

UNDERSTANDING DESTINY AND ISLAMIC WORK ETHIC IN TEGAL SARI VILLAGE

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how the understanding of destiny (takdir) is expressed through work ethic and social behavior in Tegal Sari Village, Dolok Masihul District, Serdang Bedagai Regency. The study addresses three questions: how residents understand destiny, how Islamic work ethic appears in everyday work, and how this understanding affects social attitudes. A descriptive qualitative field-research design was used. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation involving six informants representing three families, supported by information from religious and community figures. Data were analyzed through data reduction, data display, and conclusion verification. The findings indicate that the dominant pattern is moderate: Allah is recognized as the ultimate determinant of outcomes, while human beings remain responsible for ikhtiar and are expected to practice tawakkal after making an effort. Work ethic is manifested in diligence, discipline, responsibility, honesty, perseverance, planning, and adaptation to economic and environmental changes. The understanding of destiny also supports humility, gratitude, mutual assistance, community harmony, sharing, and the provision of employment opportunities. The study concludes that belief in destiny does not inherently produce passivity. When combined with effort, evaluation, and tawakkal, it can function as a source of spiritual resilience and constructive Islamic work ethic.

Keywords: destiny; ikhtiar; tawakkal; Islamic work ethic; rural community

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INTRODUCTION

The Islamic concept of destiny is closely connected with beliefs about divine knowledge, human responsibility, effort, and acceptance of outcomes. In everyday life, belief in destiny can shape how people interpret success, failure, livelihood, and work. The Qur'an associates human change with what people undertake themselves, while Islamic scholarship generally distinguishes between recognizing divine determination and abandoning human effort. In this sense, faith in destiny should not be reduced to fatalism; rather, it can coexist with purposeful action, moral responsibility, and trust in God after effort has been made (Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia, 2019; Ali & Al-Owaihan, 2008).

This relationship becomes particularly relevant in rural communities, where livelihoods may depend on agriculture, trade, household enterprises, education, and services while remaining sensitive to weather, market prices, customer demand, and household needs. Research on Islamic work ethic describes work as a morally meaningful activity that involves diligence, responsibility, justice, and benefits for oneself and others (Ali, 1988; Ali, 1992; Aldulaimi, 2016). Empirical studies also show that Islamic work ethics may be connected with role orientations, organizational attitudes, employee behavior, and prosocial conduct (Yousef, 2000; Ali & Al-Kazemi, 2007; Javed et al., 2019; Sudirman et al., 2024).

Qualitative research on Muslim entrepreneurs further indicates that religious beliefs can generate action-oriented "moral energy" that sustains work and entrepreneurship rather than encouraging withdrawal from economic activity (Uygur et al., 2017). In Indonesia, Djakfar (2018) likewise found that Islamic religious practice can be related to a balanced orientation toward spiritual, economic, and social responsibilities. These studies provide a useful framework for interpreting how villagers connect divine determination with practical effort, but they do not explain the particular pattern found among families in Tegal Sari Village.

The local context also matters because religious understanding is socially formed. Socialization within families and communities contributes to the transmission of religious meanings, while education and everyday experience can reshape how those meanings are applied. Research in Islamic education similarly emphasizes that Islamic values are not merely abstract concepts but are interpreted and practiced through lived contexts (Wati et al., 2022). Qualitative studies published in *Algebra* also demonstrate the usefulness of observation, interviews, and documentation for examining lived religious and social practices in local settings (Tawarni, 2023; Pohan & Syahril, 2023).

The present study therefore focuses on Tegal Sari Village, Dolok Masihul District, Serdang Bedagai Regency. The study background reports an estimated population of 1,714 residents in 2026 and identifies diverse livelihoods, including farming or plantation work, private employment, wage labor, trading, household management, and teaching. The diversity of occupations provides an appropriate setting for examining whether the understanding of destiny is expressed differently across forms of work while sharing a common theological orientation.

The purpose of this study is threefold: first, to describe the community's understanding of destiny; second, to identify the forms of work ethic displayed in daily life; and third, to analyze the implications of this understanding for social attitudes and community behavior. The study is expected to contribute to discussions of Islamic theology and work ethics by showing how *ikhthiar* and *tawakkal* are translated into everyday practices at the family and community levels.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study used a descriptive qualitative approach and field-research design. Qualitative inquiry was selected because the research seeks to understand how people interpret destiny, work, failure, livelihood, and social relationships from their own perspectives rather than to measure predetermined variables numerically. Such an approach is consistent with qualitative inquiry that emphasizes meaning, context, and participants' lived experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Denzin & Lincoln, 2017).

The research was conducted in Tegal Sari Village, Dolok Masihul District, Serdang Bedagai Regency. The participants consisted of six informants representing three families, with additional supporting information obtained from religious and community figures. The informants had different occupational backgrounds: farming, grocery retail, a bakery business, household management, oil-palm plantation management, and teaching. These occupational differences were

considered important for exploring how theological understanding was applied across different forms of responsibility.

Data were collected through in-depth interviews, direct observation, and documentation. Interviews focused on definitions of destiny, the relationship between destiny and effort, responses to success and failure, work routines, ethical behavior, adaptation to difficulties, and forms of social assistance. Observation was used to compare participants' statements with everyday patterns of responsibility and interaction, while documentation supported the description and organization of field information. The use of multiple data sources strengthened the contextual interpretation of the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Data analysis followed three broad stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion verification. The analytical process involved identifying recurring meanings, grouping statements into themes, comparing similarities and differences among informants, and relating empirical patterns to the literature on Islamic work ethic and religious socialization. The thematic orientation of the analysis is compatible with qualitative procedures for identifying, organizing, and interpreting patterns of meaning within a dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Understanding Destiny among Residents of Tegal Sari Village

The findings show that the dominant understanding of destiny among the informants is moderate. Informants generally recognize Allah as the ultimate determinant of outcomes while simultaneously maintaining that people must make effort, solve problems, and take responsibility for their decisions. This pattern does not correspond to a fully fatalistic orientation, because the informants continue to distinguish between accepting an outcome and refusing to act. The pattern is compatible with the Islamic work-ethic literature, which emphasizes that ethical work involves purposeful activity rather than mere passive acceptance (Ali & Al-Owaihan, 2008; Aldulaimi, 2016).

Bapak Salim, a farmer, placed stronger emphasis on the idea that livelihood and harvest outcomes are determined by Allah and should therefore be accepted with an open heart. His account became especially visible when discussing agricultural uncertainty. By contrast, Ibu Kayla, Bapak Malik, Ibu Risma, Bapak Agus, and Ibu Tina more explicitly linked destiny with the obligation to work and adapt. Bapak Agus described destiny as *sunnatullah*, emphasizing that divine determination operates together with human capacity and causal processes. Ibu Tina understood destiny as reflecting divine wisdom, including when outcomes differ from expectations. These differences suggest that a shared theological framework can contain distinct emphases in everyday interpretation.

The informants' accounts also indicate that the meaning of destiny is shaped by lived experience. Family functions as a primary setting for religious socialization, while religious gatherings, teachers, *ustadz*, formal education, and personal experiences provide additional interpretive resources. This observation is consistent with the broader view that religion and ethical orientation are embedded in social life rather than formed in isolation (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Weber, 2002). The local form of religious meaning is therefore produced through an interaction between doctrinal understanding and repeated experience of work, economic uncertainty, and social relationships.

A central analytical distinction emerging from the data is the difference between accepting results and abandoning effort. Participants generally treated acceptance after serious effort as *tawakkal*, whereas invoking destiny as a reason to avoid effort was viewed negatively. This distinction is important because Islamic work ethic scholarship consistently positions work, intention, responsibility, and moral conduct as part of religiously meaningful activity (Ali, 1988; Ali, 1992; Yousef, 2000).

Islamic Work Ethic in Everyday Life

The work ethic observed in Tegal Sari Village is reflected in routine, diligence, responsibility, honesty, persistence, planning, service, and adaptation. Because the informants have different occupations, work ethic is visible not only in physical labor but also in household management, customer service, teaching, supervision, and decision-making. These observations correspond with the view that Islamic work ethic includes both productivity and moral quality in work (Ali & Al-Kazemi, 2007; Ali & Al-Owaihan, 2008).

Bapak Malik begins his bakery activities early in the morning by supervising dough preparation, baking, shop cleanliness, customer service, sales recording, and procurement of raw materials. Bapak Agus manages oil-palm plantation activities, including fertilization schedules, plant maintenance, harvesting, transportation, and marketing. Ibu Tina teaches in the morning, prepares instructional materials, evaluates students' work, and plans subsequent teaching strategies. The findings show that discipline is enacted through repeated routines and deliberate planning rather than through physical effort alone.

Hard work is also expressed through honesty and responsibility. Bapak Salim associates careful land management with the pursuit of lawful and blessed livelihood, while Ibu Kayla connects early working hours with the effort to obtain sustenance and stresses honesty in weighing goods and maintaining product quality. Such practices are consistent with Islamic work ethic research that treats work as an ethical relationship involving trust, fairness, responsibility, and benefit to others (Aldulaimi, 2016; Sudirman et al., 2024).

When facing obstacles, most informants did not stop at passive resignation. Bapak Malik interpreted a quiet shop as both a test and a lesson for changing sales strategies. Ibu Kayla adjusted stock when customer demand declined. Bapak Agus reorganized plantation activities in response to weather and palm-oil price changes. Ibu Risma responded to household economic pressure through spending control and budget management, while Ibu Tina used students' learning difficulties to evaluate teaching strategies. This adaptive orientation resonates with qualitative research showing that contemporary Muslim work ethic can be action-oriented and capable of sustaining entrepreneurial and practical activity under changing conditions (Uygur et al., 2017).

The findings nevertheless reveal a potential tension. Strong emphasis on divine determination without systematic evaluation of effort may create a risk of passivity. Conversely, an interpretation that combines destiny with responsibility encourages persistence, learning, and adaptation. This balance is consistent with research showing that Islamic work ethic is associated with individual orientations and behavioral consequences while still operating within a broader religious worldview (Yousef, 2000; Javed et al., 2019).

Social Implications of Understanding Destiny

The understanding of destiny also affects social relationships. Several informants described livelihood as something determined by Allah, which reduced envy and unhealthy competition. Ibu Kayla explained that the belief that sustenance is arranged by Allah made it easier to avoid feeling threatened by other sellers. This interpretation supported friendliness and social harmony. Bapak Malik viewed business success as a trust that carries social responsibility. He sought to maintain good relations with residents and was willing to share products or provide work opportunities when possible.

Ibu Risma expressed concern for households in need through sharing food and usable clothing. Bapak Salim occasionally shared part of his harvest and helped neighbors work their land without expecting payment. Bapak Agus described excess wealth as an amanah that could be used to create employment, provide small assistance, or share basic necessities. Ibu Tina emphasized that community members have different but complementary roles. These actions indicate that theological beliefs are translated into everyday forms of solidarity rather than remaining purely doctrinal.

The social dimension of the findings is consistent with Islamic work ethic scholarship that emphasizes the benefit of work for both oneself and others. Ali (1988) conceptualized work within a framework of diligence, responsibility, and social usefulness, while Ali and Al-Owaidan (2008) emphasize the moral and social foundations of Islamic work ethics. In the Indonesian context, Djakfar (2018) similarly describes a balance among spiritual, economic, and social obligations. More recent research also indicates positive links between Islamic work ethics and prosocial behavior in organizational settings (Javed et al., 2019; Sudirman et al., 2024).

The findings can therefore be understood through two connected functions of destiny. First, there is a psychological-spiritual function: destiny provides a framework for patience, gratitude, acceptance, and resilience when outcomes cannot be fully controlled. Second, there is a social function: the same belief can encourage humility, generosity, mutual help, and the sharing of resources when success is interpreted as an amanah rather than as a basis for superiority. This interpretation also fits the broader observation that religious values become socially meaningful

through practice, communication, and contextual learning (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Wati et al., 2022).

Overall, the Tegal Sari findings suggest that destiny is not experienced as a static theological endpoint. It becomes part of practical decision-making in response to economic uncertainty, work demands, success, failure, and community relationships. The dominant pattern is therefore dynamic: participants accept that outcomes ultimately depend on Allah while continuing to modify strategies, regulate spending, improve work, and maintain social ties. This pattern strengthens the argument that, in this setting, tawakkal is best understood after ikhtiar rather than as its replacement (Ali, 1992; Uygur et al., 2017).

CONCLUSIONS

The study concludes that the dominant understanding of destiny among residents of Tegal Sari Village is moderate and combines belief in Allah's determination with human responsibility to make effort. The informants generally practice ikhtiar before tawakkal and do not regard destiny as a sufficient reason for inactivity. Their work ethic is expressed through diligence, discipline, responsibility, honesty, perseverance, planning, and adaptation across farming, trading, entrepreneurship, household management, plantation work, and teaching. The understanding of destiny also has positive social implications, including humility, gratitude, mutual assistance, sharing, community harmony, and willingness to provide employment or practical help. At the same time, the findings indicate that an overly passive interpretation of divine determination may weaken initiative. The strongest pattern emerging from the field is therefore the integration of theological acceptance with practical effort, reflection, and social responsibility. This integration helps explain how faith in destiny can operate as a source of resilience and constructive Islamic work ethic within a rural community.

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