

From Sick Soul to Spiritual Awakening: Interpreting the Hijrah Movement Through William James' Theory of Religious Conversion

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Abstract

*The hijrah phenomenon among urban Indonesian Muslims reflects not only a form of religious identity expression but also a deep psychological dimension. This article aims to interpret hijrah as a form of religious conversion through William James' theory of religious experience, particularly the concepts of sick soul, passive conversion, active conversion, and spiritual awakening. Employing a qualitative library research method, this study analyzes James' primary work, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, alongside secondary literature on hijrah and religious psychology. The findings reveal that hijrah serves as a response to existential and spiritual crises, leading to a transformative process from inner turmoil to an integrated religious identity. James's theoretical framework illuminates how religious experiences in hijrah function as a means of psychological healing and self-reconstruction in the face of modernity's pressures. The implications of this study indicate that a psychology of religion approach can be an effective framework for understanding the phenomenon of hijrah more reflectively and deeply. Therefore, further studies are recommended to integrate this approach with field methods to enrich the mapping of contemporary religious experiences*

in the digital era.

Keywords: *Hijrah, Psychology of Religion, Religious Conversion, Religious Studies, William James*

Abstrak

*Fenomena hijrah yang marak di kalangan Muslim urban Indonesia tidak hanya mencerminkan ekspresi identitas religius, tetapi juga mengandung dimensi psikologis yang mendalam. Artikel ini bertujuan untuk menafsirkan hijrah sebagai bentuk konversi religius dengan menggunakan teori pengalaman religius William James, khususnya konsep sick soul, conversion, dan spiritual awakening. Metode yang digunakan adalah studi pustaka dengan pendekatan kualitatif, yang menganalisis karya utama James *The Varieties of Religious Experience* serta literatur sekunder terkait hijrah dan psikologi religius. Temuan utama menunjukkan bahwa hijrah merupakan respons terhadap krisis eksistensial dan spiritual, yang memunculkan proses transformatif dari kegelisahan batin menuju integrasi religius yang lebih utuh. Teori James membantu menjelaskan bagaimana pengalaman religius dalam hijrah berperan sebagai mekanisme penyembuhan psikologis sekaligus sebagai upaya rekonstruksi identitas diri di tengah tekanan modernitas. Implikasi dari penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa pendekatan psikologi agama dapat menjadi kerangka yang efektif untuk memahami fenomena hijrah secara lebih reflektif dan mendalam. Oleh karena itu, studi lanjutan direkomendasikan untuk mengintegrasikan pendekatan ini dengan metode lapangan guna memperkaya pemetaan pengalaman religius kontemporer di era digital.*

Kata Kunci: *Hijrah, Konversi Religius, Psikologi Agama, Studi Agama, William James*

Introduction

The phenomenon of *hijrah* has emerged as a dominant discourse within the religious dynamics of young Muslim generations, particularly in Indonesia. *Hijrah* is no longer understood merely as a geographical migration from one place to another. As exemplified in the historical narrative of the Prophet Muhammad saw, but has undergone a semantic expansion, becoming a symbol of

lifestyle transformation, religious identity, and even a redefinition of the self amid existential crisis.¹ On social media, the hashtag #hijrah serves as a platform for articulating spiritual experiences, often associated with the aspiration to return fully to Islamic teachings, to abandon worldly lifestyles, and to rebuild one's relationship with God.² This narrative has gained traction through the testimonials of public figures, the confessions of artists who have undergone *hijrah*, and the proliferation of digital da'wah communities such as Shift Pemuda Hijrah, Hijrahfest, and various Islamic accounts in the digital sphere.³ This phenomenon is not merely cultural or symbolic, but also reveals psychological depth, reflecting inner turmoil, spiritual anxiety, and the quest for meaning in the context of a fast-paced and uncertain secular modernity.

A growing body of research on the *hijrah* phenomenon has developed through various scholarly approaches. In general, these studies can be categorized into three main tendencies. First, studies situated within the realm of digital media emphasize the mechanisms of disseminating persuasive da'wah content and the *hijrah* phenomenon in digital spaces but tend to overlook the psychological

¹Lukman Hakim, 'Dinamika Hijrah Di Indonesia: Dari Transformasi Spiritual Menuju Gerakan Sosial', *Jurnal Sosiologi Agama Indonesia* (JSAI), 5.1 (2024), 13–33 <<https://doi.org/10.22373/jsai.v5i1.3993>>; Fika Anjana, 'Analisis Gerakan Hijrah Dalam Membentuk Identitas Keagamaan Masyarakat Modern', in *AICROM: Annual International Conference on Religious Moderation* (Universitas Islam Zainul Hasan Genggong, 2025), pp. 149–58.

²Thiyas Tono Taufiq, Royanulloh Royanulloh and Komari Komari, 'Tren Hijrah Muslim Perkotaan Di Media Sosial: Konstruksi, Representasi Dan Ragam Ekspresi', *FIKRAH*, 10.2 (2022), 355 <<https://doi.org/10.21043/fikrah.v10i2.14212>>.

³Syihaabul Huda, Nuryani and Bambang Sumadyo, 'Pesan Dakwah Hijrah Influencer Untuk Kalangan Muda Di Media Sosial', *MAARIF*, 17.2 (2023), 105–21 <<https://doi.org/10.47651/mrf.v17i2.198>>; Agung Tirta Wibawa, Riyanda Utari and Ulfa Yuniati, 'Pengalaman Public Figure Dalam Memaknai Hijrah', *J-KIs: Jurnal Komunikasi Islam*, 2.2 (2021), 95–112 <<https://doi.org/10.53429/j-kis.v2i2.294>>.

and subjective dimensions of religious conversion.⁴ Second, the theological-normative approach views *hijrah* as a moral obligation to shift from sinfulness to obedience, often driven by popular da'wah narratives and a literal reading of religious texts.⁵ Third, sociological studies on urban Muslim identity map the transformation of spiritual values and symbols, interpreting *hijrah* as a form of symbolic performativity and an expression of modern urban Muslim lifestyle.⁶

⁴Kakulee Akhter and Md. Sayeed Al-Zaman, 'Digital Media in the Economic Empowerment of the Hijra Community', *Media Asia*, 2024, 1–18 <<https://doi.org/10.1080/01296612.2024.2386497>>; Muhammad Iqbal Juliansyahzen, 'Ideologization of Hijrah in Social Media: Digital Activism, Religious Commodification, and Conservative Domination', *Millah: Journal of Religious Studies*, 22.1 (2023), 155–80 <<https://doi.org/10.20885/millah.vol22.iss1.art6>>; Mohammad T. Rahman and Muslim Mufti, 'Massification of Youth Religious Studies to Prevent Juvenile Delinquency in Bandung', *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies*, 77.4 (2021), 1–9 <<https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v77i4.7055>>; Rahmad Hidayat, Muhammad Sholihin and Deri Wanto, 'The Hijrah Communities and Religious Superficiality: Ideology and Religiosity of the Islamic Hijrah Communities on Social Media', *Journal of Population and Social Studies*, 29 (2020), 118–38 <<https://doi.org/10.25133/JPSsv292021.008>>.

⁵Syarif and Saifuddin Zuhri, 'Memahami Hijrah Dalam Realitas Alquran Dan Hadis Nabi Muhammad', *Jurnal Living Hadis*, 4.2 (2019), 277 <<https://doi.org/10.14421/livinghadis.2019.2021>>; Izza Royyani, 'Makna Hijrah Perseptif Qur'an Dan Hadis (Telaah Atas Pro-Kontra Seputar Hijrah Di Media)', *JurnalAL FITHRAH*, 10 KACA Ju.2 (2020), 117–32; Diena Qaulan Tsaqila and others, 'Tafsir Ayat Al-Qur'an Tentang Hijrah', *Jurnal Budi Pekerti Agama Islam*, 3.1 (2024), 53–64 <<https://doi.org/10.61132/jbpai.v3i1.859>>.

⁶Bambang Qomaruzzaman and Busro Busro, 'Doing Hijrah Through Music: A Religious Phenomenon Among Indonesian Musician Community', *Studia Islamika*, 28.2 (2021), 385–412 <<https://doi.org/10.36712/sdi.v28i2.13277>>; Rahman and Mufti; Syamsul Rijal, 'Pursuing Hijrah to Salafi Path: Urban Muslim Youth and the Quest for Self-Transformation in Indonesia', *Contemporary Islam*, 19.1 (2025), 101–21 <<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11562-024-00564-x>>; Shafrida Wati, Muhammad Alkaf and Zahratul Idami, 'Religion on Millennials:

From this mapping, it becomes evident that the psychological and subjective dimensions of individual religious experiences within the *hijrah* movement have not received sufficient scholarly attention. This study aims to address this gap by integrating William James's theory of religious conversion, which focuses on the transition from a "sick soul" to spiritual awakening."

This article aims to complement existing studies on *hijrah* by interpreting the movement through William James's theory of religious conversion, particularly his concepts of the *sick soul* and *twice-born* conversion. Focusing on the psychological-subjective dimension, this study examines how these concepts can be applied in the context of Muslim *hijrah*, how the adaptation of the term *grace* into *hidayah* enriches the understanding of the conversion process, and how the interaction between psychological and cultural aspects shapes inner transformation. This research also seeks to address the following questions: How does the transition from a state of *sick soul* to spiritual awakening occur within *hijrah* experiences? How do psychological and cultural dimensions interact in forming a new religious identity? Within the context of a crisis of meaning and existential pressure among the digital generation, *hijrah* is understood not merely as a social phenomenon or lifestyle trend, but as a spiritual healing process that offers a moral framework and a renewed sense of meaning in life—reconstructing personal integrity and psychological well-being through profound religious experience.

In order to address the aforementioned questions, this article employs a qualitative method using a library research approach, by interpretively and critically analyzing theoretical texts and previous studies. The primary source in this study is *The Varieties of Religious Experience* by William James, while the secondary sources include journal articles, books, and academic publications relevant to the *hijrah* phenomenon, religious psychology, and spiritual experiences in the digital age. All references used are secondary data that have been academically published and are verifiable. This study undertakes an in-depth examination of representations of *hijrah* as

documented in various scholarly works and narratives analyzed in prior literature. This approach is chosen to capture the complexity of religious experience within *hijrah* as an object of theoretical reflection, rather than as direct empirical data. Therefore, this research is theoretical-conceptual in nature and aims to contribute to the body of *hijrah* studies through the lens of Jamesian religious psychology.

This article departs from the theoretical assumption that the *hijrah* phenomenon among Muslims can be interpreted as a form of religious conversion, which can be categorized into two main patterns: passive conversion and active conversion. Passive conversion occurs suddenly, triggered by emotional resonance with religious content, while active conversion unfolds through a more structured and reflective process. Both serve as responses to the psychological condition of the *sick soul*, characterized by a crisis of meaning, spiritual emptiness, and existential anxiety. Through the *hijrah* process, individuals undergo spiritual awakening, marked by the internalization of religious values, the formation of a new habitus, and the reconstruction of a more psychologically and socially stable identity. Thus, William James's theory not only facilitates the mapping of the subjective dynamics of *hijrah* but also explains how religious experience can function as a mechanism of inner healing within a modern context marked by a crisis of meaning.

William James: Biography, Academic Career, and Intellectual Legacy

William James was born on January 11, 1842, in New York City, into a Swedenborgian family rich in intellectual and religious nuances.⁷ His family frequently moved between America and Europe. His father, Henry James Sr., was a prominent theologian and writer, while his mother, Alice Walsh, came from an Irish Catholic background. From an early age, James was raised in an environment that actively encouraged philosophical discussion, journaling, and

⁷Gay Wilson Allen, *William James: A Biography*, (New York: Viking Press, 1967).

spiritual exploration. His father inherited a considerable portion of wealth from William's grandfather, also named William, who had amassed his fortune through real estate ventures along the Erie Canal.⁸ Free from the need to earn a living, Henry Sr. devoted much of his time to two main interests: religion and family. Although lacking formal theological training, he pursued an unconventional path as a theologian, combining the mystical visions of Swedenborg with the social utopianism of Fourier, and even supported experimental communal projects such as Brook Farm. His pursuits reflected a spiritual quest that was both wild and sincere, while also highlighting the tension between personal idealism and estrangement from the religious mainstream.⁹

As he grew older, James developed a strong passion for drawing. Aspiring to become a painter, his family moved to Newport, Rhode Island, in 1860, where William studied under the prominent American portraitist William Morris Hunt. Although he showed talent, he abandoned this career path in less than a year, concluding that it was not enough for him to produce truly first-rate work. In 1861, he shifted his focus to science, studying chemistry and enrolling at the Lawrence Scientific School at Harvard. After several years, he decided to pursue medicine at Harvard Medical School and earned his medical degree in 1869. Despite holding a medical degree, James chose not to practice medicine, instead devoting himself to the study of psychology and philosophy. In 1872, he began teaching physiology at Harvard and, throughout his academic career, held professorships in both psychology and philosophy at the same institution.¹⁰

⁸Daniel L Pals, *Nine Theories of Religion*, ed. by 3, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

⁹*Ibid.*

¹⁰Saulo de Freitas Araujo and Lisa M. Osbeck, 'William James and the Role of Psychology in Philosophy', in *Oxford Research*

Recognized as the "Father of American Psychology," William James made fundamental contributions to the establishment of a new paradigm in psychology.¹¹ He defined psychology as the study of mental life and consciousness, believing that consciousness lies at the core of the human soul's existence. In James's view, consciousness serves an adaptive function, enabling individuals to survive by adjusting to changing conditions and making decisions accordingly. He elaborated on this idea comprehensively in his monumental work *The Principles of Psychology* (1890), which he spent over a decade writing. The work was published in two volumes comprising more than 1,200 pages. This book not only laid the foundation for modern psychology but also significantly influenced major thinkers such as Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung. Two years later, he produced a condensed version titled *Psychology: The Briefer Course* (1892), which presented the core principles in a more accessible format.

Beyond his contributions to psychology, James was also known as a prolific philosopher, whose intellectual legacy is reflected in his major works, many of which remain foundational references today. *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy* (1897) explores the relationship between belief and rationality; *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902) stands as a seminal text in both the psychology and philosophy of religion; *Pragmatism* (1907) outlines the foundations of American pragmatic philosophy; *The Meaning of Truth* (1907) serves as a development of his theory of pragmatic truth; and *A Pluralistic Universe* (1909) asserts pluralism as a central principle in James's philosophical framework.¹² These works not only

Encyclopedia of Psychology (Oxford University Press, 2020) <<https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190236557.013.831>>.

¹¹*Ibid.*

¹²Fio P Hasyim, 'Alan Tengah Antara Ilmu Pengetahuan Dan Agama Menurut William James', *Fakultas Ilmu Pengetahuan Budaya*

demonstrate the breadth of James's thought but also affirm his interdisciplinary contributions in bridging psychology, philosophy, and religion.

Ontology of the Theory: Key Concepts in William James' Religious Experience

1. Definition of Religion

James examines religious consciousness through subjective experience, as reflected in the autobiographical testimonies of religious individuals who are capable of deep and conscious self-reflection.¹³ He argues that truth is not obtained solely through logical arguments or theoretical approaches, but rather through the direct apprehension of experiential data. Therefore, the most authentic path to understanding religious consciousness lies in the subjective experiences expressed by individuals.¹⁴ Drawing from his empirical observations, James concludes that three main features characterize religion. First, religion is personal. For James, religion is profoundly personal in nature. He was so convinced of this that he chose to base his book on the deeply personal, original experiences of devout believers. The essence of religious experience, according to James, lies in its profoundly inward and personal dimension, that is, how an individual, in silence and solitude, senses a connection with something regarded as sacred or transcendent (the divine), regardless of its form or concept. His focus is not on institutional religion, collective rituals, or doctrinal systems, but rather on the

Universitas Indonesia (Universitas Indonesia, 2010) <uri: <https://lib.ui.ac.id/detail.jsp?id=133508>>.

¹³William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: Pengalaman Pengalaman Religius*, trans. by Luthfi Anshari (Yogyakarta: Jendela, 2003).

¹⁴Robert W Crapss, *Dialog Psikologi Dan Agama: Sejak William James*, (Kanisius, 1993).

individual's deep and authentic existential experience of the transcendent.¹⁵

*"The feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider divine."*¹⁶

As reflected in James's definition of religion, aspects such as feeling, behavior, and inner experience in solitary situations are understood as religious experiences, so long as the individual perceives themselves as being about what they regard as a divine entity. This underscores the view that the structure of religious experience is inherently individual and personal.

The second characteristic is "emotionality," wherein James emphasizes emotion over rational thought in religious experience. Religion, for James, is closely tied to emotion, not logic or doctrine as the primary component, but rather feelings such as peace, fear, awe, or relief that arise in a religious moment.¹⁷

The third characteristic, according to James, is "variety," which highlights the limitless and highly diverse nature of religious experience. He questions whether the diversity of sects and religious teachings should be regretted, and answers: it should not.¹⁸ For James, each individual should adhere to their own religious experience, in whatever form it manifests. There is no singular form

¹⁵William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experiences: A Study In Human Nature* (New York: New American Library, 1958); James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: Pengalaman Pengalaman Religius*.

¹⁶*Ibid*, 31-32.

¹⁷Robert W Crapss, *Dialog Psikolgi Dan Agama...*,

¹⁸*Ibid*.

of religious experience; it may emerge gradually or suddenly, and may be characterized by joy or suffering.¹⁹

2. The Constellation of the Soul: Healthy-Minded and Sick Souls

James identifies two fundamental temperaments in response to religious experience: those who are *healthy-minded* and those who are *sick souls*.²⁰ Individuals with a *healthy-minded* disposition tend to be optimistic, appreciating the bright side of life and consciously directing their attention to positive aspects, thereby minimizing or excluding awareness of evil or suffering.²¹ A classic example, according to James, is St. Francis of Assisi or adherents of the "mind cure" movement, who believe that health and happiness can be achieved through suggestion and a positive mental attitude; they substantiate their claims with "experimental evidence" in their personal lives, such as physical healing believed to occur through optimism.²²

Healthy-minded individuals are those with a positive and optimistic outlook on life. They are content with the religion they follow, meaning they do not undergo existential crises or deep experiences of repentance.²³ These individuals are open, active, and hopeful, yet realistic about the risks of life. Their approach to existence is generally affirmative, and they find meaning and purpose without requiring dramatic transformation. In their view,

¹⁹William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experiences: A Study In Human Nature*; William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: Pengalaman Pengalaman Religius*.

²⁰*Ibid.*

²¹*Ibid.*

²²Daniel L Pals, *Nine Theories of Religion...*,

²³David H. Nikkel, 'William James: The Mystical Experimentation of a Sick Soul', *Religions*, 15.8 (2024) <<https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15080961>>.

God is a giver of freedom, and thus, the temptations of the devil can always be restrained.²⁴

In contrast, the *sick soul* tends to view life through the lens of suffering, evil, and mortality. For them, religious experiences that emphasize only optimism seem superficial, as they overlook the existential restlessness inherent in human life. The sick soul seeks meaning through confrontation with the darker aspects of existence, believing that true peace can only be attained through awareness of suffering and inner transformation—often occurring through the experience of the *divided self* and moments of repentance or conversion.²⁵ These individuals undergo profound existential crises, experience a sense of meaninglessness, and struggle with despair and alienation from the world.²⁶ In many cases, they undergo what James calls the “second birth,” a process of spiritual transformation that leads to peace and religious meaning, often through mystical or transcendental experiences.²⁷ James himself experienced severe depression and existential crisis, which profoundly shaped his philosophical and psychological thinking; his journey from a “sick soul” to a seeker of meaning through religious experience serves as a concrete embodiment of the very theory he articulated.²⁸ To clarify

²⁴William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experiences: A Study In Human Nature...*, 77; William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: Pengalaman Pengalaman Religius...*, 102.

²⁵*Ibid*, 112. James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: Pengalaman Pengalaman Religius...*, 159-160.

²⁶David H. Nikkel, ‘William James: The Mystical Experimentation of a Sick Soul...’,

²⁷James, *The Varieties of Religious Experiences: A Study In Human Nature*; James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: Pengalaman Pengalaman Religius*.

²⁸Daniel L Pals, *Nine Theories of Religion...*, David H. Nikkel, ‘William James: The Mystical Experimentation of a Sick Soul...’,

the fundamental distinction between the healthy-minded and the sick soul, the following comparative table is presented:

Table 1. William James's Religious Temperaments

Healthy-Minded	Sick-Souled
Optimistic	Pessimistic
Evil minimized	Evil is central
Joyful faith	Faith through crisis
Gradual development	Requires conversion

3. Conversion

James defines religious experience as a form of "inner conversion," a process through which an individual establishes a relationship with a higher self.²⁹ Such experiences often reflect profound changes in the structure of personality, which may occur suddenly and lead to positive transformations in one's values and attitudes. According to James, religious conversion is a kind of psychological "rebirth," in which an individual previously afflicted by the condition of a "sick soul" is restored to health through religious experience.³⁰ This process may unfold either gradually or abruptly, and is often marked by expressions such as "being converted," "born again," "receiving grace," "living the religion," or "gaining assurance." During this process, individuals experience inner division accompanied by guilt and unhappiness, which is then transformed into conscious self-integration, firm conviction, and spiritual joy.³¹ James regards religious conversion as a deep

²⁹Katja Thörner, 'Two Arguments Against Some Critics of Religion Based on Feeling and Emotion Following William James', *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, 6.3 (2014), 207–24 <<https://doi.org/10.24204/ejpr.v6i3.171>>.

³⁰William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: Pengalaman Pengalaman Religius*, 239.

³¹*Ibid*, 239-240.

transformation of belief and attitude, wherein individuals overcome feelings of alienation and attain existential renewal.³² This process may be described as a form of radical psychological transformation, as it can lead to a total restructuring of personality that results in enhanced values, attitudes, and self-discipline.

This conversion involves a three-stage process: internal distress, seeking assistance, and the activation of a religious worldview that leads to a redemptive experience. Internal distress often arises from a discrepancy between a person's global meaning system and their situational appraisal of negative life events. This distress may manifest as symptoms of depression, anxiety, and existential suffering.³³ Second, in the phase of religious coping, individuals frequently seek support from religious or spiritual figures rather than mental health professionals—particularly in contexts where religion and transcendence serve as coping strategies.³⁴ This is evident in the preference for spiritual support among those experiencing existential distress and trauma. Finally, engaging in religious beliefs and practices can offer a structured approach to understanding and managing suffering, providing comfort and reducing feelings of isolation. Approaching hardship through a lens of spiritual growth—such as the concept of spiritual

³²Michael Andrew Ceragioli, 'Josiah Royce, William James, and the Social Renewal of the "Sick Soul": Exploring the Communal Dimension of Religious Experience', *Religions*, 15.9 (2024), 1045 <<https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15091045>>.

³³M. Elizabeth Lewis Hall and others, 'Spiritual Surrender: Initial Appraisals of Cancer Diagnoses in Black Christian Women', *Journal of Black Psychology*, 50.3 (2024), 365–87 <<https://doi.org/10.1177/00957984241232942>>.

³⁴Ines Testoni and others, 'Social Psychological and Spiritual Discomfort: Legitimization of the Need for Transcendence and Psychological Listening', *Pastoral Psychology*, 2025 <<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11089-025-01225-3>>.

jihād in Islam—can lead to greater levels of spiritual development and post-traumatic growth.³⁵ This mindset encourages individuals to interpret negative experiences meaningfully and to address them proactively.

Applying William James's Theory to the Hijrah Phenomenon: An Analysis of Religious Conversion

1. The Hijrah Phenomenon as a Philosophical-Psychological Problem

The contemporary *hijrah* movement among urban Muslims is not merely an expression of religious identity but also a reflection of inner unrest that reveals a deeper existential crisis faced by the digital generation. Amid the rapid, competitive lifestyle of modern society, many Muslims experience alienation from spiritual values, which leads to internal anxiety and a sense of meaninglessness in life.

The *hijrah* narrative, widely disseminated through social media and dakwah communities, offers a form of religious transformation that promises spiritual renewal. It calls for the abandonment of a “dark past” in favor of a more devout and meaningful life.³⁶ This narrative often resonates as a redemptive journey from moral confusion to spiritual clarity.

A study by Widyaningsih, conducted in Banyumas, demonstrates that social media is a dominant factor in encouraging *hijrah* among the youth, with an influence score of 19.03—significantly higher than the influence of social environment, which

³⁵*Ibid.*

³⁶Aditya Dedy Nugraha, ‘Memahami Kecemasan: Perspektif Psikologi Islam’, *IJIP: Indonesian Journal of Islamic Psychology*, 2.1 (2020), 1–22 <<https://doi.org/10.18326/ijip.v2i1.1-22>>; Wibawa, Utari and Yuniati; Mila Nabila Zahara and Dadan Wildan, ‘Identity and Cultural Framing: How to Millennial Muslims to Form an Hijrah Movement in The Digital Age?’, *Sosietas Jurnal Pendidikan Sosiologi*, 10.2 (2020), 862–77 <<http://ejournal.upi.edu/index.php/sosietas/>>.

scored 12.43. This finding suggests a strong emotional resonance triggered by digital content.³⁷ Supporting this, Aprianti and Alila found thousands of Instagram posts tagged with #muslimahbercadar, highlighting the powerful role of visual and emotional appeal in shaping new forms of religious awareness.³⁸

In this context, James's approach becomes particularly relevant for understanding the inner dimension of *hijrah* as a form of religious conversion born out of the awareness of spiritual suffering. James's concept of the "sick soul" sharply illustrates the psychological condition of individuals facing existential pressure. He describes the sick soul as a state in which the self persistently struggles with the reality of suffering, evil, and guilt, burdens that cannot be resolved by moral optimism or conventional social piety.³⁹

For individuals in this state, religion is not merely an obligation but a path to healing from inner fragmentation and self-alienation. The *hijrah* phenomenon, as frequently expressed in the testimonies of its adherents, often begins at a psychological low point—feelings of failure, emptiness, restlessness, and a loss of direction in life. Meiranti found that young *hijrah* adherents are not primarily driven by external religious symbols such as *syar'i* clothing, but rather by a search for meaning and the need for "spiritual

³⁷Rindha Widyarningsih, 'Pengaruh Media Sosial Atau Lingkungan Pergaulan?: Mengungkap Determinan Utama Motivasi Berhijrah', *Assertive: Islamic Counseling Journal*, 1.2 (2022), 1–15 <<https://doi.org/10.24090/j.assertive.v1i2.7010>>.

³⁸Agus Aprianti and Pramiyanti Alila, 'Peran Digital Media Instagram Dalam " Hijrah Movement " Perempuan Muda Bercadar', *Jurnal Lingkar Studi Komunikasi*, Vol. 6.1 (2020), 56–71.

³⁹James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: Pengalaman Pengalaman Religius....*,

awareness.”⁴⁰ These conditions are strongly aligned with the symptoms of the sick soul as extensively analyzed by James in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*.

Moreover, the *hijrah* experience is not solely rooted in inner distress; it also involves a purposeful search for meaning that leads to the reconstruction of religious identity. James refers to this kind of transformation as a “second birth” or spiritual rebirth—a form of conversion that results in fundamental changes in one’s moral, emotional, and spiritual consciousness.⁴¹ In the context of *hijrah*, this is reflected in the transformation of mindset, daily habits, and even social circles. Those who undergo *hijrah* do not merely change their clothing or adopt religious rhetoric; rather, they undergo a comprehensive restructuring of their life orientation, now grounded in transcendent values.

Kusumawati et al. in their study of TikTok followers of Ustadz Hanan Attaki, found that *hijrah* motivations can be categorized into “because” (spiritual and identity crises) and “goal” (a search for peace and life meaning).⁴² These categories align closely with the conversion process described by James. This process is often marked by inner relief, spiritual calmness, and a renewed sense of

⁴⁰Mike Meiranti, ‘Fenomena Hijrah Di Era Milenial Dalam Media Sosial’, *Ath Thariq Jurnal Dakwah Dan Komunikasi*, 3.2 (2019), 148 <https://doi.org/10.32332/ath_thariq.v3i2.1350>.

⁴¹James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: Pengalaman Pengalaman Religius*, 240.

⁴²Reni Kusumawati, Ari Suseno and Riza Gusti Rahayu, ‘Motif Hijrah Generasi Z: Studi Kasus Followers Tiktok @Hanan_Attaki_’, *El-Mujtama: Jurnal Pengabdian Masyarakat*, 4.6 (2025), 3671–79 <<https://doi.org/10.47467/elmujtama.v4i6.4902>>.

purpose—indicators that James identifies as signs of an authentic and transformative religious experience.⁴³

The phenomenon of *hijrah* as a form of psychological conversion should also be examined in relation to the spiritual dynamics of the digital generation, which is increasingly affected by information overload, value disorientation, and a crisis of personal integrity. In this context, religion serves as a stable source of meaning, offering a moral structure and a supportive community that facilitates personal transformation. However, not all forms of *hijrah* represent an authentic process of inner healing. James emphasizes that genuine religious experience is not merely marked by external changes, but must penetrate the inner core of the individual, leading to profound inner reconciliation. Thus, applying James's theoretical lens to the *hijrah* phenomenon not only helps map its psychological dynamics but also enables a critical evaluation of superficial and performative expressions of religious transformation.

2. The Dialectic of the Sick Soul and Religious Conversion in the Hijrah Phenomenon

Religious transformation in James's theory begins with a fragile or damaged inner condition, which he refers to as the "sick soul." This type of soul undergoes a profound existential crisis, burdened by moral anxiety, alienation from the self, and a search for meaning, questions that cannot be answered through shallow optimism or conventional religious rituals.⁴⁴ The *hijrah* phenomenon in Indonesia, particularly among celebrities and the millennial generation, illustrates how such a sense of inner emptiness can

⁴³Michael Andrew Ceragioli, 'Josiah Royce, William James, and the Social Renewal of the "Sick Soul"....',

⁴⁴William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: Pengalaman Pengalaman Religius*.

trigger serious personal struggles, with *hijrah* emerging as a pathway toward resolution.⁴⁵

In studies on celebrity *hijrah*, often labeled as “*seleb hijrah*,” Prihambodo et al identify several strong motivations behind these drastic changes, including feelings of emptiness, fear of hell, and a desire to improve one's spiritual life.⁴⁶ This reflects the “sick soul” within an urban and popular context: when one's public persona undergoes a dramatic shift, the potential for religious conversion emerges, not merely as symbolic but as a serious effort toward inner healing. The *hijrah* of celebrities further demonstrates that individual spiritual experiences can have broader social effects, as public figures' transformations often inspire followers to emulate them, creating a ripple effect within society.

Within James's framework, the process of religious conversion can be understood in two distinct patterns. The first is passive conversion, in which religious change occurs suddenly and emotionally, without prolonged reflection. This process resembles an inner “click,” a moment of spiritual awakening often triggered by exposure to religious content. In the digital era, such exposure rarely requires deep inquiry to initiate a *hijrah*. Although some scholars have criticized this type of experience as overly individualistic and detached from its social context, López argues that such emotional

⁴⁵Hamzah Fansuri, ‘Gerakan Hijrah Dan Kontestasi Ruang Publik Indonesia’, *Maarif*, 17.2 (2023), 11–30 <<https://doi.org/10.47651/mrf.v17i2.191>>; Abdullah Sidiq Notonegoro, ‘Hijrah Sebagai New Social Movement?’, *Maarif*, 17.2 (2023), 52–69 <<https://doi.org/10.47651/mrf.v17i2.194>>.

⁴⁶Dimas Prihambodo, Syafira Anisatul Izah and Anti Anti, ‘Konversi Agama Pada Perilaku Individu Dan Kolektif (Fenomena Hijrah Beberapa Artis Di Kajian Musawarah)’, *Al-Din: Jurnal Dakwah Dan Sosial Keagamaan*, 8.1 (2022), 31–45 <<https://doi.org/10.30863/ajdsk.v8i1.3201>>.

moments often serve as important catalysts in the dialectical process toward broader religious and social transformation.⁴⁷

In contrast, active conversion occurs through conscious reflection and intentional efforts to internalize new religious values. Zahara and Wildan's study on the Shift Community in Bandung shows that many young *hijrah* adherents strengthen their religious commitment through regular study circles, group recitations (*pengajian*), and collective social activities—illustrating how initial emotional resonance can evolve into meaningful spiritual commitment.⁴⁸ This model aligns with James's view that more enduring transformation arises through moral deliberation and reflective intention, rather than through affective experience alone.⁴⁹

Debates emerge regarding the relationship between passive and active conversion. Phenomenological studies reveal that many individuals begin their *hijrah* through emotional triggers (passive conversion) and later reinforce it through learning and religious communities (active conversion), aligning with López's concept of the "evolution of the self."⁵⁰ Imawati found a strong correlation between increased religiosity and self-esteem ($r = 0.634$), indicating that active conversion involves not only ritual observance but also psychological and social reconstruction.⁵¹ The dialectic of the *sick soul*

⁴⁷Roger G. López, 'William James and the Religious Character of the Sick Soul', *Human Studies*, 37.1 (2014), 83–101 <<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10746-013-9302-0>>.

⁴⁸Wibawa, Utari and Yuniati; Mila Nabila Zahara and Dadan Wildan, 'Identity and Cultural Framing...',

⁴⁹William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: Pengalaman Pengalaman Religius*.

⁵⁰Roger G. López, 'William James and the Religious Character of the Sick Soul' ...,

⁵¹Rochimah Imawati, 'Understanding "Contemporary Hijrah " Phenomenon: A Study of the Effect of Religiosity on Self-Esteem',

and conversion in James's framework is clearly reflected in the *hijrah* phenomenon: emotional impulses initiate the journey, but spiritual depth is shaped through reflection and communal engagement. Thus, *hijrah* becomes a transformative process that transcends symbolic change, integrating both inner healing and social realignment.

3. Philosophical Reflections: Spirituality, Self-Integration, and the Relevance of James in the Digital Age

James's approach to religious experience offers a profound philosophical lesson for understanding spiritual dynamics in the digital age. In a fast-paced, individualistic, and fragmented modern world, individuals face not only social pressure but also existential fatigue that culminates in a crisis of meaning. James asserts that religion, in its most authentic form, is an inner response to such crises—not a dogmatic system, but a path toward healing a fractured and disoriented soul. The strength of James's framework lies in its departure from institutional religion and its focus on deeply personal and transformative human experiences.⁵² In the digital era—where religious experience is often shaped by algorithms, symbolic visualizations, and instant spiritual narratives—James's approach provides a sharp yet constructive critique. He reminds us that genuine religious experience does not arise from external influence alone, but emerges from an awareness of inner suffering and a sincere search for meaning.

Spirituality shaped through passive conversion, merely imitating or responding to emotional impulses, requires critical reevaluation. *Hijrah* that relies solely on outward symbols and

Psikoislamika: Jurnal Psikologi Dan Psikologi Islam, 19.2 (2022), 496–505
<<https://doi.org/10.18860/psikoislamika.v19i2.15381>>.

⁵²William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: Pengalaman Pengalaman Religius*.

appearances, without addressing the root of inner restlessness, has not yet reached the stage of true transformation in James's perspective. The philosophical lesson here is the necessity of integrating reflective dimensions into every form of religious change, so that it does not remain superficial but instead touches the deeper wholeness of the self. Furthermore, James emphasizes that authentic religiosity is not exclusive; it must allow space for the diversity of spiritual experiences. In the context of *hijrah*, this insight is highly relevant. Not everyone undergoes spiritual transformation in the same way, and not all conversions follow a single pattern. Recognition of spiritual pluralism is thus a crucial lesson for cultivating a form of religiosity that is more inclusive, empathetic, and genuinely transformative.

Spirituality is not merely a command, but a path to healing. In the digital age, saturated with noise, performative pressures, and spiritual distraction, James's approach opens contemplative space for individuals to truly encounter the Divine within their inner world. Ultimately, the deepest lesson from James's thought is that living religion is not a fixed system of inherited values, but an experienced, dialectical, and healing journey. In James's view, religion is therapeutic: it does not exist solely to answer theological questions, but to bridge inner conflict, fill existential voids, and restore a coherent orientation toward life. Thus, amid the reality of digital *hijrah* often entangled in reflection and commodification, James reminds us that authentic spiritual experience is only possible when religion becomes a response born from the depth of suffering, rather than from social pressure or the demands of the spiritual marketplace.

Conclusion

Based on the analysis of William James's theory of religious conversion and its application to the *hijrah* phenomenon in Indonesia, this article finds that *hijrah* should not merely be

understood as a shift in religious identity, but as a profound psychological response to the existential crises experienced by the digital generation. The concept of the *sick soul* elucidates how many individuals who undergo *hijrah* are driven by inner turmoil, value disorientation, and a deep search for meaning, which ultimately leads them toward spiritual transformation, either passively or actively. This process not only fosters personal internalization of religious values but also contributes to a more stable restructuring of psychological and social identity.

James's approach allows us to interpret *hijrah* as an authentic religious experience beyond a sociocultural trend—serving as a healing mechanism through transcendence and reflective spiritual awareness. Thus, his theory broadens our understanding of *hijrah* as a complex existential journey that unites psychological, spiritual, and cultural dimensions.

Nevertheless, this study has several limitations that should be addressed in future research. First, as a library-based inquiry, it does not rely on primary empirical data such as interviews or ethnographic observation; therefore, interpretations of *hijrah* experiences are entirely dependent on existing literature. Second, although the theoretical analysis has been carried out through a reflective lens, aspects such as digital performativity and online community dynamics in the *hijrah* movement require further exploration using interdisciplinary approaches. It is thus recommended that future studies integrate James's theory of religious psychology with field research methods to directly examine the inner dynamics and spiritual processes of *hijrah* actors within the digital cultural context. Cross-cultural investigations are also necessary to expand the validity of these findings and enrich our broader understanding of religious conversion in contemporary Muslim societies.

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