



Harmony, Power, and Diversity: The Concept of Multicultural Leadership in *Serat Nitistruti*

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Abstract:

The increasing complexity of Indonesia's plural society demands a model of leadership that is not only structurally effective but also inclusive in managing cultural, religious, and social identity diversity. However, studies on multicultural leadership are still dominated by Western theories, while explorations of local wisdom remain relatively limited. In fact, Nusantara traditions such as *Serat Nitistruti* by Pangeran Karanggayam contain teachings on the *gusti-kawula* relationship, social harmony, and the legitimacy of power based on morality. The scope of this research is focused on interpreting the relationship between social harmony, the legitimacy of power, and the management of cultural diversity as represented in the text. The purpose of this study is to uncover the model of multicultural leadership offered by *Serat Nitistruti* and its relevance within the context of a plural society. This study employs a qualitative research design with a textual analysis approach, hermeneutics, and cultural studies to interpret the symbols, normative teachings, and leadership values contained in the manuscript. The results indicate that *Serat Nitistruti* represents a leadership model that emphasizes a balance between power and ethics, as well as the leader's ability to maintain harmony amid social and cultural diversity. Leadership is understood as non-dominative, but rather participatory and oriented toward justice, wisdom, and self-restraint. Therefore, *Serat Nitistruti* offers a multicultural leadership paradigm grounded in Javanese local wisdom that places harmony and diversity as the foundation of the legitimacy of power, thereby holding conceptual relevance for the development of inclusive leadership in contemporary Indonesia.

Keywords: Multicultural Leadership, *Serat Nitistruti*, Javanese Local Wisdom, Social Harmony, Ethics of Power.

Abstrak:

Peningkatan kompleksitas masyarakat plural di Indonesia menuntut model kepemimpinan yang tidak hanya efektif secara struktural, tetapi juga inklusif dalam mengelola keberagaman budaya, agama, dan identitas sosial. Namun, kajian kepemimpinan multikultural masih didominasi teori Barat, sementara eksplorasi kearifan lokal relatif terbatas. Padahal, tradisi Nusantara seperti dalam *Serat Nitistruti* karya Pangeran Karanggayam memuat ajaran tentang relasi *gusti-kawula*, harmoni sosial, dan legitimasi kekuasaan berbasis moralitas. Ruang lingkup penelitian difokuskan pada pemaknaan relasi antara harmoni sosial, legitimasi kekuasaan, dan pengelolaan keberagaman budaya sebagaimana direpresentasikan dalam teks. Tujuan penelitian ini adalah untuk mengungkap model kepemimpinan multikultural yang ditawarkan *Serat Nitistruti* serta relevansinya dalam konteks masyarakat majemuk. Kajian ini merupakan ragam penelitian kualitatif dengan pendekatan analisis teks, hermeneutika, dan kajian budaya untuk menafsirkan simbol, ajaran normatif, dan nilai-nilai kepemimpinan yang terkandung dalam naskah. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa *Serat Nitistruti* merepresentasikan model kepemimpinan yang menekankan keseimbangan antara kekuasaan dan etika, serta kemampuan pemimpin dalam merawat harmoni di tengah keberagaman sosial dan budaya. Kepemimpinan dipahami tidak bersifat dominatif, melainkan partisipatoris dan berorientasi pada keadilan, kearifan, serta pengendalian diri. Oleh karena itu *Serat Nitistruti* menawarkan paradigma kepemimpinan multikultural berbasis kearifan lokal Jawa yang menempatkan harmoni dan keberagaman sebagai fondasi legitimasi kekuasaan, sehingga memiliki relevansi konseptual bagi pengembangan kepemimpinan inklusif dalam konteks Indonesia kontemporer.

Keywords: Kepemimpinan Multikultural, *Serat Nitistruti*, Kearifan Lokal Jawa, Harmoni Sosial, Etika Kekuasaan.

INTRODUCTION

Multicultural leadership has become a central focus in social and governance studies due to the increasing complexity of societies that are plural in terms of culture, ethnicity, religion, and language.¹ Multicultural leadership encompasses the ability to maintain social harmony, manage cultural diversity,² and exercise power in an inclusive and just manner, so that differences become not a source of conflict but a collective strength.³ This phenomenon is particularly significant in Indonesia as a country with more than 1,300 ethnic groups⁴ and a wide range of cultural traditions, where the challenge of maintaining unity while respecting diversity continues to evolve.⁵ However, studies on the concept of multicultural leadership rooted in traditional local wisdom, especially in classical literary texts of the Indonesian archipelago, remain very limited.⁶

In 2020, based on census data from the Central Bureau of Statistics, around 85% of Indonesia's population adhered to Islam, followed by Protestant Christianity (5.5%), Catholicism (3%), Hinduism (1.7%), Buddhism (0.7%), and other belief systems.⁷ Efforts to foster unity and understanding among various religious communities not only strengthen Indonesia's social order but also enhance the country's status as a regional example of religious tolerance.⁸

The Research and Development and Training Agency of the Ministry of Religion of the Republic of Indonesia, through its Religious Harmony Index survey over the past three years, has shown a positive trend. The Religious Harmony Index in 2022 was 73.09, while in the following two years it increased to 76.02 in 2023 and 76.47 in 2024.⁹ One of the factors contributing to this improvement is the effort of the Ministry of Religious Affairs to promote and internalize the strengthening of religious moderation through various programs and activities.¹⁰

Serat Nitiruti is a classical Javanese literary work written by *Pangeran* Karanggayam during the era of the Pajang Kingdom in 1591 CE, and is known to contain ethical and moral

¹ James A. Banks, "Diversity, Group Identity, and Citizenship Education in a Global Age," *Educational Researcher* 37, no. 3 (2008): 129–139. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43823659>

² Faridah Jalal and Dede Rosyada, *Pendidikan Multikultural: Konsep Dan Implementasi* (Kencana, 2013), 45–47.

³ Syaharuddin and Mohamad Iwan Fitriani, "Multicultural Leadership: Concept and Implementation in Educational Institutions," *Jurnal Pendidikan Glasser* 8, no. 2 (2024). <https://lonsuit.unismuhluwuk.ac.id/glasser/article/view/3618>

⁴ Badan Pusat Statistik (BPS), *Statistik Kebudayaan Indonesia 2023* (BPS RI, 2023), 12–15.

⁵ Raihani Raihani, "School Leadership Practices and Identity Politics in a Multicultural Society: The Case of Indonesia," *Journal of Asian Social Science Research* 4, no. 1 (2022): 23–42, <https://doi.org/10.15575/jassr.v4i1.61>.

⁶ Benedict R. O'G. Anderson, *Language and Power: Exploring Political Cultures in Indonesia* (Cornell University Press, 1990), 23–26.

⁷ Pearl Lousye Wenas and Seska Meily Hermin Mengko, "Analisis Pengembangan Pariwisata Kota Manado Melalui Slogan 'Manado Kota Cerdas,'" *Jurnal Hospitaliti dan Pariwisata* 4, no. 1 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.35729/jhp.v4i1.57>.

⁸ Raikhan and Moh. Nasrul Amin, "Penguatan Moderasi Beragama: Revitalisasi Guru Dalam Pembelajaran Pendidikan Agama Islam Di Madrasah," *Jurnal Pembelajaran Pemberdayaan Masyarakat (JP2M)* 4, no. 3 (2023): 629–43, <https://doi.org/10.33474/jp2m.v4i3.20917>.

⁹ Barjah, *Indeks Kerukunan Umat Beragama 2024 Naik Jadi 76,47* (Kementerian Agama, 2024), <https://kemenag.go.id/nasional/indeks-kerukunan-umat-beragama-2024-naik-jadi-76-47-wG2qs>.

¹⁰ Endang Fatmawati, "Strategies to Grow a Proud Attitude towards Indonesian Cultural Diversity," *Linguistics and Culture Review* 5, no. S1 (2021): 81, <https://doi.org/10.21744/lingcure.v5nS1.1465>.

teachings for social life, including guidance on the roles and behavior of leaders.¹¹ The real name of *Pangeran Karanggayam* was *Tumenggung Sujanapura*, who was an ancestor of the Surakarta court poet *Raden Ngabehi Ranggawarsita*¹² and also a descendant of *Raden Patah* of Demak Sultanate. The manuscript used in this research is *Serat Nitisruti* with the catalog number Bb.1.82 from Museum Dewantara Kirti Griya in Yogyakarta. The manuscript measures 14×21 cm and consists of 41 pages. The text of *Serat Nitisruti* uses the Javanese language and script in the form of *tembang macapat*, consisting of metrum I (*Dhandhanggula*) with 31 stanzas, metrum II (*Sinom*) with 34 stanzas, metrum III (*Asmarandana*) with 35 stanzas, metrum IV (*Mijil*) with 27 stanzas, metrum V (*Durma*) with 23 stanzas, metrum VI (*Pucung*) with 38 stanzas, metrum VII (*Kinanthi*) with 22 stanzas, and metrum VIII (*Megatruh*) with 40 stanzas.¹³

Serat Nitisruti contains a source of Javanese leadership teachings that embody moral values, ethics, and the structure of relationships between leaders and those they lead.¹⁴ However, empirical studies that explicitly connect it with the paradigm of multicultural leadership explaining how traditional texts can respond to the dynamics of cultural diversity remain limited.¹⁵ Therefore, this research is important to address how *Serat Nitisruti* represents a concept of leadership that is not only ethical but also multicultural, namely a concept capable of integrating harmony, the legitimacy of power, and the management of cultural diversity, which can be applied in the context of modern Indonesian society that is pluralistic.

Several studies on leadership and *Serat Nitisruti* have been identified by the researcher. First, the study by Izzuddin Fahmi Rijal on Javanese Leadership Teachings in *Serat Nitisruti*.¹⁶ This research presents a philological analysis of *Serat Nitisruti* and positions the text as a source of leadership teachings in the Javanese tradition and its relevance to Islamic education. The focus of the study is the identification of the content of the text and the normative relevance of Javanese leadership, but it has not yet explored the multicultural dimension. Second, the research by Puspita, Aryanto, and Wijaya entitled Moral Teachings in *Serat Nitisruti*.¹⁷ This study employs the hermeneutics of Paul Ricoeur to explore the moral values contained in *Serat Nitisruti* and their relationship with the Qur'an. The findings indicate the presence of universal values such as compassion, justice, and humility that have the potential to support cross-cultural dialogue, although they are not explicitly connected to multicultural leadership theory. Third, the study by Utami and Suwarni entitled *Piwulang Sajrone Serat Nitisruti*.¹⁸ This study focuses on the structure of the text and the social moral teachings

¹¹ Izzuddin Rijal Fahmi, "Ajaran Kepemimpinan Jawa Dalam Serat Nitisruti Dan Relevansinya Dengan Pendidikan," *Muslim Heritage* 6, no. 1 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.21154/muslimheritage.v6i1.2810>.

¹² Rd. Ng. Yasadipura, *Babad Tanah Jawi, Jld. 2* (Balai Pustaka, 1939), 53–54.

¹³ Neni Alyani et al., "Building a Culture of Tolerance Through Sustainable Leadership, Cultural Intelligence, and Social Adaptation: Evidence from a Multicultural Community in Indonesia," *Cultural Intelligence* 7, no. 4 (2025). <https://journal.uinsgd.ac.id/index.php/ks/article/view/49568>

¹⁴ Fahmi, "Ajaran Kepemimpinan Jawa Dalam Serat Nitisruti Dan Relevansinya Dengan Pendidikan."

¹⁵ Intan Puspita Sari et al., "Moral Teachings in Serat Nitisruti and Their Correspondence with the Qur'anic Surahs," *Kawruh: Journal of Language Education, Literature and Local Culture* 7, no. 2 (2025): 102–16.

¹⁶ Fahmi, "Ajaran Kepemimpinan Jawa Dalam Serat Nitisruti Dan Relevansinya Dengan Pendidikan."

¹⁷ Puspita Sari et al., "Moral Teachings in Serat Nitisruti and Their Correspondence with the Qur'anic Surahs."

¹⁸ "Piwulang Sajrone Serat Nitisruti (Tintingan Sosiologi Sastra)," n.d.

contained in *Serat Nitistruti* from the perspective of the sociology of literature. The results identify general moral themes, but do not explore how these teachings shape a theory or model of multicultural leadership. Fourth, the thesis by Afendy Widayat entitled *Serat Nitistruti* in the Perspective of Ethics and Its Relevance to the Values of Pancasila.¹⁹ This thesis interprets the moral values in *Serat Nitistruti* using a hermeneutic approach, focusing on the compatibility of the text's teachings with the values of Pancasila. Although it discusses social and ethical values, the study does not extend the analysis to the realm of multicultural leadership or the implications for managing cultural diversity.

Based on the review of previous studies, there is a significant research gap, namely the lack of studies that explicitly develop a model of multicultural leadership derived from the text *Serat Nitistruti*. Most existing studies interpret the text primarily from the perspective of general ethics and its relevance to educational values,²⁰ but they have not been used to connect local values with contemporary theories of multicultural leadership.

This research aims to identify and describe the representation of the values of harmony, power, and diversity in *Serat Nitistruti* as a foundation for leadership. It also seeks to analyze the concept of multicultural leadership implied in the text and to explore values that are relevant to a plural social context.²¹ Furthermore, this study contextualizes the teachings of *Serat Nitistruti* within the discourse of modern multicultural leadership as an alternative value framework rooted in local wisdom.²²

The novelty of this research lies in the development of a multicultural leadership model based on *Serat Nitistruti*. This model does not merely interpret general moral values, but constructs an explicit concept of multicultural leadership that includes social harmony, the legitimacy of power, and the management of cultural diversity an approach that has not been undertaken in previous studies. In addition, this research integrates the local values contained in *Serat Nitistruti* with global discussions on multicultural leadership, thereby contributing a local-global dimension to leadership theory.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research design using a library research approach. The author examines classical Javanese literary texts that contain normative, symbolic, and philosophical values related to leadership. Qualitative research enables the author to interpret the meaning of multicultural leadership in depth without reducing it to numerical data or statistical variables.²³ The text *Serat Nitistruti* is analyzed as the primary data source through intensive reading, accompanied by the analysis of relevant secondary literature. Furthermore, the author applies three approaches in examining *Serat Nitistruti*.

First, a textual analysis approach is used to view the text as a discourse structure that

¹⁹ Afendy Widayat, "Serat Nitistruti Dalam Perspektif Etika Dan Relevansinya Dengan Nilai-Nilai Pancasila" (Universitas Gajah Mada, 2010).

²⁰ Sri Harti Widyastuti, "Penyiapan Kepemimpinan Berdasarkan Konsep Islam Jawa Dalam Serat Wulang Putra," *Litera* 21, no. 1 (2022). <https://journal.uny.ac.id/index.php/litera/article/view/48034>

²¹ Rahmi Hayati, "Integrasi Nilai Nilai Humanis Dalam Kepemimpinan Pendidikan Islam Multikultural," *Jurnal Sosial Dan Sains* 5, no. 5 (2025), <https://doi.org/10.59188/jurnalsosains.v5i5.32203>.

²² Ahmad Al Fauzan et al., "Budaya Jawa Dan Peranannya Dalam Nilai-Nilai Kepemimpinan," *Jurnal Pendidikan Multikultural Indonesia* 4, no. 1 (2021): 40–45, <https://doi.org/10.23887/jpnu.v4i1.30063>.

²³ Creswell J. W., *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among Five Approaches* (4th Ed, 4th ed. (Sage Publications, 2018), 44–45.

contains signs, symbols, and teachings of leadership. This approach is guided by the theory of Roland Barthes, who considers a text as a system of signs whose meanings can be interpreted through the relationship between language, symbols, and context.²⁴ This approach is applied by identifying normative terms, metaphors of power, and patterns of leadership teachings (*piwulang*) within the text that relate to social harmony and the management of diversity.

Second, a hermeneutic approach is employed to interpret the deeper meanings of the text *Serat Nitistruti*. The theoretical framework used is the philosophical hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer, which emphasizes that understanding a text emerges from a dialogue between the text, its historical context, and the interpreter.²⁵ A text does not possess a single fixed meaning; rather, it remains open to interpretation according to the context of different periods. In this study, the author interprets *Serat Nitistruti* by considering the context of classical Javanese culture while also examining its relevance to contemporary discourse on multicultural leadership.

Third, a cultural studies approach developed by Clifford Geertz is employed, which views culture as a system of symbolic meanings through which humans understand the world and their social relations.²⁶ Leadership, from this perspective, is understood as a cultural practice rich in values and symbolic legitimacy.²⁷ This approach is used to position the leadership teachings in *Serat Nitistruti* as an expression of Javanese social ethics that emphasize harmony, balance of power, and the management of differences.²⁸ Furthermore, the analysis is guided by theories of culture and power to examine the relationship between power and moral legitimacy, leaders and society, as well as authority and social harmony.²⁹ This theoretical framework helps explain that power in *Serat Nitistruti* is not merely coercive in nature, but is legitimized through ethical values, spirituality, and the capacity to manage diversity.³⁰

These three theoretical frameworks complement one another because the classical Javanese text *Serat Nitistruti* is not merely a linguistic text but also a system of signs (symbols, metaphors, and myths of power), a product of historical tradition, and an expression of Javanese culture embedded within a particular social structure. The theory of Roland Barthes is used to analyze the structure of meaning and to uncover symbolic ideology. The theory of Clifford Geertz is applied to analyze the cultural context and explain the Javanese system of meaning. Meanwhile, the theory of Hans-Georg Gadamer is employed to understand and ensure historical interpretation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Representation of Leadership in the Textual Structure of *Serat Nitistruti*

The results of the textual analysis show that *Serat Nitistruti* consistently represents leadership as an ethical and cultural practice, rather than merely a formal power relationship.³¹ Through the structure of *piwulang* (didactic teachings), the text constructs an

²⁴ Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (Hill and Wang, 1972), 109–159.

²⁵ Hans Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (Continuum, 2004), 305–307.

²⁶ Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (Basic Books, 1973), 5.

²⁷ Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 89–93.

²⁸ Koentjaraningrat, *Kebudayaan Jawa*, (Balai Pustaka, 1994), 304–310.

²⁹ R. O'G. Anderson, *Language and Power: Exploring Political Cultures in Indonesia*, 22–28.

³⁰ Niels Mulder, *Mysticism in Java: Ideology in Indonesia*, (Kanisius, 2001), 56–61.

³¹ R. O'G. Anderson, *Language and Power: Exploring Political Cultures in Indonesia*, 29–34.

image of the ideal leader grounded in self-control, wisdom, and the ability to maintain social balance.³² Its discourse structure is normative and didactic, in which leadership advice is conveyed through symbols, metaphors, and moral expressions that bind leaders to social and spiritual responsibilities.³³

Leadership as an ethical and cultural practice rooted in self-control is reflected in the following stanza:

“*Yen dadi nata kudu weruh ing budi,
Aja kagungan pamrih pribadi,
Ngudi beciking praja,
Amrih tentreming nagara.*”

The translation

“If one becomes a leader, one must understand wisdom,
not be driven by personal interests,
strive for the good of the state,
so that peace in society may be achieved.”³⁴

This passage affirms that leadership is understood as a moral practice that requires the restraint of personal interests and an orientation toward collective welfare.

Leadership as a social responsibility is reflected in the following stanza:

“*Nata kudu asih marang kawula,
Ngayomi wong kang nandhang susah,
Aja nganti kaliren lan kasangsaran,
Iku kuwajibaning nata.*”

The translation

“A leader must love the people,
protect those who suffer, and ensure that the people
do not experience hunger and misery,
this is the obligation of a ruler.”³⁵

This passage shows that the legitimacy of leadership derives from the leader’s ability to protect and promote the welfare of the people, particularly the vulnerable and disadvantaged groups.

From the perspective of textual analysis inspired by Roland Barthes, the text *Serat Nitistruti* can be interpreted as a system of signs that produces meanings of leadership. Terms such as *laku utama* (noble conduct), *waskita* (insightful wisdom), *adil* (justice), and *rukun* (social harmony) function not only as guides for individual morality but also as symbols of collective values that sustain social harmony. Thus, leadership in this text is polysemic, carrying ethical, political, and cultural meanings simultaneously.³⁶

Power as a Moral Trust Rather Than Domination

A hermeneutic reading of *Serat Nitistruti* reveals that the concept of power in this text is not constructed on the basis of coercive domination, but rather as a moral trust.³⁷ Power is understood as a means to maintain order, balance, and collective welfare.³⁸ The ideal leader is

³² *Kebudayaan Jawa*, 312–318.

³³ . Soedarsono, *Filsafat Jawa* (Gadjah Mada University Press, 1996), 72–75.

³⁴ R. Ng. Pangeran Karanggayam, *Serat Nitistruti*, Ed. Darusuprta (Depdikbud, 1981), 34.

³⁵ Pangeran Karanggayam, *Serat Nitistruti*, Ed. Darusuprta, 46.

³⁶ Barthes, *Mythologies*, 109–159.

³⁷ Paul Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences: Essays on Language, Action and Interpretation* (Cambridge University Press, 1981), 43–48.

³⁸ R. O’G. Anderson, *Language and Power: Exploring Political Cultures in Indonesia*, 35–41.

not portrayed as an absolute figure, but as a guardian of cosmic and social harmony.³⁹

Within the framework of the philosophical hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer, the meaning of power in *Serat Nitistruti* emerges from a dialogue between the text and the context of classical Javanese culture, which highly values the principle of balance and harmony.⁴⁰ Power becomes legitimate not merely because of physical strength or structural authority, but because of the leader's ability to demonstrate wisdom and justice. This approach is consistent with the view of Norman Fairclough that language and texts function as social practices that reproduce power relations.⁴¹ However, unlike modern discourses of power that often tend to be hegemonic, *Serat Nitistruti* places power within a framework of ethics and spirituality. The language used in the text serves to restrain the personal ambitions of leaders in favor of collective interests.

Table 1. The Differences between *Serat Nitistruti* and *Serat Wulangreh* Are as Follows:

Main Aspects	<i>Serat Nitistruti</i>	<i>Serat Wulangreh</i>
Perspective on Power	Power is viewed as a moral relationship between the leader and those being led, characterized by harmony and grounded in noble ethics and the leader's exemplary conduct. ⁴²	Power is viewed as a form of structural legitimacy that must be obeyed hierarchically by the people in order to maintain stability and order. ⁴³
Concept of Leadership	A leader as an ethical role model who integrates morality with collective goals.	The leader is viewed as a formal authority whose rights must be respected and obeyed by the citizens.
Power-People Relationship	Social harmony through shared responsibility and moral commitment. ⁴⁴	Loyalty and obedience to the ruler serve as the basis of the relationship. ⁴⁵
Dominant Ethics	Equality, justice, and virtue in leadership.	Obedience to the social hierarchy and the upholding of authority.

Social Harmony as the Core of Leadership

The analysis shows that harmony is a central value in the leadership concept presented in *Serat Nitistruti*.⁴⁶ Harmony is not understood as uniformity, but rather as the ability to manage differences wisely.⁴⁷ Leaders are expected to understand the diverse social conditions of society and respond to them with fairness and empathy.⁴⁸

From the perspective of cultural studies by Clifford Geertz, Javanese culture can be understood as a "web of meanings" that places harmony as the main principle of social life.⁴⁹ *Serat Nitistruti* reflects this worldview by emphasizing that conflict and division are signs of leadership failure. Therefore, the ideal leader is a figure who is able to read social situations, mediate differences, and prevent the domination of one group over another.

³⁹ Mulder, *Mysticism in Java: Ideology in Indonesia*, 62–68.

⁴⁰ Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 305–307.

⁴¹ Norman Fairclough, *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language* (Longman, 1995), 73–75.

⁴² Fahmi, "Ajaran Kepemimpinan Jawa Dalam Serat Nitistruti Dan Relevansinya Dengan Pendidikan."

⁴³ "Etika Kewarganegaraan Dalam Serat Wulangreh," n.d. <https://ejournal.undip.ac.id/index.php/sabda/article/view/13285>

⁴⁴ Fahmi, "Ajaran Kepemimpinan Jawa Dalam Serat Nitistruti Dan Relevansinya Dengan Pendidikan."

⁴⁵ Amat Zuhri, "Etika Kewarganegaraan Dalam Serat Wulangreh," *Sabda: Jurnal Kajian Kebudayaan* 10, no. 1 (2015). <https://ejournal.undip.ac.id/index.php/sabda/article/view/13285>

⁴⁶ *Kebudayaan Jawa*, 300–305.

⁴⁷ Clifford Geertz, *The Religion of Java* (University of Chicago Press, 1960), 146–150.

⁴⁸ Fauzan et al., "Budaya Jawa Dan Peranannya Dalam Nilai-Nilai Kepemimpinan," 40–45.

⁴⁹ Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 5–7.

The harmony referred to in this text is also multilevel in nature, encompassing harmony between leaders and the people, among members of society, and between humans and the cosmic order.⁵⁰ This indicates that leadership in *Serat Nitistruti* possesses ecological and spiritual dimensions that enrich the concept of multicultural leadership.⁵¹ Jong Hyun Lee and Hyoungchul Shin state that inclusive leadership has a significant positive influence on the climate of diversity. This influence is reflected in organizational citizenship behavior oriented toward change.⁵² Similarly, Kustomo shows that multicultural leadership of school principals has a positive impact on the implementation of inclusive and diversity-sensitive curricula, and is able to foster a school culture that embraces differences.⁵³

Diversity and Multicultural Principles in *Serat Nitistruti*

Although it emerged from the context of classical Javanese culture, *Serat Nitistruti* contains principles that align with modern ideas of multicultural leadership.⁵⁴ The text teaches that a leader must understand the differences in character, social backgrounds, and interests of the people they lead.⁵⁵ Diversity is not positioned as a threat, but rather as a social reality that must be managed with wisdom.⁵⁶

In the theory of multicultural leadership proposed by James A. Banks, effective leadership in a pluralistic society is characterized by inclusiveness, social justice, and recognition of cultural differences.⁵⁷ These values are implicitly present in *Serat Nitistruti*, particularly through its emphasis on fairness, mutual respect, and a leader's ability to avoid narrow partiality.

Thus, the findings of this study show that *Serat Nitistruti* is not only relevant as a traditional ethical text, but also as a conceptual source for the development of multicultural leadership based on local wisdom. Leadership is therefore understood not as the standardization of identity, but as a process of integrating values within diversity.

Leadership Policies in the Text of *Serat Nitistruti* in Regulating the Treatment of Different Groups:

Leadership that Understands Differences in Character

Leadership must be based on an understanding of the diverse characteristics of society. Text excerpt:

*“Yen dadi nata kudu weruh ing budi, Ngerti watake kawula, Aja nganti salah nindakake, Supaya raharja nagara.”*⁵⁸

⁵⁰ Mulder, *Mysticism in Java: Ideology in Indonesia*, 52–58. Keduanya menjelaskan bahwa harmoni dalam pandangan Jawa bersifat berlapis—meliputi relasi sosial, politik, dan kosmis yang menjadi dasar legitimasi kepemimpinan.

⁵¹ R. O’G. Anderson, *Language and Power: Exploring Political Cultures in Indonesia*, 40–46.

⁵² JongHyun Lee and HyoungChul Shin, “Effects of Inclusive Leadership on the Diversity Climate and Change-Oriented Organizational Citizenship Behavior,” *Behavioral Sciences* 14, no. 6 (2024): 491, <https://doi.org/10.3390/bs14060491>.

⁵³ Agus Prianto dkk, “Pengaruh Kepemimpinan Multikultural Kepala Sekolah Terhadap Implementasi Kurikulum Inklusif di Sekolah Dasar,” *Inovasi: Jurnal Sosial Humaniora dan Pendidikan* 5, no. 1 (2026). <https://journalcenter.org/index.php/inovasi/article/view/5303>

⁵⁴ Nancy K. Florida, *Writing the Past, Inscripting the Future: History as Prophecy in Colonial Java* (Duke University Press, 1995), 6–9.

⁵⁵ *Kebudayaan Jawa*, 307–312.

⁵⁶ James A. Banks, *Cultural Diversity and Education: Foundations, Curriculum, and Teaching*, (Routledge, 2016), 7–12;

⁵⁷ James A. Banks, *An Introduction to Multicultural Education* (Pearson, n.d.), 23–30.

⁵⁸ Pangeran Karanggayam, *Serat Nitistruti, Ed. Darusuprta*, 33.

This text views power as an interpretative practice, in which a leader must adjust policies to social conditions in order to achieve collective welfare.

Leaders Protecting Vulnerable Groups

The legitimacy of leadership derives from the ability to protect vulnerable groups. Text excerpt:

“*Nata kudu asih marang kawula, Ngayomi wong kang nandhang susah, Aja mung mulyakake kang kuwasa, Amarga kuwi tandha ora adil.*”⁵⁹

The term *welas asih* (compassion) indicates that power is understood as a moral responsibility that places the welfare of society as the primary objective.

Leaders Maintaining Social Harmony

Leaders must remain neutral and fair toward all groups. Text excerpt:

“*Aja memihak marang golongan, Nata kudu adil lan wicaksana, Supaya tentreming nagara, Lan rukun bebrayan agung.*”⁶⁰

The concept of *rukun bebrayan* reflects the view that social stability is achieved through balanced social relations and non-discriminatory policies.

Dialogical Leadership

Leadership must be open to differing opinions. Text excerpt:

“*Nata kudu gelem mireng pitutur, Aja mung manut karepe dhewe, Amarga saka rembug kang becik, Bisa njalari kabecikan nagara.*”⁶¹

The concept of *rembug* places deliberation and dialogue as sources of collective wisdom, so that a leader’s decisions gain social legitimacy.

Synthesis of Multicultural Leadership Based on Local Wisdom

Based on textual analysis, hermeneutic interpretation, and cultural studies, this research finds that the concept of leadership in *Serat Nitistruti* can be synthesized into three main principles: harmony, ethical power, and the management of diversity.⁶² These three principles form a model of leadership that is participatory and oriented toward social balance.⁶³

Unlike Western leadership models that are often rooted in instrumental rationality or structural domination, leadership in *Serat Nitistruti* is cultural and moral in nature.⁶⁴ It requires leaders to subordinate personal interests to the maintenance of social order.⁶⁵ This finding strengthens the view that traditional literary texts can function as alternative sources of social and political theory.⁶⁶ Therefore, *Serat Nitistruti* offers a contextual framework of multicultural leadership that is relevant for pluralistic societies such as Indonesia.⁶⁷ Leadership is not measured solely by administrative effectiveness, but by the ability to maintain harmony and manage diversity fairly.⁶⁸

59 Pangeran Karanggayam, *Serat Nitistruti*, Ed. Darusuprpta, 46.

60 Pangeran Karanggayam, *Serat Nitistruti*, Ed. Darusuprpta, 59.

61 Pangeran Karanggayam, *Serat Nitistruti*, Ed. Darusuprpta.

62 Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences: Essays on Language, Action and Interpretation*, 45–49.

63 *Kebudayaan Jawa*, 300–325.

64 Max Weber, *Economy and Society* (University of California Press, 1978), 212–215.

65 Mulder, *Mysticism in Java: Ideology in Indonesia*, 60–67.

66 R. O’G. Anderson, *Language and Power: Exploring Political Cultures in Indonesia*, 44–46.

67 A. Banks, *Cultural Diversity and Education: Foundations, Curriculum, and Teaching*, 7–12.

68 Fauzan et al., “Budaya Jawa Dan Peranannya Dalam Nilai-Nilai Kepemimpinan,” 40–45.

Table 2. Conceptual Model of Multicultural Leadership

Model Stage	Main Components	Conceptual Indicators	Sources of Nitisruti Values
INPUT	Values of Javanese Local Wisdom	Leadership morality, the ruler-people relationship, and the leader's example.	Teachings on ethical leadership and social morality.
	Values of Multiculturalism	Recognition of cultural differences and social inclusivity.	Social harmony and togetherness.
	Leadership Character	Integrity, compassion, and wisdom.	The ethics of exemplary leadership.
PROCESS	Harmony (Social Relations)	Collaboration, social balance, and the unity of interests.	Harmonious social relations.
	Ethical Power	Leadership based on morality, responsibility, and justice.	Power as a moral responsibility.
	Diversity Management	Tolerance, dialogical communication, and inclusivity.	Cultural adaptation and respect for differences.
OUTPUT	A Harmonious Multicultural Organization	Social stability and group cohesion.	Harmonious social life.
	Inclusive Leadership Based on Local Wisdom	Collective participation and organizational trust.	The moral legitimacy of leaders.
	Organizational Sustainability	Productivity, solidarity, and social resilience.	A balance between power and society.

The input stage serves as the value foundation that shapes multicultural leadership in *Serat Nitisruti*, emphasizing Javanese local wisdom in the form of an ethical relationship between leaders and society. Leadership is understood as a moral practice that requires integrity, wisdom, and exemplary conduct from leaders in managing social life.⁶⁹ These values are integrated with the principles of multiculturalism, which recognize cultural diversity and social identities as realities of modern organizations. The integration of both forms a leadership character capable of managing differences in an inclusive manner and oriented toward collective welfare.⁷⁰

The process stage represents the implementation of leadership values through three main principles: social harmony, ethical power, and the management of diversity. Harmony functions to create balanced social relations through dialogical communication and collective collaboration. Ethical power positions leadership as a moral trust that demands justice and social responsibility.⁷¹ Meanwhile, the management of diversity emphasizes a leader's ability to integrate cultural differences and social identities inclusively. These three principles become mechanisms that transform moral values into effective multicultural leadership practices.⁷²

The output stage illustrates the results of implementing leadership based on local wisdom, namely the formation of a multicultural organization that is harmonious, inclusive, and sustainable. Leadership rooted in moral values generates social cohesion, organizational trust, and the collective participation of organizational members. Furthermore, this model promotes social stability and organizational resilience in facing global changes, because

⁶⁹ Pangeran Karanggayam, *Serat Nitisruti*, Ed. Darusuprpta, 32–34.

⁷⁰ Franz Magnis-Suseno, *Etika Jawa: Sebuah Analisa Falsafi Tentang Kebijakan Hidup Jawa* (Gramedia, 1984).

⁷¹ Pangeran Karanggayam, *Serat Nitisruti*, Ed. Darusuprpta, 58–60.

⁷² R. O'G. Anderson, *Language and Power: Exploring Political Cultures in Indonesia*, 45–48.

leadership relies not only on structural power but also on moral legitimacy and harmonious social relations.⁷³

Multicultural leadership found in *Serat Nitistruti* includes the teachings of *Astabrata* (the eight virtues), the qualities of *Nistha Madya Utama* (inferior, moderate, and noble character), *Manunggaling Gusti Kawula*, and *Sangkan Paraning Dumadi*.

The teaching of *Astabrata* refers to eight divine virtues that a leader must possess in carrying out leadership. These virtues are symbolized by the characteristics of the gods. First, being generous and not disappointing others, (symbolized by Indra). Second, being fair in upholding the law without favoritism, (symbolized by Yama). Third, encouraging and nurturing the vitality of both physical and spiritual life, (symbolized by Surya). Fourth, being humble, patient, forgiving, and wise, (symbolized by Chandra). Fifth, being friendly and close to others without discrimination, (symbolized by Vayu). Sixth, being helpful, assisting others selflessly, and showing gratitude, (symbolized by Vayu). Seventh, possessing authority and a sense of responsibility, (symbolized by Varuna). Eighth, being firm and able to control one's emotions, (symbolized by Agni).⁷⁴

The qualities of *Nistha Madya Utama* (low, moderate, and noble) symbolize three types of human personality: the wise and intelligent person (*sujanadi*) as the noble character, the merchant-like character (*saudagar*) as the moderate trait, and the thief-like character (*durjana*) as the lowest trait, as stated in verses 8-9 of the *Sinom* stanza.

*“Iku dadi tata krama/ tumêrah wong sanagari/ wus ana wawarahira/ ginêlar têtung prakawis/ tunggal ambêk utami/ lawan solah bawa kulup/ tanapi pamariksa/ mangkéné nyatané kaki/ iya iku nistha madya lan utama//. Lawan maning jarwanira/ warah kang têtung prakawis/ ing nguni wus winasita/ mangkéné ingkang kariyin/ kramaning sujana di/ nênggih kaping kalhipun/ caraning pra sudagar/ patraping durjana katri/ yèki aran ambêg nistha madyatama//”*⁷⁵

The translation

“It serves as proper conduct for all people in the land. It has long been taught and explained through three matters: first, good deeds; second, all forms of behavior; and third, the manner of observing and reflecting upon them. Thus, in reality, these are known as *nista*, *madya*, and *utama*. Furthermore, the explanation of these three teachings had already been conveyed in earlier times. Originally, they referred to the conduct of the wise and learned as the first, the conduct of merchants as the second, and the conduct of thieves as the third. These are what are meant by *nista*, *madya*, and *utama*.”

Manunggaling Gusti Kawula refers to the relationship between leaders and those they lead in traditional Javanese society. The relationship between the two represents a close personal bond characterized by mutual respect and responsibility. Such a relationship resembles the affection found within a family bond.

Sangkan Paraning Dumadi is a concept concerning the purpose of human creation from the perspective of traditional Javanese society. In *Serat Nitistruti*, verse 15 of the *Kinanthi* stanza explains that the purpose of human creation is to attain ultimate truth (*kasunyatan*,

⁷³ Amy C. Edmondson, *The Fearless Organization: Creating Psychological Safety in the Workplace* (Wiley, 2019).

⁷⁴ Haryati Soebadio (et.al.), *Kajian Astabrata: Pendahuluan Dan Teks, Jld. 1* (Departemen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 1997), 9–10.

⁷⁵ *Naskah Serat Nitistruti, Bb. 1.182., 35.* (n.d.).

God).

“*Mamrih kawruh kasunyatan/wruha purwaning dumadi/ywa katungkul suka-suka/néng nuswapa datan lami.*”

“For the purpose of seeking the True Reality/, know the origin of existence/. Do not be tempted only by worldly pleasures/, for life in this world is not long.”⁷⁶

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that *Serat Nitistruti* represents a concept of leadership that is deeply rooted in the values of social harmony, ethical power, and the management of diversity. Through approaches of textual analysis, hermeneutics, and cultural studies, the text is shown not merely to present individual moral advice, but to construct a normative framework of leadership that positions the leader as a guardian of social and cultural balance. Leadership in *Serat Nitistruti* is understood as an ethical practice that requires wisdom, self-control, and responsibility for collective welfare.

The concept of power in *Serat Nitistruti* is viewed as a moral trust rather than structural or coercive domination. Power gains legitimacy through justice, social sensitivity, and the leader's ability to maintain order and prevent conflict. The principle of harmony becomes the primary foundation of leadership, in which social and cultural differences are not eliminated but managed wisely. Thus, the text emphasizes that social stability can only be achieved through ethical leadership oriented toward balance.

Furthermore, this research finds that the teachings of leadership in *Serat Nitistruti* have substantial compatibility with contemporary principles of multicultural leadership. The values of inclusivity, justice, and recognition of diversity implied in the text demonstrate that Javanese local wisdom had anticipated issues of plurality long before the concept of multiculturalism developed in modern discourse. Therefore, *Serat Nitistruti* is not only relevant as a classical literary heritage, but also as an alternative conceptual source for the development of a multicultural leadership model that is contextual, ethical, and rooted in the local culture of Indonesia.

However, this study still has several limitations. The analysis focuses on a single text, *Serat Nitistruti*, therefore generalizations about the broader tradition of Javanese leadership must be made cautiously and proportionally. In addition, the hermeneutic approach allows room for subjectivity because interpretation emerges from a dialogue between the historical context of the text and the researcher's perspective. This research is also textual conceptual in nature and does not include supporting field data; therefore, the practical relevance of these leadership teachings in contemporary contexts has not yet been empirically tested.

For future studies, the author hopes that research can expand its scope through cross-textual comparisons in order to trace both continuities and conceptual differences within the Javanese leadership tradition. In addition, field research involving leaders in the spheres of bureaucracy, education, or cultural communities who actualize Javanese teachings (*piwulang Jawa*) would strengthen the empirical validity of these findings. Through such efforts, the study would not only deepen its theoretical dimension but also reinforce its practical contribution to the development of multicultural leadership rooted in local wisdom.

⁷⁶ *Naskah Serat Nitistruti, Bb. 1.182., 35.*

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