and attentiveness toward the position of others. Rather than treating *tepa selira* merely as local wisdom or cultural ethics, the article situates it as a relational mode of knowing capable of rethinking how religious others are approached within Islamic education. Through this perspective, interfaith literacy is reoriented from "knowing about the religious other" toward "knowing with ethical responsibility toward the religious other." In doing so, the article contributes to broader debates on decolonial education by demonstrating how Indonesian Islamic education can become a site for producing alternative epistemologies from the Global South rather than merely applying Western models of religious literacy.

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Corresponding Author:
Mutmainah, Rofikasari
Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang, Indonesia; 24010101310002@student.uin-malang.ac.id

1. INTRODUCTION

The debate about interfaith literacy in Islamic education cannot be separated from the decolonial critique of modern epistemological framework (Azhar, 2021). In many contemporary models of religious education, religion is often positioned as an object that needs to be understood, 'classified,' and 'managed' through liberal-secular categories born out of the Western historical experience: secularization, church-state conflicts, liberal pluralism, and multicultural governance. This kind of model does make an important contribution to fostering openness, recognizing diversity, and preventing intolerance. However, the model also carries an epistemic problem: non-Western religions are often read through a framework that is not entirely grounded in the social, historical, and cosmological experiences of their own societies.

Within decolonial studies, the problem is not just "lack of tolerance", but how knowledge about other religions is produced, by whom, in what language, and for the benefit of what kind of social order. Therefore, the main concern of this article is not merely how Muslim learners come to know other religions. More importantly, it asks how Islamic education can develop interfaith literacy without fully relying on Western epistemological assumptions that treat religion as a stable, private, and easily definable entity.

Religious education has long been entangled with the historical processes through which religions are named, classified, compared, and positioned within modern knowledge systems. The model of religious literacy developed in the Western academic tradition has indeed played an important role in challenging narrow, essentialist, and ahistorical religious understandings (Owen, 2005; Said, 1977; Sari et al., n.d.). However, when applied as a universal framework, the model risks reducing non-Western religious experiences to merely "local cases" within theories produced by Western academic centers. In this situation, the Global South is not really treated as a producer of knowledge, but rather as a field for the application of theory. Indonesia, for example, is often read as a laboratory of pluralism, tolerance, moderation, or religious conflict, but it is rarely placed as an epistemological source for formulating other ways of understanding interreligious relations. As a result, interfaith literacy is often understood as a cognitive ability to recognize other religions, rather than as a social, ethical, and affective practice rooted in local traditions.

The context of Indonesian society's plurality shows that interreligious relations are not only shaped by doctrines, curricula, or state policies, but also by daily practices. In many Javanese communities, for example, knowledge of the "other" is not always born from formal dialogue forums, tolerance seminars, or multicultural education modules. It emerges through neighborliness, guarding speech, attending celebrations, helping each other in death, respecting the boundaries of feelings, and reading complex social situations with *'rasa '*(Magnis-Suseno, 1997).

In simple terms, *tepa selira* can be understood as the ability to put oneself in others' shoes, assess one's own actions for their possible impact on others, and maintain relational balance so that social interaction does not harm others' dignity. However, in this article, *tepa selira* is understood not merely as Javanese etiquette, but as an "empathetic epistemology." It refers to a mode of knowing grounded not in domination or classification, but in attentiveness to feeling, relationality, and the social position of others.

Tepa selira is closely related to several other Javanese terms that shape how people understand life and social interaction. First, rasa, which is the ability to capture atmosphere, affective vibrations, and subtleties of relationships that cannot always be explained verbally. In the context of interfaith literacy, it is a reminder that understanding other religions is not enough; it requires more than factual information about doctrines and rituals. Knowledge of other religions also requires sensitivity to historical wounds, minority experiences, social fears, and the symbolic boundaries that live within the community. Second, *rukun*, which is often translated as social harmony, but in practice is not as simple as "no conflict". *Rukun* is the governance of relationships so that differences do not always turn into open hostility. Third, *empan papan*, which is the ability to place words, actions, and attitudes in context. In Islamic education, this concept can help determine when another religion needs to be explained, in

what language, in what situations, and with sensitivity to who is being discussed. Fourth, *ngajeni,* which is the attitude of respecting others as subjects who have dignity. Fifth, *andhap asor,* which is humility in relationships, including in producing knowledge about other parties. This collection of concepts shows that the Javanese tradition has an epistemic device that not only regulates social behavior, but also regulates the way of knowing and talking about the "other" (Magnis-Suseno, 1997).

In Indonesian Islamic education, the reading of interfaith literacy opens up space to criticize the cross-faith literacy model that relies too much on classifiable rationality. So far, the Western model of religious literacy has tended to emphasize understanding religion as an internally diverse tradition, historically changing, and connected to socio-political life. This principle is important, not unimportant at all. However, they still tend to place religion as an object that can be explained academically. Meanwhile, intermittent fasting asks a different question: not just "what do we know about other religions?", but "how do we know about other religions without hurting, simplifying, or taking over their voices?" This shift is important because, in many religious education practices, other religions are often presented as material explained by the majority teacher, the majority textbook, or the state's policy, without an internal voice from the community being discussed. At this point, *tepa selira* can be positioned as a decolonial principle because it rejects the dominant knowledge relation .

Previous studies of religious literacy and interreligious education over the past decade have highlighted growing concern about the relationship among religious education, pluralism, and public life (Hidayat, 2021; Musthafa et al., 1999; Musyrifin et al., 2022; Rosidin et al., 2024). Literature from the Western tradition emphasizes the importance of understanding religion in a social, political, and cultural context, rather than as a doctrine separate from history. Another study of the decolonization of religious education curricula shows that modern religious education still carries a colonial legacy in how it classifies world religions, distinguishes major religions from local traditions, and treats non-Western experiences as data rather than theories (Gearon et al., 2021; Matemba & Addai-Mununkum, 2021). In the Indonesian context, a number of studies on Islamic religious higher education have shown that interfaith literacy is increasingly being used as a counter-radicalization strategy to strengthen religious moderation (Ali et al., 2021). These studies are important because they show a shift in Islamic education from a closed, doctrinal model to a more dialogical approach to learning. However, most studies still place interfaith literacy as an instrument of tolerance, moderation, or the prevention of extremism (Godazgar, 2025; Maulidiyah, 2024; Pute et al., 2023; Rosidin et al., 2024; Selvia et al., 2022), rather than as an epistemological issue of how knowledge about other religions is produced.

Of course, this article does not reject the contribution of Western religious literacy, as it has helped shift religious learning from an essentialist approach to a historical and contextual one. However, this article also does not accept the model as the final framework. Through the concept of interfaith communication, this article proposes that interfaith literacy in Indonesian Islamic education can be understood through Javanese empathetic epistemology, a way of knowing that foregrounds affect, relationality, respect, and contextual awareness as part of knowledge production. Thus, tepa selira is not treated as "local wisdom" in a decorative sense, but rather as an analytical category for decolonizing the way Islamic education understands other religions. It allows a shift from ‘knowing about the religious other’ to ‘knowing with ethical self-restraint toward the religious other.’

The main argument of this article is that *tepa selira* can be a conceptual basis for decolonizing interfaith knowledge in the context of Indonesian Islamic education. By using *tepa selira* as a lens, Islamic education is not only directed at forming normatively tolerant learners, but also at subjects capable of understanding other religions with ethical awareness, a *rasa* (affective sensitivity), and epistemic prudence.

Based on this background, this article asks three main questions. First, how does the Western model of religious literacy shape the way Islamic education understands, classifies, and represents other religions? Second, how can Javanese concepts such as *tepa selira*, *rasa, rukun, empan papan*, *ngajeni,* and *andhap asor* be read as an empathetic epistemology for understanding interfaith relations? Third,

how can interfaith knowledge be decolonized and used to formulate a more contextual framework for interfaith literacy in Indonesian Islamic education?

2. METHODS

This article uses the library research method with a critical conceptual review approach. This method was chosen because the article focuses on a critical reading of the concepts, theories, and discourses that comprise the interfaith literacy discourse in Islamic education. In particular, this article examines how the models *of religious literacy* and *interreligious literacy* that have developed in the Western academic tradition can be re-read through decolonial criticism and Javanese local concepts, especially *tepa selira*, as what we call 'empathetic epistemology.'

The data sources in this article consist of three groups of literature. First, literature on *religious literacy*, *interreligious literacy*, and *interfaith education* that discusses religion as an object of education, interreligious relations, tolerance, pluralism, and interfaith learning. This literature is used to map out the basic assumptions of the Western model in understanding other religions. Second, the literature on decoloniality, the coloniality of knowledge, the Global South, and criticism of the universalism of Western epistemology. This literature serves as an analytical tool for reading how knowledge about other religions is produced, classified, and institutionalized in education. Third, literature on Javanese traditions, Indonesian Islamic education, Javanese social ethics, and concepts such as *tepa selira*, *rasa*, *harmony*, *empan papan*, *ngajeni*, and *andhap asor*. This group of literature is used to explore the possibility of local epistemology as a conceptual basis for interfaith literacy.

Data collection was carried out through a selective search of relevant journal articles, academic books, book chapters, and conceptual documents. The selected literature is mainly concerned with three main themes: religious literacy, decolonial criticism of religious education, and local Javanese epistemology in Indonesian socio-religious life. This article prioritizes the literature of the last ten years to capture contemporary developments, but retains classical literature when it plays an important role in the formation of concepts.

Data analysis is carried out through three stages. First, conceptual mapping, which identifies key concepts in literature such as *religious literacy*, *interreligious literacy*, *liberal pluralism*, *coloniality of knowledge*, and *local epistemology*. Second, critical reading, which examines the epistemic assumptions behind the Western cross-faith literacy model, especially its tendency to treat other religions as objects classified and explained from the outside. Third, conceptual reconstruction: formulating *tepa selira* as an empathetic epistemology to decolonize interfaith knowledge in Indonesian Islamic education.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Mapping Interfaith Knowledge

In the initial stage, we conducted a conceptual mapping of the selected corpus of literature for the 2021–2026 period to identify the main directions of the study of religious literacy, interreligious literacy, liberal pluralism, coloniality of knowledge, and local epistemology. This mapping is not intended as a strict quantitative bibliometric analysis, but rather as a thematic coding process to identify the conceptual tendencies that emerge in the literature. Each publication is classified according to its dominant focus, such as the emphasis on religious literacy as a conceptual skill, interfaith literacy as a relational encounter, decolonial critique of religious curriculum, the limitations of liberal pluralism, and the possibility of local epistemology as an alternative theoretical source.

The following is a summary of the trends of the study based on the results of our research:

Table 1: Trends of Interfaith Literature

Study Trends	Literature Data Indicators	Proposing Corpus	Findings
Religious literacy as conceptual literacy	The literature emphasizes religion as knowledge that needs to be read historically, socially, and culturally; not just doctrinal memorization. Ubani, for example, develops *religious literacy* as a form of literacy within the framework of 21st century learning.	25%	The study moves from "knowing religion" to "reading religion in a contextual way".
Interreligious literacy as a cross-faith encounter	The study on PTKI Indonesia shows the practice of cross-religious visits, dialogue, and learning as a method of counter-radicalization and the formation of openness.	20%	Interfaith literacy is understood as a relational experience, not just cognitive knowledge.
Decolonization of the religious education curriculum	Decolonial studies emphasize that religious education is shaped by colonial history, religious classification, and epistemic hierarchies. Gearon et al. stated that religion and education were at the center of the European imperial project.	20%	The problem of religious literacy does not only lie in the content of teaching, but in the way religion is classified and represented.
Criticism of liberal pluralism	The cutting-edge literature on religious pluralism examines the limitations of liberal neutrality, *public reason*, and diversity governance in post-secular societies.	15%	The liberal pluralism model provides a language of tolerance, but it is not always adequate for the non-Western religious experience.
Local epistemology and Javanese traditions	The study of *tepa selira*, *rasa*, *rukun*, *empan papan*, and Javanese social ethics began to be read as the basis for empathy, respect, and relational awareness.	15%	Locality began to shift from "cultural wisdom" to alternative epistemological sources.
Religious moderation as a policy framework	Indonesian studies often link religious literacy to moderation, social harmony, and the prevention of extremism. The 2024 study on religious	5%	Interfaith literacy in Indonesia is still often entered through the language of social

	literacy in Indonesia, for example, sees it as an alternative to religious education that is too theological and has the potential to create alienation between communities.	stability and state policies.

Table 1 above shows that studies over the last five years are still dominated by two major trends: first, the strengthening of *religious literacy* as the ability to read religious contexts; second, the expansion of *interreligious literacy* as a relational experience across faiths. However, decolonial tendencies are also strengthening, especially in criticism of the religious education curriculum, which still carries traces of coloniality of knowledge. On the other hand, the study of local epistemology, such as *tepa selira,* is still relatively small, but it actually opens up a distinctive space for this article.

Critical Reading: Epistemic Assumptions Behind Western Interfaith Literacy Models

In the second stage, we conduct a critical reading of the epistemic assumptions underlying the Western model of interfaith literacy. This reading examines how other religions are positioned in the discourse *of religious literacy* and *interreligious literacy*: whether they present as subjects of knowledge with internal voices, experiences, and authority, or as objects that are classified, explained, and managed from the outside.

We find that the main problem in the Western model of interfaith literacy lies not only in the material about other religions, but in the epistemic assumptions that govern how other religions are known, classified, and explained. As seen in the following table:

Table 2: Mapping Patterns of Western Epistemic Model

Epistemic Assumptions	Patterns in Literature	Findings	Analytical Implications
Religion can be understood through modern academic categories	*Religious literacy* places religion as a historical, social, and cultural phenomenon that can be analyzed systematically.	This model helps to counter essentialism, but still positions religion as an object that can be explained from the outside.	Interfaith literacy is not completely neutral; he brings a Western academic perspective in understanding religion.
Other religions are present as objects of classification	Religions are often grouped as *world religions*, local religions, traditions, cultures, or beliefs.	The classification seems scientific, but it keeps traces of the coloniality of knowledge.	The problem of interfaith literacy is not only the content of teaching, but the way other religions are named and placed.
Knowledge relations are asymmetrical	Other religions are often explained by teachers, curriculum, textbooks, or academics from an external position.	Adherents of other religions have not always been present as subjects who participate in shaping knowledge about themselves.	There is a gap between "explaining" and "explaining".
Interfaith literacy is framed as tolerance	Western literature and educational policies often emphasize	Tolerance can keep hierarchical relationships: the	Interfaith literacy needs to be read as an epistemic

	tolerance, recognition, and social harmony.	majority tolerates the minority.	issue, not just a social attitude.
Religious Moderation and Counter-Radicalization	The PTKI study shows that interfaith literacy is used to prevent radicalism and strengthen moderate attitudes.	Other religions risk being studied as a means of social stability, not as a living tradition that has its own epistemic value.	Interfaith literacy tends to be an instrument of governance, not an equal space of knowledge.
The need for an alternative framework	Decolonial criticism points out the limits of the Western model of reading non-Western experience.	A more relational, ethical, and contextual lens is needed.	*Tepa selira* can be proposed as an empathetic epistemology for reading other religions without representational dominance.

Our findings in this phase show that interfaith literacy can be both progressive and problematic. It is progressive because it opens up understanding of other religions, but it is problematic when it maintains an asymmetrical knowledge relationship between the subject that explains and the other religion that is explained.

As seen in Table 2. At least, our critical reading yields three analytical findings: First, Western models of interfaith literacy tend to assume that religion can be understood through neutral academic classifications. Second, in educational practice, other religions are often presented as objects to be explained from the outside, not as subjects that help shape knowledge of themselves. Third, in the Indonesian context, the adoption of interfaith literacy remains largely tied to the moderation and counter-radicalization agenda, so the epistemic dimension has not been fully developed. This finding opens up space for the third phase, namely, conceptual reconstruction through *tepa selira,* a Javanese empathetic epistemology that can read other religions not only through the category of knowledge but also through taste, relationships, respect, and representational prudence.

Discussion

Tepa Selira: Javanese Empathetic Epistemology

Tepa selira is simply associated with empathy, tolerance, respect, and the ability to maintain social relationships. The study by Al Haqq et al. (2025), for example, examines tepa selira alongside the value of cablaka in Islamic religious education based on Javanese philosophy, particularly to shape the mental health and character of the younger generation. The study shows that tepa selira began to be used in contemporary Islamic educational discourse, although its use remains focused on character education and social harmony. Other studies of *rasa rumangsa* in the context of Javanese culture emphasize the relationship between empathy, self-awareness, solidarity, and conflict prevention; this is important because tepa selira does not stand alone, but operates within a broader Javanese ethical vocabulary: *rasa, rumangsa, rukun, empan papan, ngajeni,* and *andhap asor* (Magnis-Suseno, 1997).

If these concepts are read epistemologically, then tepa selira offers a different model of knowledge from the modern classifier model. The classifier model usually works by separating the known subject and the known object. In this model, other religions are present as something that can be explained, mapped, compared, and categorized from the outside. This is seen in many modern models of religious literacy that position religion as a historical, social, and cultural phenomenon that can be systematically analyzed. *The Harvard Religious Literacy Project,* for example, states that religious literacy includes the ability to analyze religious encounters with social, political, and cultural life, as well as to understand religion as an internally diverse, historically changing, and culturally embedded tradition. This approach is very useful to counter religious essentialism (Moore, 2019). However, from a cross-

disciplinary point of view, the question arises not only whether other religions are historically and contextually understood, but also: what is the ethical position of the person who understands it?

Decolonial criticism shows that modernity not only produces progress, rationality, and academic institutions, but also produces epistemic hierarchies (Gearon et al., 2021; Tuhiwai Smith, 2012). In religious education, for example, this hierarchy appears when the religious experience of non-Western societies is read through the Western secular-liberal category and then presented as a "case" of a theory previously considered established. Gearon et al. (2021) explicitly point out that religion and education are at the center of the European imperial project, so the decolonization of the religious education curriculum cannot mean only adding content about other religions, but also revisiting the epistemic structure of the curriculum itself.

Hegemonic knowledge is knowledge that feels entitled to explain others without listening to the way others explain themselves. Hegemonic knowledge works through classification, simplification, and symbolic mastery (Badri et al., 2007; Quijano, 2000; Scott, 2004). In the context of religious education, the forms are diverse, for example, how textbooks explain other religions in the majority language; teachers explain the beliefs of other communities without presenting the voices of their adherents; The curriculum includes other religions as tolerance material, but does not make room for the internal complexities of those religions (Andreotti, 2011).

It is interesting to read one of the epistemic frameworks of injustice introduced by Miranda Fricker. Fricker (2007) distinguishes epistemic injustice into testimonial and hermeneutical injustice; a person or community can be harmed when his or her testimony is not believed, or when his or her life experience lacks adequate conceptual space in the dominant language. Minority religions, for example, or local traditions can experience both. His self-testimony is often 'defeated' by the narrative of the majority, while his internal concepts are often translated into external categories that do not always fit. José Medina then expands on this criticism by emphasizing the importance of epistemic resistance and collective responsibility in dismantling structured ignorance (Biesta, 2010).

Tepa Selira actually has a strong relationship with the theory of relational ethics. Emmanuel Levinas, for example, places the "face of the Other" as an ethical call that precedes knowledge (Levinas, 1979). That is, before we explain to others, we have first faced ethical demands not to reduce them. Noddings (1984) through the ethics of care, also emphasized that educational relationships are not only built through knowledge transfer, but through attention, responsiveness, and connectedness. In the context of Javanese society, this principle is close to feeling: the ability to capture the atmosphere, weigh the impact of actions, and understand that others are not dry objects of knowledge.

In the context of Islamic education, this reading finds resonance with the concept of *adab.* Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas understands adab as the recognition of the proper place for something in the order of form and knowledge (Al-Attas, 1980; Bambang, 2023). Although this concept originated in Islamic tradition, he can engage in dialogue with his own taste. Both of them reject reckless knowledge. Manners demand proper placement; *Tepa Selira* demands a consideration of the feelings and positions of the other party. If the two are brought together, then interfaith literacy in Islamic education not only requires students to know other religions, but also to know how to place that knowledge ethically. This is important because the problem of religious education is often not just a lack of information, but also a lack of representational nuance: too quick to conclude, too easy to judge, too confident in explaining other religions from the outside.

Thus, interpersonal epistemology is easier to understand as an empathetic epistemology that works through four main principles:

1) Relationality, which is the understanding that knowledge about other religions is always formed in social relations, not in a neutral space.
2) Reflexivity is the awareness that the subject who knows carries certain positions, biases, histories, and interests.
3) Representational humility, which is humility in talking about other religions, because every representation always risks simplifying.

4) Ethical restraint is the ability to restrain oneself so that knowledge does not turn into symbolic domination.

These four principles make tepa selira one of many decolonial frameworks for reorganizing the way Islamic education 'knows' other religions.

Decolonizing Interfaith Literacy in Indonesian Islamic Education

If the first subsection presents *tepa selira* as an empathetic epistemology, then the second subsection explains how this epistemology can serve as a decolonial cross-faith literacy model in Indonesian Islamic education.

In the latest discourse, religious literacy is increasingly understood as a form of literacy rather than just the mastery of religious information. Ubani (2025) for example, develops *religious literacy* as a distinct literacy with its own practices, competencies, and ways of reading within the framework of 21st-century learning. This shift is important because it opens up space to see religion as a social text that needs to be interpreted, not just memorized doctrinal data. However, for Indonesian Islamic education, interfaith literacy requires an additional dimension: not only the ability to read other religious contexts contextually, but also the ability to read one's position when dealing with other religions.

Ali et al. (2021) study on interreligious literacy learning in Indonesian Islamic universities provides an important example of how interfaith literacy has been practiced through visits to Christian universities and places of worship, living in villages, and presenting other religious leaders in Islamic higher education institutions. The study shows a shift in religious learning from a doctrinal to a humanistic-functional approach and positions the model as a counter-radicalization strategy.

What we call a decolonial cross-faith literacy model needs to distinguish between exposure and epistemic encounter. Exposure means that students are introduced to other religions: seeing houses of worship, hearing explanations from other religious leaders, reading texts, or taking a visit. Little things like this are important, but not enough. Epistemic encounter means that students encounter other religions as subjects who can explain themselves, correct erroneous representations, and resist simplification (de Sousa Santos, 2015).

Interfaith learning should ideally not stop at "seeing things differently," but move toward "weighing how different things want to be understood." This model can be formulated through five dimensions:

Reflective Dimensions

Islamic education needs to teach that any knowledge about other religions always comes from a certain position. A PAI teacher, textbook, state, academic, or Muslim student never speaks from a vacuum. They bring with them a certain theology, history, prejudice, majority language, and institutional framework. Paulo Freire calls critical education a process of consciousness-raising, which is the formation of awareness of the structures that shape human experience (Freire, 2020; Reni et al., 2024). In the context of interfaith literacy, critical awareness means recognizing that how we read other religions is influenced by our own position. *Tepa Selira* refines this awareness through the language of taste: before explaining to others, one needs to measure oneself.

Dialogical Dimensions

Interreligious literacy cannot rely entirely on one-sided explanations. He needs a space where other religious communities can explain themselves. *Tepa Selira* demands an ethical reversal: other religions should not be merely pedagogic objects, but epistemic partners. If Muslim learners study Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, or local traditions, then the decolonial model demands the presence of internal sources, voices, or texts from that community.

Affective Dimensions

One weakness of the overly cognitive model of religious literacy is that it assumes prejudice can be overcome only through information. In fact, prejudice often lives in social emotions: fear, disgust, suspicion, superiority, defensiveness, and a sense of threat. Therefore, interfaith literacy needs to

involve affective work. *Rasa*, for example, in this kind of context, becomes important. The study of *rasa rumangsa* in Javanese culture shows how empathy and self-awareness are related to behaviors that support harmony, peace, and social well-being (Al Haqq et al., 2025; Hefner, 2013; Retsikas, 2007). This affective work can mean training learners to recognize their emotions when dealing with other religions: do they feel superior, fearful, amused, alien, or defensive?

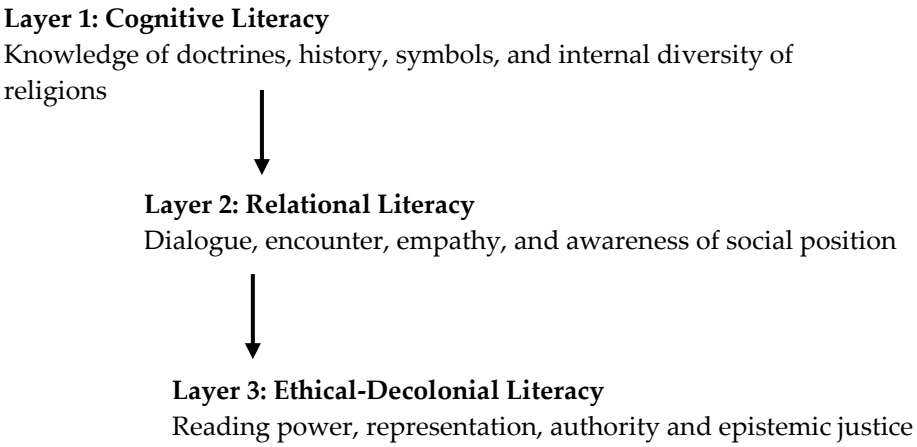
Representational Dimensions

Interfaith literacy should begin by paying attention to how other religions are presented in textbooks, curricula, lectures, and classroom practices. The concept of religious misrepresentation and exclusion, as developed in the study of religious education in Malawi and Ghana, is of interest to us. The study captures well how religious minorities may be present in the curriculum, but are disproportionately, inaccurately, and inadequately represented (Matemba & Addai-Mununkum, 2021). In the Indonesian context, this can happen when other religions are mentioned only in the chapter on tolerance, while the complexity of their histories, practices, and internal voices is never discussed. Thus, *tepa selira,* as an ethics of representation, requires humility: do not explain other religions as if one paragraph in a textbook were enough to represent centuries of living traditions.

Transformative Dimension.

Interfaith literacy based on decolonial principles not only aims to make students "more tolerant", but also better able to read power relations in religious life. This is important because tolerance often works in asymmetric relationships. The majority tolerates the minority; the state regulates harmony; schools teach harmony; But questions about house of worship permits, discrimination, hate speech, symbolic violence, or internal religious minorities are often silenced in the name of stability.

Diagram 1: Decolonial Interfaith Literacy Model



The diagram illustrates that the *tepa selira*-based model of interfaith literacy is constructed through three interconnected layers. The first layer, *cognitive literacy*, refers to foundational knowledge of the histories, doctrines, symbols, and internal diversity of other religions. The second layer, *relational literacy*, emphasizes dialogue, encounter, and awareness of the social positions of others within interreligious relations. The third layer, *ethical-decolonial literacy*, moves beyond informational understanding by critically examining how knowledge about other religions is produced, who is granted representational authority, and how power relations shape religious life. In this sense, the model does not stop at introducing religious difference in informational terms, but seeks to cultivate ethical awareness, relational sensitivity, and epistemic reflexivity in approaching religious others within Indonesian Islamic education. .

The *Tepa Selira* model that we offer has three layers. The first layer is cognitive literacy, which is knowledge of the history, doctrines, practices, symbols, and internal diversity of other religions. The

second layer is relational literacy, the ability to understand other religions through encounters, dialogues, and awareness of the social positions of other parties. The third layer is ethical-decolonial literacy, which is the ability to read how knowledge about other religions is produced, who is given the authority to speak, and how representation can be fair or dominant. Without a third layer, interfaith literacy easily falls into a catalog of religions. Neat, informative, but sterile from criticism.

4. CONCLUSION

Our research shows that interfaith literacy in Islamic education cannot be understood solely as the ability to know other religions, build tolerance, or prevent extremism. Behind this concept there is a more fundamental epistemic problem, namely how other religions are known, classified, represented, and placed in the structure of educational knowledge. The model *of religious literacy* and *interreligious literacy* that has developed in the Western academic tradition has indeed made an important contribution in shifting religious education from a doctrinal-essentialist approach to a more historical, social, and contextual reading. However, the model also has limitations because it often places other religions as objects that can be explained from the outside through the categories of modern liberal-secular and academic. This article offers *tepa selira* as a Javanese empathetic epistemology to decolonize interfaith knowledge in Islamic education. *Tepa selira* is not understood simply as manners or local wisdom, but as a way of knowing based on *taste*, reflexivity, representational prudence, and respect for other people's positions. Through *intercourse*, knowledge of other religions does not start from the will to master, classify, or conclude, but from the ability to place oneself, hear, and weigh the impact of representation on the represented party. We offer the need to make an epistemic shift from 'knowing about the religious other from knowing about the religious other' to 'knowing with ethical responsibility toward the religious other'

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