Cultural System of Cirebonese People: Tradition of Maulid an in the Kanoman Kraton

Sistem Budaya Masyarakat Cirebon: Tradisi Maulidan dalam Kraton Kanoman

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Abstract

This paper examines the construction of Maulidan ritual in the commemoration of Prophet Muhammad’s birth at the Kanoman’s palace (kraton) Cirebon. Although the central element of the maulid is the veneration of Prophet, the tradition of Maulidan in Kanoman reinforced the religious authority of Sultan in mobilizing a massive traditional gathering by converging Islamic propagation with the art performance. It argues that the slametan (ritual meal with Arabic prayers), pelal alit (preliminary celebration), ‘panjang jimat’ (allegorical festival), asyrakalan (recitation of the book of maulid) and the gamelan sekaten can be understood as ‘indexical symbols’ modifying ‘trans-cultural Muslim ritual’ into local entity and empowering the traditional machinery of sexual division of ritual labour. The study focuses on the trend of Muslim monarch in the elaboration of maulid performance to demonstrate their piety and power in order to gain their legitimacy. Its finding suggests that religion tends to be shaped by society rather than society is shaped by religion. I emphasize that the maulidan tradition is ‘capable of creating meaningful connections between the imperial cult and every segment of ‘Cirebon people’ other than those Islamic modernists and Islamists who against it in principle. Based on the literature, media reports and interview materials, I argue that the meaning of rites may extend far beyond its stated purpose of venerating the Prophet since the folk religion has strategically generated the “old power” and religious authority. This study attempts to capture the cultural system of the religious-based rituals where the practice of local Muslims has shown distinctive manifestation from the Muslim heartlands in the Middle East.

Key words: maulid, slametan, religion, belief, ritual

Abstrak

Tulisan ini membahas konstruksi ritual maulidan dalam rangka kegiatan memperingati kelahiran Nabi Muhammad di Keraton Kanoman, Cirebon. Meskipun unsur utama maulid adalah memuliakan Nabi saw, tradisi maulidan di Kanoman telah menegaskan otoritas keagamaan Sultan dalam hal menyelenggarakan acara tradisional yang bersifat masif dengan cara menggabungkan dakwah Islam dan pentas seni budaya. Tulisan ini menegaskan bahwa ritual slametan, pelal alit, panjang jimat, asyrakalan dan gamelan sekaten dapat dipahami sebagai ‘indexical symbols’ (simbol-simbol pemberi petunjuk) yang telah merubah ritual umat Islam yang bersifat trans-nasional dalam bentuk entitas lokal dan telah memberdayakan pembagian kerja berdasarkan jenis kelamin. Penelitian ini fokus pada tren kerajaan Islam dalam upaya mengelaborasi tradisi maulid untuk menunjukkan kesalehan dan kekuasaan dalam

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Kata kunci: maulid, slametan, agama, kepercayaan, ritual

The relationship between religion and culture in the context of Indonesian Islam has been enchanting source of study among anthropologists. Living traditions among the people harbor interesting puzzle concerning whether religion is influenced by its community or community is shaped by religious doctrine. The *garebeg maulid* in Yogyakarta *kraton* is one example on how elements of religion and culture have been amalgamated in a very unique way. Woodward argues that *garebeg maulid* has connected veneration of the prophet Muhammad with Javanese notions of kingship (2011:190). Meanwhile, Adlin Sila found that celebration of *maulid* Nabi in Cikoang community, South Sulawesi, has presented symbolic meanings of *maulid* which are derived from the tradition of Sufi order. This study reveals the role of *sayyid* (descendent of prophet Muhammad) as the guardian of local culture in developing the ritual of *maulid* (Sila 2001).

The reason why ritual becomes the target of study has led to the argument that ritual is a medium or vehicle to understand a particular root of culture which lies at the deepest level of social structure. As Asad said, people’s ritual is code for understanding their interpretation of culture (Woodward 2011:29). I expect that I can learn many important values and norms that lie beneath the deepest level of Cirebonese people’s worldview from my investigation to ritual of *maulid* in Kanoman *kraton*. According to the local historian, tradition of *maulid* in the Cirebon *kraton* has been commenced since the appointment of Sunan Gunung Jati (the founder of Cirebon Kingdom) as the greatest saint (*wali qutub*) in 1479 AD (Sulendradiningrat 1985:83-84). It means that the tradition has been survived for more than five centuries. Such a long history of the ritual has encouraged my curiosity to explore the elements and their meanings which involved in the celebration of *maulid*.

Apart from the assumption that *maulid* is a kind of deviation from what is labeled as “pure Islam”, the persistence of such traditional Islamic customs needs sufficient explanation linking the capacity of agents in the establishment and maintenance the local innovations with social and historical aspects of its community. Although many scholars have serious concern about this issue, the main challenge of studying local Islam, according to Eickelman, is to explicate ‘how the universalist principles of Islam have been manifested in various social and historical contexts without propounding Islam as a seamless essence on the one hand, and presenting it as ‘a plastic congeries’ of beliefs and practice on the other’ (Eickelman 1982 in Woodward 1988:85-86). In this paper, I examine the significance of local culture dealing with the reinforcement of Sultan’s religious authority in mobilizing a massive traditional gathering in the Kanoman *kraton*, Cirebon.

Cirebonese People: A Profile

The origin of Cirebonese people can be traced to a developing village around the northern coastal of West Java in 1389 AD (Tjandrasasmita 1996:200). The territory grown to be seaport village which was visited by various international traders such as Chinese, European and Middle Eastern people. Due to the growing trend of coexistence with other local and world ethnic, the coastal territory is later called Caruban which means mixture. In its development, it turned to be Cerbon and finally becomes Cirebon (Yayasan Kraton Kasepuhan 2002:3). As the ruler of the territory, the King of Pajajaran delegated the authority to govern the seaport to Ki Gedeng Sindangkasih, Ki Gedeng Jumajanji (also known as Ki Gedeng Tapa) and then Pangeran Cakrabumi. Under the control of Pangeran Cakrabumi, Cirebon became
more developing territory following the moving center of trade from Muara Jati to Kasunean (Tjandrasasmita 1996:206).

The social and political transformation from Pajajaran Hinduism to be Cirebon Islam had been commenced after Pangeran Cakrabumi (also known as Pangeran Cakrabuana) declared the independence of Cirebon from Pajajaran. He did not only establish independent central of government in Pakungwati, but also actively disseminated Islamic teachings in the land of Cirebon. One of his legacies is the small mosque which is called ‘Tajug Jalagrahan’ (Wildan 2002:272-3). In order to strengthen his knowledge about Islam, Cakrabumi decided to pilgrimage to Mecca for about two years (Tjandrasasmita 1996:206). After he developed the coastal territory, many people converted to be Muslim and many people from Muara Jati moved to Caruban to trade and live (Tjandrasasmita 1996:205).

The wave of Islamization in Cirebon had experienced a greater development since Sunan Gunung Jati took the role. Both political and cultural approaches were part of his strategy in introducing Islam to people. He did not only maintain political network with the influential Muslim leaders, but also fostering the popular Islamic traditions within the Cirebonese system of culture. For his authority that included both political and religious aspect, he received a title ‘Raja-Pandito’, a political and religious leader. Since its inception in the 15th-16th century, Cirebon has ‘its own importance in the configuration of the Islamic era’ (Muhaimin 1995:7).

However, the inclination of Sunan Gunung Jati to strengthen the foundation of Islamic culture and the lack of ambition to extend his political power, Cirebon never developed into a state with strong political power (Muhaimin 1995). It could be the fact that he had been 60 years old when he took the political office (De Graaf & Pigeaud 1986:142). According to Muhaimin, Sunan Gunung Jati’s concern was more on religious matters rather than political business, due to his sainthood. He was already satisfied with the political role of his son, Sabakingkin which later known as Sultan Hasanudin (Islamic King of Banten). Therefore, he could focus his energy to his religious mission (De Graaf & Pigeaud 1986:8).

The declining power of Cirebon happened particularly since the territory had been divided into two and then three fractions of kingdom: Kasepuhan, Kanoman and Kacirebonan. The political situation worsened after Dutch colonial had controlled Java and other Islands of archipelago. The three Sultans were forced to obey and serve the interest of European ruler (Naskah Mertasinga 209). Some kins of Sultan who disagree with his policy have stepped outside from kraton and some of them established pesantren around Cirebon. These religious institutions, in turn, contributed significant role in fostering the practice of tarikat (mystical path). The founder of Pesantren Buntet, Mbah Muqoyim, is one of mursyid of Syattariyah kraton (Muhaimin 1995:250).

As a small kingdom, political power of Cirebon did not grow to be a great state, however, its role in shaping the cultural system of people has shown a great influence. Since Sunan Gunung Jati, who was backed up by Walisongo (lit.nine saints), propagated Islam, the doctrine of Sufism or mysticism has been popular among Cirebonese people. The seminal ‘suluk’ or ‘tarikat’ is manifested in a variety of pupuh (mystical song) which contains the doctrine of sufism. The ‘suluk pesisir’, for example, has been an inspiring teaching among pious people. It mostly teaches how Muslim approaches his God by knowing himself, his environment, universe, angel and supernatural thing in a convincing way (Dahuri et al. 2004:224). Two other important suluk are ‘Suluk Naskah Wahosan Bujang Genjong’ and ‘Suluk Naskah “Kitab Asrar Yusuf”’. The former suluk emphasizes the importance of ‘manunggal’ (integration) in terms of four knowledge (syari’at, tarekat, hakekat and ma’rifat), while the latter conveys the position of human before God in which he/she merely undertakes God’s will and no one can preclude His will (Dahuri et al. 2004: 225-7).

The great role of propagators in the Islamization process of Cirebon has been a legend which most of them are known locally through popular accounts, either written or oral. That’s why, it is difficult to identify which is fact and myth because of lack of historical evidences. As a result, the story of Muslim propagators has been developed among people as the holy men and exemplary models whose piety and behavior deserve imitation and appreciation (Muhaimin 1995:161). It has led to the practice of veneration

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2 *Bujang Genjong* means physical entity.
to wali (saint) and holy men by visiting sites and shrines relating to those great persons. This is further manifested by the belief that the ‘fragrance’ of their honour still remains posthumously and such places contain berkah (divine blessings) (Muhaimin 1995:162). Although the veneration of holy men has been long established practice in the Muslim world, Muslim puritans commonly condemn such a habit.

Among Javanese, the reputation of Sunan Kali Jaga as an innovative agent of Islamic propagator could not be compared with any other wali. His talent and interest in the arts and culture introduced a new method of communication, particularly in conveying religious tenets, in which never imagined before by the fellow saints. By means of wayang (puppet) and gamelan, for example, Sunan Kali Jaga successfully presented spiritual messages with peace and interesting ways. This pattern and style was followed by his son, Pangeran Panggung (literally means ‘The Prince of Stage’), who has also a great reputation among the traditional artists. For Cirebonese artists, there is strong belief that they are all descendents of Pangeran Panggung, the creator of traditional arts. That’s why, before the performance of wayang, for example, the artists usually provide offerings, pray or meditate and burn incense, mainly to obtain permission, blessings or help from Pangeran Panggung. If this spirit does not come to help them, they believe that their artistic endeavors would be difficult to perform. This spiritual belief is in some ways much more important than the physical or technical conviction. In fact, almost all of them, especially the dalang topeng (master of mask dancer) and the dalang wayang (wayang puppeteer) often fast, meditate and visit the sacred graves to strengthen and enhance their spiritual power, although they never practice their technique (Suanda 1981:30-31).

As the guardian of ideas of multiculturalism, it seems that there are important efforts of Sultan to maintain diversity or pluralism in a modest way. The awareness of recognizing multiculturalism has been perpetuated in Sultan’s vehicle by symbolizing one world culture or ethnic with the relevant symbols. In the carriage of ‘Paksi Naga Liman’, for example, the word ‘Paksi’ refers to bird symbolizing Middle East culture. Naga is an imaginary animal which epitomizes Chinese culture, while Liman stems from Sanskrit means elephant, as symbol of Indian culture. The ‘Singa Barong’ carriage has also similar messages. The form of carriage is manifestation of three animals, namely elephant, dragon and bird. Elephant represents Indian culture, dragon represents Chinese culture and bird symbolizes Egyptian/Arab culture (Islam). This awareness might become a simple manifestation of multicultural trend of Cirebon people which has been mentioned in the book of Carita Purwaka Caruban Nagari, that the word of Cirebon stems from sarumban, meaning ‘mixture’ of different tribes, languages, customs and religions.

Nevertheless, the position of Cirebon in the middle of two established cultures, which is Javanese and Sundanese, has created an ambiguous cultural identity. The culture does not firmly affiliate to Javanese nor Sundanese, but some practices refer to Javanese culture, while some other things have taken from Sundanese. This ambiguous position can be identified in the use of local language, called ‘Bahasa Cherbon’, a language that is influenced by both Javanese and Sundanese. Based on the egalitarian and outspoken style of language, the ‘bahasa Cherbon’ is also known as blakasuta (outspoken language). Ironically, when Cirebonese people met Javanese, they regard Cirebonese as Sundanese, while Sundanese assume Cirebonese as Javanese (Noer 2009:3). This confusing response of outsiders, fortunately, does not really become serious concern of the people. In a relax way, Cirebonese can response such attitude by saying: “apa jare kono lah!” (I don’t care). However, during the 2010 census of population, Cirebon has been categorized as ‘one suku’ among 1,128 tribes throughout Indonesia. It means that Cirebon can not be assumed as Javanese or Sundanese anymore. The criteria of being Cirebonese are simple: those who live in Cirebon and have paternal lineage with Cirebonese who was born in Cirebon, they can be included as Cirebonese (Radar Cirebon 2/5/2010).

There is different concept of Cirebon in terms of culture and political administration. As a cultural entity, Cirebon encompasses the so-called ‘Wilayah III’ (lit. three territory), namely Indramayu, Kuningan and Majalengka. In western part, Subang still have affiliation with Cirebon, while in the eastern

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3 Paksi Naga Liman is an official carriage of Sultan of Kanoman which is created in 1428 by Pangeran Losari.
4 Singa Barong is an official carriage of Sultan of Kasepuhan which is proposed by Panembahan Pakung Wati I and created in 1549 by Panembahan Losari, Werk Bas Dalem Gebang Sepuh and Ki Nataguna.
part, Brebes, Tegal and Pemalang also have similar culture with Cirebonese. Due to the idea of shared culture, aspiration to unify the ‘Wilayah III’ as a new province has been sporadically promulgated by certain group with the brief, Ciayumajakuning (Cirebon, Indramayu, Majalengka and Kuningan). Those regions covers an area of about 5,642,569 square kilometers and had a population about 7.5 million inhabitants in 2008. Unfortunately, this aspiration tends to be political interest rather than cultural movement.

In terms of political administration, Cirebon refers to two types of administration, namely the kotamadya (municipality) and kabupaten (regency). The kotamadya is located in area of 37.54 square kilometer with total population 298,995 inhabitants in 2008. Administratively, the municipality of Cirebon has five kecamatan (district) and 22 kelurahan (village) (Badan Pusat Statistik Kota Cirebon 2009). From the capital city of West Java (Bandung), Cirebon is about 130 km away, while from Jakarta is about 258 km. The three kraton (Kasepuhan, Kanoman and Kacirebonan) which become the legacy of Cirebon predecessors is located at the territory of Kotamadya Cirebon.

The Festival of Amulets in Kanoman Kraton

In anthropological studies, ritual has been important focus to understand the way people think and feel in order to seek relationships among the concepts that operate in social life (Turner 1969:6). A study on the ritual of garabeg maulid in Yogyakarta has shown the relationships of symbolic concepts with the cosmology and living norms of Javanese people in the context of daily life. The ritual has revealed various meanings and world view of Javanese people from the use of colors, shape and choice of materials at the ‘gunungan kakung’ (Abdullah 2002:77-88). The various meanings of ritual have been also identified by Abdullah Ali (2001) in the study of Maulid in Cirebon. This study found that the ritual of maulid has different meaning among the pilgrimage. It could be entertainment, economic, and religious meaning. I try to explore the meaning and significance of the festival of amulets in the Kanoman kraton as an important part of the whole celebration of maulid.

The practice of various rituals during the Maulidan tradition at the Kanoman kraton has unconsciously or strategically empowered the gender role of constitutive elements of supporters for the survival of the remnant of Islamic kingdom. Unlike the male dominated practice of ritual in Kasepuhan court, the involvement of women in the Kanoman kraton since the early preparation of ritual until the end of ceremony has contributed a greater role than that of men counterpart. Before the peak of celebration, women have an exclusive duty to wash some noble amulets (panjang), known as nyiram panjang, in a water container. Those amulets are twelve big trays made of ceramics and have been hundreds years engaged in the annual ritual. These trays will be used to bring some kinds of meal in the panjang jimat festival, a procession of noble amulets from langgar (small mosque) to masjid agung (larger mosque). Unlike the ordinary process of washing, this duty requires norms and criteria.

The women involved in the washing process are privileged member of Sultan’s family, such as wife, sisters and daughters. According to my informant, such criterion is intended to maintain the safety of noble amulets in the hands of trusted people. “We can not imagine if the antique items are damaged or broken. Therefore, we do not involve other people (to wash them), except our internal family”. For these women, undertaking this duty is an honor that other people can not do. Although this kind of honor is socially constructed, I would argue that they realize their own interest against the weight of custom, tradition and transcendental will, as Mahmood (2001) conceptualizes about agency. As one of the women said, “I do it with ikhlas (highly sincere) and regard it as an honorable duty”.

Besides, purity is the prerequisite to take part in the duty. The purity here is associated with women’s condition that is free from blemish. Therefore, woman in her period is not allowed to join the procession, although she is part of Sultan’s family. The concept of purity in this respect almost equals with the model of Islamic orthodoxy, particularly the notion that only pure women who can conduct shalat (prayer) and recites the Koran. Instead of doing ceremony with cheerful and relax atmosphere, the
duty is undertaken solemnly and devoutly because they recite salawat\(^5\) (pray for Prophet Muhammad) during the procession. No talk or gossiping in this ceremony. The recitation of salawat is highly recommended for all people who involve in ritual practices during maulid in order to exalt the Prophet Muhammad.

The norms of female purity also prevails for other traditional customs in the preparation of the panjang jimat such as ngerik (chirping the fragrant wood), dhamel boreh (making scrub), dhamel lilin (making candle), dhamel ukup (making incense), mipis (soften spices), saji buah (serving the fruits), mungkus salawat (packing the coin of shalawat), and nyiram pacara (washing the noble amulets). However, the women duties are mostly backed up by some men which is called ‘bapak sindang’. These men help women to prepare anything dealing with domestic works. Local myth says that bapak sindang are descendants of the kraton guardians who used to be able to transform into a tiger (physically or metaphorically).

The involvement of women both in the pelal alit and pelal ageng procession is highly crucial. The pelal alit is sort of slametan (a ritual meal to obtain blessings) by doing asyrakalan (recitation of Barzanzi/Maulid) in the langgar (small mosque) as the preliminary celebration of maulidan. Similar with the pelal alit, the main ritual of pelal ageng is asyrakalan, but it is conducted in masjid agung (big mosque) and initiated with the procession of panjang jimat (festival of noble amulets). While women prepare the equipment of ceremony such as flowers, scrub, candles, fruits, coin of salawat and nasi jimat (literally means amulets rice), men prepare the troops and guardians to escort the festival. Looking at the composition of parade, women outnumber men.

Due to the myriad of amulets of kraton, the festival involves many people, both men and women in a long parade. The formation of parade comprises six groups. The first group march in the front bringing chis (spear), dupa (incense) and the banner of Cirebon kingdom. One man brings a spear, two men hold the incense and five men bring the banner together. The spear symbolizes the role of Pangeran Pringgabaya, one of Sunan Gunung Jati’s son who has duty to guard the Cirebon’s territory. The three-metres-banner with the symbol of Macan Ali (Ali’s tiger) and the inscription syahadatain (Islamic creed) conveying a message for Muslims to preserve the core of faith.

The second group is women in large number bringing various pacara (hairlooms) symbolizing the process of Prophet Muhammad’s birth. Those amulets are two bunches of long-black hair, one jantung pisang (prototype of banana flower which is made of silver), three miniatures of silver-made-Paksi Naga Liman, five scissors, fifteen kendi (jars), two cases of amulets, one toples (glass container) with water inside and four empty trays. The black hair symbolizes the first part of baby born out of the womb. The jantung symbolizes the manifestation of small size of mankind. The miniature of Paksi Naga Liman epitomizes friend of the baby. Scissor symbolizes cutter to separate baby from its placenta. The jar which contains water symbolizes the last blood of the mother during her pregnancy. The silver case symbolizes a cradle for the baby. Water container symbolizes clean water to clean the baby. The forth group is approximately eighty women bringing flowers, scrub and the coin of shalawat on the tray. Its formation is exactly like the previous group, two women bring one tray.

\(^5\) Salawat words: ‘allahumma shalli ‘ala sayyidina Muhammad’ (May blessings of Allah be upon the Prophet Muhammad)
The fifth group is Pangeran Patih, the representative of Sultan. He is accompanied by a man bringing a candle and one man hold the umbrella. The former marches in front of him, while the later marches behind him. Pangeran Patih is also accompanied by penghulu (chief Muslim clerics) and his kins. As a leader of the march, Pangeran Kumisi mostly takes part in this group. The last group is tens of men bringing a tray of fruits. Among other trays, this tray is the heaviest, so one tray is brought by four men.

During the parade, Sultan mobilizes his troops and guardians to secure the running procession. Two kinds of guardians who are responsible to secure the panjang jimat parade, pasukan blandrangan and pasukan pagersari. They are totally more than 300 people. While blandrangan troop wear long-black clothes and batik headgear, pagersari guardians wear short-hand-blue batik (mega mendung motif) clothes, long-black pants and batik headgear. Unlike the pagersari, blandrangan troop is armed with spear by Sultan. In fact, both kind of guardian have similar duty to escort the allegorical parade from the kraton to the masjid agung, which is commonly known as pagerbetis (standing hand in hand among the guardian to keep the way clear). Since Islamic kingdom of Cirebon did not have many official troops as commonly had by a kingdom, the guardians reflect the loyal supporter of Sultan in the preservation of cultural and historical legacy of Cirebonese Islam. Historically, the troops of kingdom were supplied by the various militias in certain pouches of villages that were ready to call anytime if they are summoned or needed by the Sultan. In the layer of security system, Cirebonese military was positioned in spread locations, from the nearest post to the further one. The internal circle of guardians who were located at nearby points to the kraton, such as Jagabayan and Jagasatru, and external circle which is posted in further location such as Kalijaga, Watu Tameng, Penggung, Jagapura, Sirnabaya, Kuningan, and Bungko. They guarded territory based on their own village.

The Peak Ritual: Asyrakalan

As practiced by many communities in the Muslim world, the main or the peak of celebrations of the Prophet’s birthday is the recitation of maulid, ‘panegrycal poems of a very legendary character, which start with the birth of Muhammad, and praise his life and virtues in the most laudatory fashion’ (Fuchs 1961:366-7 in Tapper & Tapper 1987:73). The recitation of the Arabic poems is held in the mosque of kraton in the night of 12th of Maulid. The Sultan, or designated substitute, comes to the mosque after Isya prayer to attend the recitation of the Prophet’s biography, which is well known as asyrakalan. As the executor of the ceremony, Pangeran Kumisi arranges the position of participant’s seat, nasi jimat and other equipments. The recitation of Barzanzi is led by penghulu (chief Muslim cleric) which is assisted by two male vocalists. Unlike some other asyrakalan which commonly separate between men and women, this ceremony allows both sexes take part. Some women take place behind the row of penghulu, and some other are scattered in the family’s row of Sultan.

In this peak of commemoration of Prophet Muhammad’s birth, the penghulu recite the Book of Barzanzi which is written by Sayyid Ja’far Al-Barjanji (1101-1690/1177-1764). Although most participants do not understand Arabic, the Barzanzi’s text is recited without any translation from the reader. While dhalang recites the text, participants listen and sometimes interrupting by saying shalatu ‘alaikum (peace upon you) in the end of sentence. In this ceremony, no one talk or make a noise except the one who recite the text and those who response the recitation. As common asyrakalan among Muslim communities, the rhythm of recitation of the Barzanzi text in tradition of Maulidan at Kanoman has different rhythm with other communities. According to the penghulu, the rhythm is so exclusive that other Muslim communities beyond the kraton do not duplicate the rhythm. It is recited with solemn and devotional atmosphere. I observe that this rhythm is similar with the rhythm of classic way of shalawatan

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6 Pangeran Patih Qadiran usually represents Sultan to attend this ceremony, while Sultan serves his guests in the kraton.
before the Friday prayer in the mosque of Kasepuhan. Some traditions of this mosque still strongly preserve the habit of Walisongo in doing religious rituals.\footnote{Apart from the classic way of shalawatan, the mosque of Kasepuhan (Masjid Agung Sang Cipta Rasa) still preserves the sermon with Arabic and ‘adzan pitu’ (calling for prayer by seven people) during the jum’at prayer.}

In the mahallul qiyam (time to stand up), all participants stand up to welcome and honour the Prophet Muhammad. Although this practice has been controversial after the rise of reformist movement (Kaptein 1993), ‘standing up’ in the middle of asyrakalan has been one of the favorite events among the participants. In this moment, Pangeran Kumisi walks around the participant and sprinkle them with perfume in a small jar, called the kocrod. He prioritizes Sultan to get a sprinkle of perfume and then his family, both men and women. Besides, people who follow the asyrakalan from outside of mosque also get a sprinkle of perfume. Most people expect berkah (blessing) from the sprinkle of perfume which has been prayed with many shalawat by many people in a sacred place and time. After standing up and back to sit, dhalang continuous the recitation. The last prayer is recited by the penghulu as the closing ceremony.

Since the Sultan represents himself as the master of spiritual in the order of local Sufism (tarikat), the visit of people in the maulidan is an embodiment of loyalty of disciple to their master (seba). Interestingly, the authority of mystic agent does not only refer to Sultan, but also to his family both men and women. If Sultan does not attend the asyrakalan ceremony, he usually welcomes his guests in the kraton. The form of berkah (blessing) from Sultan that is usually distributed to his guests are gifts, such as nasi jimat, coin of salawat, flowers, scrubs and ukup (incense). As a return, people present many offer such as rice, fruits, raw vegetables and even some money. Ratu Sri Mulya, a mother of Sultan of Kanoman XII, admits that she has more than 20 loyal guests from a variety of villages throughout Cirebon. As commonly hostess, she always serves her guest with drinks and snacks. But she wonders that almost every time she meets her guest, they do not really expect ordinary service (drinks and snacks), but they ask for the gifts.

**Slametan**

Slametan is one of the most important rites in the Javanese cultural system. Almost all aspect of life can be arranged by Javanese people to conduct such a rite. Geertz identified four types of slametan based on its function and timing. He found that slametan deals with life crisis (1) such as birth, circumcision, wedding and death. It also relates to Islamic festive (2) as Idul Fitri, Idul Adha and Maulid. The slametan is held for social integration in village and cleansing the village (3) it could be meant to cleanse the circumstance from bad spirits). Also, slametan can be conducted anytime depending on extraordinary events happened to someone, which is known as ‘slametan sela’ (4), such as departure to a long journey, house moving, replacement of name, illness, and expelling the black magic (1983:38).

Although Geertz (1960) linked the ritual of slametan with practice of Hindu-Buddhist-Animistic-syncretism of Javanese Islam, some scholars have criticized it seriously. Woodward (1988), for example, argues that although elements of the slametan is derived from pre-Islamic traditions, it is interpreted in Islamic terms. Similarly, Muhaimin maintains that ‘slametan is essentially Islamic’. The word slamet is originally borrowed from Arabic salamah meaning peace or safety. It deals with ‘sedeakah’ (sadaqa/charity) and do’a (pray) which has scriptural basis, both from the Qur’an and the Hadith (1995:136). Woodward has also convinced us that the slametan is a locally defined Muslim rite and that the criteria Geertz employs to distinguish Islam from animism are misleading. He argues that the slametan is an example of a ritual complex that links blessing (barakah) and food and extends from Arabia to Southeast Asia. Its religious and social goals are defined in terms of Islamic mystical teachings (Woodward 2011:113).

During the maulidan tradition, Sultan of Kanoman holds various slametan in different places and different times. The first round of slametan is conducted in the 25th of Safar, a few weeks before the peak of celebration. In this occasion, the participants of slametan recite prayers from one place to another. They move from Lumpang Watu, Siti Hinggil, Witana, Gedong Jimat, Jinem and then finally to the
Langgar. Those places are historical sites around the kraton which believed by people as having spirits and blessings. The second round of slametan is conducted in the ‘Paseban’ after the celebration of Maulid has finished. The ceremony which lasts in the 12th of Maulid and well known as ‘buang takir’. Unlike the first and the second one, the third or the last round of slametan is held beyond the kraton. This slametan is conducted in the 15th of Maulid and take location in 21 sites and tombs around Cirebon. Some people call this ceremony as tumpengan.

The multi functions of slametan have put this rite as cultural preference of the people to convey many things. At the first round of slametan which is conducted in six different locations, implies the pilgrimage to important and historical places in the formative period of Cirebonese culture and Kingdom. According to Pak Kumisi, such ritual is important to respect the predecessors who played significant role in propagating Islamic teachings and at the same time commemorating their legacy to the present generations. But the most important thing, he said, “our annual prayer in this slametan is intended to ask to God for his blessing in this historical place”. Meanwhile, the massages concerning thanksgiving to God can be found in the second and the third round of slametan. The ‘buang takir’ means ‘discarding the remains’ which historically refers to the Sultan’s policy in distributing the remains of food for people after the completion of big feast (maulid). This practice, later on, has became the moment of Sultan to give charity either he has the food’s remains or not. This slametan signifies the closing ceremony of the serial events of maulid. By the similar massage, the tumpengan is also a reflection of thanksgiving ceremony by distributing the ‘nasi tumpeng’ to those who have dedicated their life to guard the legacy of kraton.

The distribution of meal after slametan is surely an expected moment by most pilgrimage due to the conviction that the food contains the berkah (blessing) from Sultan. A variety of foods, which are provided by Sultan during the slametan, certainly becomes favorable charity for people. According to Ratu Sri Mulya, a wife of Sultan Kanoman XI, many meals provided for the three different kinds of slametan. At least there are nine kinds of menu should be prepared, such as curry chicken, beef steak, sambal goreng daging (fried beef with chilly sauce) and bean, setuk (salad with potato, carrot, cabbage, which is combined with milk, egg, coconut milk, added with some ingredients such as salt and white pepper), fried noodle, sauerkraut, beef and goat soup and boiled egg. Besides, the kitchen of kraton provides three kinds of rice, such as nasi tumpeng bogana, (mount rice with vegetable salad), tumpeng ayam panggang (mount rice with roast chicken) and ura-ura (white rice). Various cakes, drinks and fruits are also served for the slametan feast.

Gamelan Sekaten

The element of gamelan sekaten in the Maulid tradition has been a crucial aspect since it was a cultural media of Sunan Gunung Jati and Sunan Kali Jaga to attract people to embrace Islam and contemplating the greatness of God by spiritual touch of gamelan music. It is similar with the power of gamelan in Yogyakarta’s sekaten as found by Woodward (2011:182) that is projected ‘to attract people to the mosque, and to compel conversion to Islam. According to my informant, the early Islamic propagators in Java used to ask people who want to attend the gamelan concert to recite syahadat as a “password” or “ticket” to listen to the instrumental music. In other words, the crew of Gamelan Sekaten will play the music for those who have already paid the ticket by syahadat. It is a subtle propaganda from Javanese saints which is assumed by Cirebonese Muslim as smart and creative approach rather than using violence approach.

Although the idea of conversion has been out of date, the performance of gamelan sekaten has been maintained for some reasons. The concept of dakwah or syiar, which became the main concern of Walisongo, is believed by the current Muslim generation as not simple as recruiting people to embrace Islam, but also maintaining their faith and strengthen it to be the true Muslim (insan kamil). The leader of gamelan group told me that the gamelan music is a highly level of contemplation of mankind to his God the Almighty. Besides, preserving the historic legacy from the early propagators of Islam has been one important consideration rather than put them in a storage room. It would be a reminder for people about the concept of peace and harmony that come out from the gamelan rhythms. There is also traditional
conviction those who listen the gamelan sekaten can eliminate the negative aura of people which is believed that it can come and go.

There are seven titles of music played annually during the Maulidan, such as Cing-cing Duwur, Tari Anom, Rambu Miring, Rambu Alit, Rambu Gede, Bango Butak and Sekatenan. The music is thought having spiritual meanings which can mediate the audience to contemplate about the One. The Bango Butak (Lit. bold egret), for example, conveying the symbolic message about the offer of Islam to elevate people dignity and the subtle exhortation to learn Islamic teachings comprehensively. It is similar with the meaning of Cing-cing Duwur (Lit. highly elevate), which telling that embracing Islam by reciting syahadat (creed) will elevate people’s dignity. He/she will know the God Almighty. However, this gamelan is not allowed to play in Friday, whereas its function to mediating mankind to God. Friday is believed by Muslims as the sayyidul ayyam (the best day to conduct spiritual rites). In this day, Muslim is recommended to perform ritual or spiritual activities which are determined by syariah (ibadah mahdlah) rather than doing undetermined activities by Islamic law (ibadah ghairu mahdlah) or profane deeds.

The importance of ‘gamelan sekaten’ dealing with spiritual massages, however, can not be claimed as the only performance of various manifestations of Cirebonese arts which emphasize divine aspects. Some Cirebonese artists believe that most of the traditional arts were created by the wali (saints) to spread the Islamic religion. Therefore, the arts have religious symbols and meanings, which the people should learn to know Islam. Some people think that the philosophical meaning of one set of wayang kulit comes from the Qur’an and has the same ideological value as the Qur’an. Many of the dalang wayang are highly knowledgeable in this philosophical background of the arts and often explain this to the people through the performances (Suanda 1981: 38). The tari topeng (mask dance) has also explanation concerning spiritual dimension of a performance art. The role of character such as Panji, Samba, Rumyang, Temenggung and Klana (Rahwana) is representation of religious people. Their religiosity is embodied in most of motions that always form the symbol of Allah (God) when two hands are lift up as high as shoulder. The curvature which is formed by the meeting between thumbs and finger is like “h” letter (the last letter in the word ‘Allah’ in Arabic). It also reflects a symbolic balance between material and spiritual achievement for every mankind who believes the greatness of God. Given these symbolic messages, tari topeng principally demonstrates the concept of hablum minallah (divine relations) and hablum minannas (human relations) (Noer 2009:23).

The important feature of gamelan sekaten is played by twelve players, which is called nayaga. The twelve players, according to the Sep (group leader) of gamelan, represent the date of Muhammad’s birth, 12 of Rabi’ul Awal (Maulid). This symbolic meaning links the whole unit of performance with the celebration of Maulidan which is seemingly separated from the allegorical festival and the asyarakalan. The performance of gamelan also subjects to tradition. Unlike Kasepuhan kraton (palace) that presents gamelan during Idul Fitri and Idul Adha, the gamelan sekaten in Kanoman is only played during the Maulidan. The performance lasts for five days in the Bangsal Sekaten or Mande Karesmen at Siti Hinggil area. It starts from 7th of Maulid after ashar prayer when the pelad alit (preliminary celebration) is held in the langgar agung (mosque) and ends at the buang takir (closing ceremony) ritual in 11th of Maulid.

Like a system of monarchy, the players of gamelan sekaten are appointed based on the lineage. In other words, all gamelan players are the son of previous generation of gamelan players. At least, he is descendant of Sultan of Kanoman. The Sep (Chief), for example, is a nephew of the Sultan Kanoman X (Sultan Raja Muhammad Nurus). Also, like tradition of patriarchal kingdom, there is no female player since its initial performance of gamelan. When I ask this issue to the Sep, he argues that responsibility of playing ‘gamelan sekaten’ is as serious as the propagator of Islam in which no women became part of it. “If playing ordinary gamelan, anyone can do it including women,” he said. This inclination seemingly replicates the model of orthodoxy in which male dominated paradigm contributed significant role in shaping the popular practice of Islam. The profane practice has been a pseudo-sacred thing for the sake of preserving tradition.

Genealogy among Cirebonese artists is also very important to maintain “the pure artist descendents” which relates to the quality of performance. But it is not as patriarchal as the kraton tradition. As Suanda (1981:30) found that there are two different groups of professional artists in Cirebon.
The larger group is of artist descent, and most of them play in the *wayang* (puppet play) and *topeng* (masked dance) performances. The second one is not of artist descent, and most of them play in the other forms of performances such as *sandiwara* (a folk dance theater which uses a proscenium stage and presents the folk stories or legends), *ronggeng* (a female professional dancer in the social dance), *reyog* (a folk theater which is performed by four main artists who carry and play single-headed drums), *bengberokan* or *bangbarongan* (totem form mask play) and *debus* (an acrobatic and magic performance), which technically or artistically are considered simpler than the *wayang* and *topeng*. Artist descent is called *turunan*, if both mother and father are artist. But if only one parent, (only mother or father) the artist is called *katurunan*. In this respect, *turunan* is considered the best, which is why until today most of them always hope to marry their children with the same family. They believe that people who aren’t *turunan* or *katurunan* will not be able to obtain the spirit of Pangeran Panggung, the creator of traditional arts. They believe that his spirit can help them in doing the arts. If they can not obtain the spirit of Pangeran Panggung, it means that they can’t be good artist because they are unable to reach the essence or the soul of art (1981:30).

Unlike the ordinary ensemble, the *gamelan sekaten* is treated with carefully and highly respect. It is not only because of it is the *kraton’s* heirloom which has historical sentiment, but also as noble amulet that is very rare. The *Gamelan Sekaten* was a wedding gift from Sultan Trenggono (King of Demak) to Cirebon Kingdom for the marriage of Ratu Mas Nyawa from the Islamic Kingdom of Demak (daughter of king) with Pangeran Bratakelana (son of Sunan Gunung Jati) in 1495 (Wildan 2002:313). It is a witness of good relationship between Islamic Kingdom of Demak and Cirebon. The damage of the ensemble certainly will not only affect historical evidence of the development of Islam in Java, but also the continuity of *Maulid an* tradition which has lasted hundreds years. Unlike the carriage of *Paksi Naga Liman* which has its duplicate, the *gamelan sekaten* has not.

Given those situation, the *gamelan* ensemble is washed by *nayaga* and held a religious ceremony by *penghulu* (Muslim cleric) before it performs. At about 9 am, the *gamelan* ensemble are taken from the storage room in the *kraton dalem* to the *langgar*. The *penghulu* leads the ceremony which is known as *tawashul*, reciting prayer to obtain blessing. Basically, it is simple ritual by reciting *al-fatihah* (the first section in the Qur’an) which is intended to deliver to some holy men, such as Prophet Muhammad, his Companion, his follower of Companion, *ulama*, Sunan Gunung Jati, *Walisongo* and all Muslims. This ceremony is attended by Sultan, his family, Pangeran Patih, Pangeran Kumisi, Sep (chief) of sekaten and some *abdi dalem* (loyal group to Sultan). Instead of using detergent or other modern cleaning liquid, the washing process uses *abu gosok* (traditional cleaning ash), *serbuk bata* (brick’s powder) and *sabut kelapa* (coconut fiber). After washing ritual finished, *penghulu* closes the ceremony with a pray and short *nasehat* (exhortation) to *nayaga*.

**Conclusion**

The whole package of *maulid an* celebration in Kanoman *kraton* confirms the argument that religion is always shaped by its society. Symbolic meanings which are created by society become tools of communication to remind the merit of predecessors, particularly those who played significant role in Islamising Cirebonese people. The parade of amulets reveals how Islam has been transmitted from Muhammad prophet, his Companions, *Walisongo* and Sunan Gunung Jati. It means that remembering and respecting important figures in religion as one of important norms. The parade also reminds people to the religious creed, *syahadat*, as the most fundamental confession for Muslim to the Oneness of God and the recognition of Muhammad as the His messenger. Undoubtedly, Islamic creed is the core message of the whole ritual of *maulid an* in Kanoman *kraton* as happened to ‘*grebeg maulid*’ in Yogyakarta.

The constitutive elements of commemoration of Muhammad’s birth in Kanoman are ‘indexical symbols’ modifying a folk religion into local entity. The practice of *slametan*, *panjang jimat*, *asyrakalan* and *gamelan sekaten* in one package of religious-based celebration has demonstrated a distinct feature of popular Islam among the complex manifestation of tradition in the Muslim world. While Islamic orthodoxy restricts the movement of female actors, in the practice of popular Islam, they found a freedom to play their social and cultural role. Except participating in the *gamelan* concert, women have
opportunity to take part in most ritual of maulid such as slametan, panjang jimat and asyrakalan. This trend indicates that traditional machinery of sexual division of ritual labour has unconsciously fostered the project of women empowerment in the ritual world.

Although the central element of the Maulid is the recitation of texts expressing honour and love for the Prophet Muhammad, the tradition of Maulidan in Kanoman shows the richness and creative innovation of the Javanese Muslim propagator (walisongo, nine saints) in reconciling Islam and local cultures. The adoption of local instruments and creation of musical works in the mediation between mankind and the God Almighty is a fascinating effort and has become inspiration of local artists to develop the art performance exploring spiritual achievement or divine messages. The relationship between Islamic propagation and the performance of art has been successfully exemplified by the maulidan ritual in a peaceful atmosphere. At the same time, the observance of slametan during the maulidan tradition has reinforced the religious authority of Sultan in mobilizing a massive traditional gathering that has lasted hundreds of years. Instead of polluting the purity of Islamic religion, the adoption of slametan has enriched the traditional elements of Cirebonese Islam.

The meaning of rites may extend far beyond its stated purpose of venerating the Prophet since the folk religion has strategically generated the “old power” and religious authority. The declining power after penetration of Dutch colonial into the structure of local politics has inevitably encouraged Sultan to maintain his authority as the guardian of Islamic traditions. It is in line with some scholars who believe that Muslim monarchs have used elaborate Maulid performance to demonstrate their piety and power and in so doing to establish their Islamic legitimacy for many centuries. As the success of Yogyakarta’s Sultan in celebrating maulid, the maulidan tradition is ‘capable of creating meaningful connections between the imperial cult and every segment of ‘Cirebon people’ other than those Islamic modernists and Islamists who against it in principle’ (Woodward 2011:178).

References


