

Religion and Culture: The Construction of Religious Harmony in *Bersih Desa* Traditions East Java Indonesia

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Abstract

Indonesian society is known as a heterogeneous society, having ethnic, religious and cultural diversity. Tradition has been rooted for generations so that it is difficult to separate from every practice of social life, moreover Indonesian people in ancient times believed in metaphysical things which then had an impact on the obligation to carry out religious ceremonies as a form of maintaining good relations with metaphysical things. Rudolf Otto did this as part of human responsibility towards the sacred, and the sacred is the highest power, so that responsibility towards the sacred has implications for the implementation of religious or ceremonial actions. For Durkheim, it has an impact on the obligation to behave religiously. The *bersih desa* tradition carried out by the community is one of the routine practices carried out every year, interestingly the implementation of this tradition is followed by people who have different religious backgrounds. Research on this *bersih desa* tradition is carried out holistically, this is to get a complete picture of the expression of the community in carrying out the tradition, as well as the meaning of its implementation in terms of socio-religious relations. Therefore, this research used 3 techniques in extracting data, namely observation, interviews and documentation. This research resulted in the findings of three main values in the implementation of the village clean tradition; 1). Theological value. 2). Ecological value, and. 3). Sociological value

Keywords: Religion, Culture, and Religious Relations

Introduction

East Java is one of the regions with heterogeneous society conditions, consisting of various ethnicities, religions, and cultures. It cannot be denied that this fact is a social reality that has been constructed since long ago, actually this fact can be a strong social capital for East Java to continue to maintain togetherness by capitalizing on differences, but on the other hand these differences can also be a threat if the community and related parties cannot manage it properly.¹

The current condition of society leads to small fragments that actually lead to the tendency of horizontal conflict in society, this is exacerbated by the political parties that are being held in this country making differences in political choices conical to the sentiment of momentary hatred with groups of different choices, so that returning to local wisdom that fosters social harmony such as the village clean culture carried out by the majority of the community can be a solution to reduce friction in the community due to differences.²

¹ Rina Hermawati, "Toleransi Antar Umat Beragama di Kota Bandung" dalam *Jurnal Umbara* Vol. 1 (2), Desember 2016, 105-110

² Peraturan Komisi Pemilihan Umum Republik Indonesia Nomor 5 Tahun 2018, tentang Tahapan, Program, dan Jadwal penyelenggaraan Pemilihan Umum Tahun 2019

Javanese society is known to have a variety of traditions that develop in the community³, traditions are an inseparable part of Javanese life, among several traditions that develop in the lives of Javanese people such as the tradition of life circle ceremonies or according to Arnold Van Gennep referred to as life cycle rites, namely traditions or rites carried out throughout the stages of human growth⁴. Performing ceremonies at certain moments in life rites is part of a tradition that has been carried out from the past until now, and has been passed down from generation to generation by the ancestors of the Javanese community, these traditions have their own place in the community and some even use something that is considered sacred in its implementation⁵. According to Rudolf Otto, this is done as part of human responsibility to the sacred, and the sacred is the highest power⁶, so that responsibility to the sacred has implications for the implementation of religious acts or ceremonies⁷, for Durkheim it has an impact on the obligation to behave religiously.⁸

Studies and research on the cultural traditions of Javanese society have been carried out for a long time by several local researchers such as M Thoriqul Huda⁹, Nur Syam,¹⁰ Koentjaraningrat,¹¹ Erni Budiwanti,¹² Supardi Suparlan,¹³ or several studies that have been conducted by researchers from outside Indonesia, such as Geertz,¹⁴ Woodward,¹⁵ Andrew Betty,¹⁶ Robert W. Hefner,¹⁷. From the results of several studies that have been conducted by several researchers above, it shows that Javanese society has a variety of cultures that bind and integrate into the lives of its people, even this culture seems to have become part of its obligations as a creature that cannot be abandoned.

However, it cannot be denied that the culture carried out by the community will never be separated from the influence of outside cultures and the challenges of increasingly dynamic social changes in society, meaning that changes that occur in society have an influence on changes in the culture itself¹⁸, social changes in society in question can shift the existing cultural system, transform it, replace it, or add new ones that are juxtaposed with existing cultures¹⁹. This kind of cultural dialectic will always continue to occur and will never end as long as humans still carry out their role as social

³ Ahmad Khalil, *Islam Jawa, Sufisme dalam Etika dan Tradisi Jawa* (Malang: Universitas Islam Negeri Malang Press, 2008), hal 278

⁴ Arnold Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960). Seperti yang diktuip juga oleh Koentjaraningrat dalam bukunya *Sejarah Teori Antropologi I* (Jakarta: UI Press, 1987), hal 74

⁵ Bustanuddin Agus, *Agama dalam kehidupan Manusia, Pengantar Antropologi Agama* (Jakarta: Raja Grafindo Persada, 2007).

⁶ Thomas F O'dea, *Sosiologi Agama; Suatu Pengantar Awal* (Jakarta: CV Rajawali, 1992), hal 38-39

⁷ Koentjaraningrat, *Pengantar Ilmu Antrpologi* (Jakarta : Rineka Cipta, 1990), hal 377

⁸ Koentjaraningrat, *Pengantar Antropologi; Pokok – Pokok Etnografi* (Jakarta: Rineka Cipta, 1998), hal 201

⁹ M Thoriqul Huda, "Harmoni Sosial dalam Tradisi Sedekah Bumi Masyarakat Desa Pancur Bojonegoro", *Religio; Jurnal Studi Agama-Agama*, Vol. 7 No. 2 Tahun 2017, 267-296.

¹⁰ Nur Syam, *Islam Pesisir*, (Yogyakarta: LKIS, 2005).

¹¹ Koentjaraningrat, *Masyarakat Desa Idonesia* (Jakarta: Universitas Indonesia Press).

¹² Erni Budwanti, *Islam Sasak* (Yogyakarta: LkiS, 2000).

¹³ Supardi Suparlan, *Hubungan Antar Suku, Bangsa, Masyarakat dan Kebudayaan Perkotaan* (Jakarta: YPKIK, 2004).

¹⁴ Geertz, *Abangan, Santri, Priyai dalam Masyarakat Jawa*,(Jakarta : Dunia Pustaka Jaya, 1981).

¹⁵ Woodward, *Islam Jawa : Kesalehan Normatif Versus Kebatinan*, (Yogyakarta: LKiS, 2004).

¹⁶ Andrew Beatty, *Varieties of Javanese Religio; An Anthropology Accountn* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

¹⁷ Robert W. Hefner, *Islam Pasar Keadilan; Artikulasi Lokal, Kapitalisme, dan Demokrasi* (Yogyakarta: LkiS, 2000).

¹⁸ Harsojo, *Pengantar Antropologi* (Jakarta : Abardi, 1984), hal 154

¹⁹ Masimambow, *Koentjaraningrat dan Antropologi di Indonesia*, (Jakarta: yayasan bor Indonesia, 1997), hal 9

beings, moving from one generation to the next, therefore culture is not a dynamic traditional practice, but always changes in accordance with the social conditions of society²⁰.

Community culture always provides space for each individual to interact with other individuals, thus creating social harmony in society, eliminating fragments that exist in society and can foster the values of cooperation in society that have begun to fade²¹. As with the village clean-up culture in East Javanese society, which opens space for dialogue for the meeting of several religions in one tradition. This is what happens to people who carry out traditional village cleaning activities in Lamongan and Kediri. There are at least several religions involved in the implementation of the village clean tradition, namely Islam, Hinduism and Christianity.

Bersih desa, which is part of anthropological practice, will be seen sociologically, in this case related to its role in the practice of village cleaning tradition. Therefore, this research will try to see more fully the role of the village clean tradition in building religious harmony in East Java. As for the research context, the researcher limits it to two areas, namely in Medowo Kediri village and Pelang Lamongan village.

Methods

In tracking the data in this study, researchers used a qualitative approach. This approach is often also referred to as the naturalistic method²² because the research is carried out in natural conditions. It is also called the ethnographic method because at the beginning of its appearance this method was widely used for cultural anthropology research. There are several considerations that make researchers decide to take a qualitative approach as an approach to examine more deeply the theme of this research, including First, because what is studied is the actions of the community that are manifested in a local culture. Secondly, the qualitative approach provides an opportunity for researchers to conduct an in-depth study of an activity phenomenon involving the community in carrying out the village cleaning tradition. Third, research on community culture. Fourth, the qualitative approach provides an opportunity for researchers to examine phenomena that exist in society holistically. Fifth, the qualitative approach used will provide opportunities for researchers in the field to understand phenomena according to the emic view or the views of local actors.

In conducting studies in the field, researchers use several methods to obtain data in the field, first, the observation method, this method is used by making observations in the field on the object of research, in this case the people of Pelang Lamongan and Medowo Kediri villages²³. This method researchers use to obtain data related to the culture of bersih desas in uniting community members. Second, Interview²⁴ is a method used to obtain data in the field by conducting face-to-face, conversing directly with respondents in the field. In this study, the object of research that is invited to talk is the villagers of Pelang Lamongan and Medowo Kediri, this method researchers use to dig info related to the meaning and process of implementing a bersih desa culture carried out by the people of Pelang Lamongan and Medowo Kediri. Among the examples of questions that will be asked in this method such as, does the bersih desa tradition play a role in strengthening inter-religious relations?²⁵ Third, Field notes or field notes are records of findings in the field, these notes come from what researchers hear, see,

²⁰ Sjafrin Sairin, *Perubahan Sosial Masyarakat Indonesia* (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2002), hal 184.

²¹ Samsul Ode, *Budaya Lokal Sebagai Media Resolusi dan Pengendalian Konflik di Provinsi Maluku*, Jurnal POLITIKA, Vol. 6 No. 2 tahun 2015, hal 93-100

²² Sugiyono, *Metode Penelitian Kuantitatif Kualitatif R&D* (Bandung : ALFABETA, 2012) hal 8.

²³ S. Margono, *Metodologi Penelitian Pendidikan*, (Jakarta: PT. Rineka Cipta, 1997), hal 158

²⁴ Koenjtaraningrat, *Metode- Metode Penelitian Masyarakat* (Jakarta: Gramedia, 1994), hal 129

²⁵ Ibid, hal 130

experience and think in the context of collecting data in the field²⁶, so in qualitative research, these field notes have an important role because they will help researchers to recall what is found in the field. In the research, the field note contains all the notes obtained in his observations of the Pelang Lamongan and Medowo Kediri village communities. Fourth, the method of data analysis, this method is used as an effort to organize the results of observations in the field, interviews and others obtained from the field related to the research theme in order to increase understanding, while for critical analysis it is necessary to continue by looking for meaning in each event and trying to compare it with other sources that are still related²⁷. The data analysis technique used is data reduction, in which researchers classify data from the field according to the grouping of data, either those found from interviews or those directly involved in it, or about informant data which is the subject of research, as well as data about activities which are classified according to the concepts. Furthermore, data presentation and conclusion drawing were carried out.

Result

Culture and Harmony in Society

Basically, culture is always related to society. It is inseparable, always working together to create intimacy in their souls because culture for them can organize their lives and make them consider themselves as a culture and society are two things that are interrelated and cannot be separated. Society as a group of people who live in the same environment and work together to establish a social structure with predetermined boundaries.²⁸

Culture is an abstract repertoire of knowledge belonging to a society. Culture is a way of life developed and shared by a group of people and passed down from generation to generation. Culture is made up of many complex elements, including religious and political systems, customs, language, tools, clothing, buildings, and works of art. Language, like culture, is such an integral part of the human person that many people tend to think of it as genetically inherited. When one tries to communicate with people of different cultures and adjust to the differences, it proves that culture is learned. Culture is an overall pattern of life. Culture is complex, abstract and broad. Thus, it is culture that provides a coherent framework for organizing one's activities and allows one to predict the behavior of others. Culture is closely related to society. That everything contained in society is determined by the culture possessed by the society itself.

Durkheim stated that "society is an organismic analogy of the body, where all parts work together to maintain the overall balance, and religion is understood as the glue that holds society together²⁹". The point is that community life according to Emile Durkheim is the same biology and in doing all its work with togetherness and bound by religious values so that humans can unite through a culture that has been formed by mutual agreement.

John Haba, as cited by Abdullah, that local wisdom has at least six functions. First, as a marker of a community's identity. Second, as an adhesive element (cohesive aspect) across religions, people, and beliefs. Third, local wisdom is not coercive or from above (top down), but a cultural element that exists and lives in society. Fourth, local wisdom gives the color of togetherness to a community. Fifth, local wisdom will change the mindset and mutual relationships of individuals and groups, by putting on the common ground (culture) that is owned. Sixth, local wisdom can function to encourage the building

²⁶ Moelong Lexi, *Metodologi Penelitian Kualitatif*, (Bandung: Remaja Rosda Karya, 2008), hal 209.

²⁷ Noeng Muhadjir, *Metodologi Penelitian Kualitatif*, (Yogyakarta: Rake Sarasin, 1996), hal 104

²⁸ Soerjono Soekanto, *Sosiologi Suatu Pengantar* (Jakarta: Raja Grafindo Persada, 2006), 22.

²⁹ Ibid, 31.

of togetherness, appreciation, as well as a joint mechanism to ward off various possibilities that reduce, even damage communal solidarity, which is believed to originate and grow on a shared consciousness, from an integrated community.³⁰

Society and tradition are two sides that cannot be separated, tradition originates from the pattern of life of the community that is carried out continuously, while the community is not only the object that produces culture, but also the implementer of tradition. Therefore, the relationship between society and tradition cannot be separated. In a sociological context, the implementation of traditions that involve many people, even across the boundaries of belief, such as the village cleanup tradition in East Java, raises the role of strengthening relationships between different groups.

Discussion

Bersih Desa: A Tradition that Builds Harmony

Bersih Desa is one of the traditions that are commonly found in rural Javanese communities, bersih desa become a symbol for community groups in interpreting gratitude for what has been given by God in the form of abundant fortune for a year, according to Rudolf Otto it is done as part of human responsibility to the sacred³¹, and the sacred is the highest power, so that responsibility to the sacred has implications for the implementation of religious actions or ceremonies³².

Among the people who carry out the traditional activities of the village clean is the village community Medowo Kediri, this tradition is believed to have been going on for a long time, from generation to generation. Mr. SJW said that "the tradition has been done for a long time, even I myself since childhood have followed this, invited by parents to participate in bersih desa activities, so when I grew up, I still do it, keep the traditions of our ancestors."³³

The bersih desa tradition is a field of gathering of Medowo community members in one joint activity, the tradition is upheld by all elements of the Medowo village community, whether they are Muslim, Hindu or Christian. It is interesting that religious barriers are no longer a barrier for the people of Medowo village in carrying out the bersih desa tradition. In the process, the bersih desa tradition is carried out by visiting and praying together at the village punden which is believed to be a place that has an influence on the existence of Medowo village. Tumpeng, daily food and market snacks complement the process of activities at the punden, then after the prayer is held, the activity then continues in the village hall accompanied by gamelan music and other equipment, accompanied by Javanese music, the community eats food dishes together.

The process continued by holding prayers at each place of worship, Hinduism held a joint prayer for the safety of Medowo village in the village temple led by Hindu community leaders, Christianity also did the same thing, namely praying together with internal Christians at the Village Church, as for the Muslim community together praying at the village hall. This activity is a reinforcement that the bersih desa tradition carried out by the Medowo village community is a field of religious harmony that exists in the community. Mr. SJW said that the community here always maintains cohesiveness, togetherness and high solidity in every process of village activities, especially that these activities become a reinforcement in building religious harmony in Medowo village.

In addition to fostering brotherhood, the village clean tradition is also an expression of gratitude of the Medowo village community for the favors given by God,

³⁰ Irwan Abdullah, *Agama dan Kearifan Lokal dalam Tantangan Global* (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2008), 8.

³¹ Thomas F O'dea, *Sosiologi Agama; Suatu Pengantar Awal* (Jakarta: CV Rajawali, 1992), hal 38-39

³² Koentjaraningrat, *Pengantar Ilmu Antrpologi* (Jakarta : Rineka Cipta, 1990), hal 377.

³³ Wawancara Bapak SJW di Medowo Pada 23 Juli 2022.

this is as expressed by Mr. Jarwo who said that the community always maintains a good relationship with God through various diversity traditions in Medowo, including the village clean tradition which is carried out collectively, together. In an effort to preserve the tradition, the Medowo community also maintains the existence of the punden located in the village field, therefore preserving the environment is one of the obligations to do in order to maintain the existence of the punden which is the point of implementation of the village clean tradition.

In Lamongan, Harmonization or inter-religious harmony occurs in Pelang village, there is a strong foundation that makes the harmony between them can be very well established. If searched deeply, one of the answers is the existence of a strong tradition. The traditions that have been passed down by ancestors, ancestors and village elders have been very strongly intertwined, making a sense of brotherhood as fellow villagers to help each other.

Although Christians are the minority, there has never been discrimination from the Muslims as the majority. One of the unifying factors between religious communities in the village is the "bersih desa" tradition. It cannot be denied that in Indonesia, traditions are still highly upheld in various regions, especially those living in rural areas. The village, where the majority of the population are farmers, always carries out the "bersih desa" tradition as a form of gratitude for the harvest that has been given by God. With a population of 4242 and the number of families who farm as many as 1048³⁴, the "earth alms" is a tradition that has long been carried out by their ancestors. In the tradition of earth alms there is a practice of inter-religious harmony in the form of delivering harvested crops to each other. Such as corn, white rice, vegetables, ingkung chicken, tumpeng, fruits and some rice plants as a symbol of the harvest.

An interesting thing happened during the bersih desa tradition. Evidence of the harmony that has been established between Muslims and Christians is when all participate to make the event a success. All young people from both Christianity and Islam work together. Not only helping each other, when the earth alms tradition began, everyone greeted each other and what they brought from home to be eaten by others. Regardless of who will eat the dish. Each person is invited to eat by exchanging food.

In addition, the prayers offered by the Muslims have never drawn protests from the Christians. This is because the prayers are prayers for the welfare of the entire village, not just for the majority of Muslims. Here it is very clear that both the majority and minority uphold harmony. The majority party, namely Islam, provides a very appropriate portion for the minority party, namely from the Christian side by providing the same opportunity for Christian priests to lead prayers in their beliefs. This further strengthens the position of religious harmony in Pelang village, in terms of mutual respect and providing equal opportunities in every community activity.

Overall, the traditions carried out above have value in community life, namely:

- a. Theological value, the attitude of surrender to the ruler of nature and respect for ancestors is one of the characteristics of rural communities, the majority of which live as farmers, this attitude has even been inherent and has become the culture of Javanese society in general.
- b. Ecological value, Furthermore, the value contained in the implementation of bersih desas or earth alms has the value of love for the surrounding nature as proof of the community's love for God.
- c. Sociological value, Tradition is used as a social field to strengthen interfaith interaction.

Closing

³⁴ Badan Pusat Statistik Kabupaten Lamongan tahun 2018

Society and tradition are inseparable entities, both of which coexist in their daily lives. As mutually attached entities, both play a role, the community as an actor in the implementation of the tradition, on the other hand the tradition provides many benefits for the perpetrators. This is reflected in the *bersih desa* tradition in East Java. Tradition plays an important role in knitting interfaith harmony. This study strengthens a variety of previous studies that argue that traditions in society can strengthen harmonious relationships, open space for dialogue between groups and strengthen solidarity in society.

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