

MEGENGAN AS A JAVANESE ISLAMIC TRADITION TO WELCOME THE HOLY MONTH OF RAMADHAN IN THE COMMUNITY OF BANGUNREJO KIDUL KEDUNGGALAR NGAWI VILLAGE

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ABSTRACT

The megengan tradition in Bangunrejo Kidul Kedunggalar Ngawi Village has become a habit that is still maintained to this day. The megengan tradition is a form of greeting accompanied by joint prayer activities. Megengan is a concrete form of acculturation between Javanese culture and Islamic religious teachings. Megengan can mean holding back, in the context of the month of Ramadan, this tradition means holding back desires related to eating, drinking, sexual relations, and so on. The megengan tradition can be a marker for Muslims to make special preparations before the arrival of the holy month of Ramadan. Megengan, from an Islamic perspective, has several religious values. Megengan is a means of da'wah and a means of broadcasting the Islamic religion. Megengan is also a symbol of gratitude to Allah SWT, who still provides the opportunity to meet the holy month of Ramadan. Megengan is also a means of strengthening ties between Hamlet residents, with the gathering of residents in one place creating an opportunity for residents to strengthen each other's harmony.

Keywords: *Megengan Tradition, Village Community, Month of Ramadan, Religious Values*

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a multicultural country with many ethnic groups and cultures, spread from Sabang in Aceh to Merauke in Papua. One of the ethnic groups in Indonesia is the Javanese tribe, which inhabits the areas of Central Java and East Java and uses Javanese as a means of communication. Javanese people have many religious traditions that are still carried out and preserved (*diuri-uri*) today as a form of local identity. Each region in Java has a different culture and religious tradition. These religious traditions become values, norms and *angger-angger urip* which are passed down from generation to generation, such as *bancakan*, *nyadran*, *ruwatan*, *nyekar*, *megengan* and other religious traditions.

The *megengan* religious tradition is a habit that has been carried out for a long time and continuously and has become part of the life of Javanese people, especially Bangunrejo Kidul Village, Kedunggalar Ngawi, East Java, to this day. The *megengan* tradition has become a habit passed down from generation to generation and has become a social heritage that has survived to the present day. From its material aspect, the *megengan* tradition is an object or material form that reminds and can also indicate the existence of certain special relationships that still survive today. Traditions that have become culture will become a source for attitudes and behavior in life in society. *Megengan* is a tradition conveyed and passed on to each subsequent generation, for example, in oral or written form. Without this inheritance process, it could be lost. The *megengan* tradition can automatically influence the actions and reactions that will be carried out in everyday life.

The *megengan* tradition was created by Sunan Kalijaga, although until now, there is no historical evidence to show this, this assumption is quite well-founded because the creation regarding the acculturation tradition between Islam and Java came from his thoughts. *Selamatan* has been a tradition in Java long before Islam entered the archipelago. In the *megengan* tradition, greetings are accompanied by joint prayer activities so that there is a concrete form of acculturation between Javanese culture and Islamic teachings. *Megengan* can mean holding back, in the context of Ramadan, this tradition means holding back desires related to eating, drinking, sexual relations, and so on. The *megengan* tradition can be a marker for Muslims to make special preparations before the arrival of the holy month of Ramadan. Islam recommends its followers restrain their desires because, in everyday life, humans cannot be separated from desires, such as appetite, biological desires, and others. In principle, if lust is not controlled, it can actually plunge humans into the valley of disgrace. This article focuses on the *megengan* tradition in Bangunrejo Kidul Kedunggalar Village regarding the importance of implementing this tradition, its religious values, and its function and purpose.

METHOD

Research on the *megengan* tradition in welcoming the holy month of Ramadhan among the people of Bangunrejo Kidul Village, Kedunggalar Ngawi District, is descriptive qualitative research. With qualitative, it is hoped to understand the meaning of both thoughts and actions of the research object (Suprayogo, et al, 2003). The approach used is the sociology of religion (Sodik, 2006). Religion is seen as an observable social fact (Connolly, 2002). Religion becomes part of the real life of its adherents, as well as the ideas, activities, and work of religious adherents (Kahmad, 2002). This approach studies the social aspects of religion (Suprayogo, et al, 2003). Data were collected in three ways: direct observation; deep interview; and documentation (Sutopo, 1998) about the *megengan* tradition in welcoming the holy month of Ramadan among the people of Bangunrejo Kidul Kedunggalar Ngawi Village. Data analysis is done through an interactive analysis model, which includes data reduction, data delivery, and conclusion. The conclusions obtained were tested for truth

and validity through data triangulation and informant review.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Masyarakat Desa dan Penjagaan Tradisi Megengan

Bangunrejo Kidul is one of the villages in Kedunggalar District, Ngawi Regency, East Java. Most people's livelihoods are farmers, farm laborers, and entrepreneurs. This village comprises 9 hamlets, including Pohjagal (village government center), Ngubalan, Blumbang, Pohsluku, Sidodadi, Garangan, Bangun, Golan, and Gelon. Each hamlet has a different history and origin. Gelon Hamlet has the oldest origins compared to other hamlets. Bangunrejo Kidul Village consists of 10 Neighborhood Units (RW) and 53 Neighborhood Units (RT). In terms of a religious organization, the majority of Bangunrejo Kidul people follow the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), so traditional Islamic practices typical of NU, such as dhikr, tahlil, manaqib, benjanjen, yassin, manaqib, megengan, and other religious traditions are still well maintained. Those who have ideological ties to NU and practice religious practices in their daily lives well. They are a small part of the "Islam Nusantara" train with the foundation of Ahl as-Sunnah wa-al- Jamaah an-Nahdliyah in accordance with NU's Khittah, with the principles of mabadi' khoiru ummah, and the rules of fiqhiyah which are expected to create a society with character. Maintaining this tradition has become a habit of the people of Bangunrejo Kidul, one of which is ruwahan, namely *megengan* to welcome the arrival of the holy month of Ramadhan. They hold *bancakan* with *encek*, usually held at the homes of community leaders or in prayer rooms or mosques.

The *megengan* tradition or "*punggahan*" is one of the spiritual communities used for the religious expression of the people of Bangunrejo Kidul. This tradition, with its dynamics, attracts the wider community's interest. Because this tradition is easily accepted by society and is developing rapidly for teaching the Islamic religion. Javanese society is known for its high civilization, noble (*adiluhung*) culture, and great ethics. The life structure of Javanese society is harmonious, the concepts adopted come from religion and have an impact on their mentality. For the Javanese people, the religion of *ageming aji* is something that is *sarira*, *ugemi*, and practiced in daily life. Religion becomes part of the real life of its adherents and the ideas, activities, and work of religious adherents (Kahmad, 2002). The *megengan* or *punggahan* tradition is a cultural form resulting from the acculturation of Islam and Javanese culture. This acculturation is understood as preserving Javanese culture as long as it does not conflict with the substance of Islamic teachings. Islam does not have to be Arabization because Islam is a comprehensive religion in all its aspects, including culture, attitudes, and mentality (Rachmad, 2015).

The *megengan* tradition is a term from the Javanese word "*megeng*" which means to restrain, namely to refrain from things that can break the fast or from things that can reduce the rewards of fasting, such as eating, drinking, gossiping, and so on. The people of Bangunrejo Kidul understand

megengan as a form of safety for staying awake during the month of Ramadhan. Meanwhile, *punnggahan* comes from the Javanese word *mungguh*, or to rise. The entry of the holy month of Ramadhan after the month of *Ruwah* must be welcomed with increased faith. The purpose of the post is to remind the public that Ramadhan is coming soon. The *megengan* tradition includes food that cannot be left out, namely *apem*. A kind of cake made from rice flour. *Apem* is a term from the Arabic word 'afwan, which means apology or forgiveness. This is intended so that people receive forgiveness from Allah SWT during Ramadhan so that they can have Eid al-Fitr, return to purity, and become human beings with all their humanity. For the people of Bangunrejo Kidul, *Megengan* has become a habit that is carried out continuously because they like it. The *megengan* tradition is a custom passed down from generation to generation and is still carried out today (Atik, 2009).

The *megengan* tradition is carried out before the fasting month of Ramadan, Javanese people call it "*maleman*" in the form of *bancak'an* to send prayers to the spirits of their ancestors. In this tradition, several rites are held according to the traditions and customs of each region. Apart from the *megengan* tradition, the village community, in welcoming Ramadhan, also carries out the *nisfu syaban*, *nyekar*, grave cleaning, *ater- ater/munjung* (delivering rice to relatives and neighbors), and *kenduren* for *nyadran* until ending in the *padusan* event as a symbol of *tazkiyatun nafs* at the end of the day toward fast. This tradition describes the purity and joy of entering fasting, which is a form of individual and social piety. The *megengan* tradition includes a *slametan* or *kendhuri* to mark the entry of the month of Ramadhan (Faishol, et al., 2014).

Javanese people clean graves, *slametan*, *apeman*, *punggahan*, and *megengan* or food *ater-ater* as a practice of sending prayers to all the family, including living relatives, by staying in touch, forgiving each other and helping each other enter the fast with a sense of purity and joy. Usually, the *megengan* tradition in Javanese society does not leave out three food dishes: sticky rice, kolak, and *apem*. The meaning of these three foods is that sticky rice has a symbolic meaning of strengthening ties of friendship; sweet compote with coconut milk means inviting the brotherhood to be closer and blessed with love; and *apem* means if something goes wrong, you can forgive each other.

Javanese people, including those in Bangunrejo Kidul Village, refer to the deceased as *suwargi* and *jenate* from the Arabic word "*jannah*", both of which mean heaven. This mention is a prayer for those who have died so that they will always find peace in the afterlife and can get to Allah SWT's heaven. Living respect for the dead so that Allah accepts the deceased person's deeds and receives forgiveness for the sins they have committed while in the world according to the word of Allah SWT in Q.s. al- Hasyr: 10. This tradition is usually carried out regularly every Friday night once a week. However, it does not rule out the possibility of doing it on other days, such as Malem Kemis. Because in Bangunrejo Kidul village, on Friday nights, it is used by the Yassin Putra congregation. This tradition,

which is still entrenched, encourages a harmonious, unified, harmonious society and becomes a public space that is open to the public. This tradition is a religious activity and also a form of religious culture that is still carried out by the local community (Libranti, 2009).

Islam and culture have an inseparable relationship, in Islam itself, there are universal and absolute values throughout the ages. However, Islam as a dogma is flexible in facing the times and their changes. Islam always presents itself in a flexible form, when facing the society, it encounters various cultures, customs, or traditions. As a historical fact, religion and culture can influence each other because both have values and symbols.

Religion is a symbol of the value of obedience to God. Culture also contains values and symbols so that humans can live in it. Religion requires a symbol system, in other words, religion requires religious culture. But the two need to be differentiated. Religion is final, universal, eternal (perennial) and knows no change (absolute). Meanwhile, culture is particular, relative, and temporary. Religion without culture can indeed develop as a personal religion, but religion as a collectivity will not have a place without culture. Islam responds to local culture, customs, or traditions wherever and whenever and is open to accepting local culture, customs, or traditions as long as the local culture, customs, or traditions do not conflict with the spirit of the Koran and Sunnah.

Islam developed in Javanese society, which is very strong in its traditions and culture. Until recently, Javanese traditions and culture have dominated national traditions and culture in Indonesia. In this context, Javanese names are also very familiar to the ears of the Indonesian people. Likewise, with Javanese terms. This proves that Javanese traditions and culture are enough to give color to various national and state problems in Indonesia. On the other hand, Javanese traditions and culture not only provide color to Indonesian state affairs but also influence religious beliefs and practices. Javanese people have very varied traditions and cultures and are heavily influenced by Hindu and Buddhist teachings and beliefs, which continue to survive today, even though they already have different beliefs or religions.

Javanese society, which is predominantly Muslim, has not yet been able to abandon Javanese traditions and culture, even though sometimes these traditions and culture conflict with Islamic teachings. Indeed, the Javanese people who adhere strongly to Islamic teachings can certainly choose and sort out which Javanese culture can still be maintained without having to deal with Islamic teachings. Meanwhile, the Javanese people, who need a sufficient understanding of Islam, preserve their ancestral heritage and practice it in their daily lives, even though it is contrary to the teachings of the Islamic religion. This phenomenon continues until now.

Megengan in Bangunrejo Kidul Village, an activity carried out the day before the fasting month, is carried out with one representative from a family gathering at the house of a religious leader, community leader, or mosque and bringing food. After they gathered, the event continued with reading prayers led by local kyai. After the prayer is said, the next activity is distribution by exchanging food between neighbors, each family must cook the same menu, including *uduk* rice, fried chili sauce, *apem*, yeast, *peyek*, *tofu*, *tempeh*, and chicken.

Megangan's Religious Value

The *megengan* tradition, which contains religious and social values and is one of Indonesia's most distinctive religious practices. This tradition is a form of *ghairu mahdhah* worship and religious practice, which is still being practiced by Islamic communities, especially the *Nahdliyin*. As a religion adhered to by the majority of society, of course *megengan* tradition practices have become a distinctive characteristic of *Nahdliyin*, which is very adaptive to local culture. This tradition is the result of contact between Islam and local culture. The dialectic existence of these two entities illustrates how Islam, a universal normative teaching from God, is accommodated in human culture without losing its identity (Susanto, 2008). The cultural patterns that exist in society develop based on religion as a dynamic dialogue and cannot be separated from locality and historical matters, showing that culture is rooted in religion, so it must be assessed as something that is constantly developing, not static, and continues to take root (Madjid, 1999). Religious traditions such as *megengan* are elements formed from the results of human interpretation in interaction with history and also other cultural elements.

The *megengan* tradition in the Bangunrejo Kidul Village community has an essential position because it concerns relationships with Allah SWT and relationships with humans. The *megengan* tradition has long developed in rural communities to increase religious and social values, especially among the *nahdliyin* in Bangunrejo Kidul Village. Religious values in the *megengan* tradition are basically attitudes and behavior that are obedient in implementing the teachings of the religion adhered to, tolerant towards the implementation of worship of other religions, and an attitude of living in harmony with followers of different religions (Dasir, 2013). Religious values are attitudes and behaviors that are obedient to Islamic teachings always to worship because the main task of humans as servants of Allah SWT is to serve Him, as in Q.S Ad-Dzariyyat: 56.

The social value in the *megengan* tradition is in the form of awards given by society to everything proven to have functional benefits for life together. Social values are various principles, assumptions, or beliefs that apply in a society. These values are a guide to life for members of society, are considered good and correct, and must be obeyed. Social values are not written but oral and are known and agreed upon by every member of society. The inheritance of social values is carried out from old generations to new generations from generation to generation. In society, social values vary

and constantly change following the development of society itself. Social values are needed to regulate relationships between members of society (Suhardi, 1999). The *megengan* tradition results from a synthesis between Islam and Javanese culture. Religion without culture only develops as a "private religion". Without culture, religion as a collectivity has no place (Yusof, 2016). "Islam is open to local Javanese culture, customs, and traditions as long as they do not conflict with the spirit of the Koran, such as the rules of fiqhiyah: *al-'adatu al-muhakkamah*."

The tradition of reading is part of Islamic teachings that developed in the Bangunrejo Kidul Village community, which is thick with cultural nuances. This tradition has become a "melting pot" and a semi-permeable meeting space between the Islamic religion and Javanese culture. Both have relevance and are related but cannot be equated. Both influence each other because there are values and symbols in each entity. Because the two are different, religion is universal, universal, and absolute in its truth, while culture is particular, relative, and temporary. Islam is a complete religion, including *din*, *dunya*, and *dawlah*. Islam teaches rules and values mutually agreed upon between communities, known as culture. Culture without religion has no spirit and is dry of moral values, while religion without culture also does not develop. This tradition becomes social capital to build cultural awareness and righteousness to strengthen community morality based on the principle: *al-muhafadhah al-'ala qadim as-shalih wa al-ahdu bi al-jadil al-ashlah*. The *megengan* tradition is a medium for maintaining the dignity of Indonesian Islam through cultural da'wah methods.

Islam is not present in an empty space without dialectics, Islam is present not only in bringing *al-'aqidah wa al-syariah* but Islam is *al-dien al-adabi wa al-hadlarah*, *al- akhlaq wa al-insaniyah*, and *al-'ilmi wa al-tsaqofah*. As in the tradition of holding the people of Bangunrejo Kidul Village as part of Javanese Islamic culture. This tradition creates social solidarity, and rural communities can widely accept Islamic preaching because it feels close to their daily language. Unsurprisingly, this tradition is vital to the people of Bangunrejo Kidul Village because it has become part of religion, a cultural system based on everyday human actions. Religion is a system of symbols for reality that causes humans to act as long as they do not deviate from the holy book of religious teachings (Geertz, 2015).

Megengan, from an Islamic perspective, has several religious values. *Megengan* is a means of da'wah and a means of broadcasting the Islamic religion. *Megengan* is a symbol of gratitude to Allah SWT, who still provides the opportunity to meet the holy month of Ramadhan, by sharing and exchanging food in the *megengan* tradition, it can be used as a means of giving alms. In everyday life, hamlet residents sometimes rarely exchange food with their neighbors, instead becoming a forum for residents to share and give alms. *Megengan* is also a means of strengthening ties between hamlet residents, with the gathering of residents in one place creating an opportunity for residents to chat with

each other and enhance the harmony of the hamlet, *megengan* is a means of welcoming the holy month of Ramadhan.

In essence, Islamic values are something that can bring benefits to human life nature, and gain the pleasure of Allah SWT, and become a guide for humans in behaving physically and spiritually according to the rules and laws taught by the Islamic religion so that in living their lives humans can achieve salvation and happiness in the afterlife which can be explained broadly in an Islamic context. Religious or religious values originate from a person's self-belief in God (Sjarkawi, 2008). Religious values have the highest and absolute position compared to other societal values. Religious values contain two aspects, namely the normative aspects of rules or guidelines and the operational foundations of deeds. Values in Islam contain two categories, namely good and bad, right and wrong, right and wrong, pleasing and being hated by Allah. Sufism values are also in the *Megengan* tradition, namely al-hikmah and al-iffah. Al-hikmah is a value of wisdom by the name of local wisdom, whereas the *megengan* tradition itself is a form of local wisdom. Al-hikmah includes sharpness, intelligence, clarity in thinking.

Wisdom here is not only in thinking, speaking, and acting but also in maintaining local wisdom from the *Megengan* tradition itself. Because *megengan* is a product of a typical Indonesian Islamic tradition that is closely related to God, humans, and nature. Meanwhile, *al-iffah* maintains purity, including generosity, steadfastness, and *wara'* (abandoning doubtful things). Actualization in the *megengan* tradition regarding the value of al-iffah, people's purity will be maintained when they are close to Allah, humans, and nature. Value is a characteristic inherent in a belief system related to a subject that gives meaning. If you look at Islamic law and the Koran, *megengan* is not found in either. *Megengan* is a tradition that was discovered long after the verses of the Koran were revealed. Because if you look closely, the *megengan* tradition already reflects Islamic elements in the process of its activities, such as expressing gratitude, strengthening friendships, and welcoming the month of Ramadhan.

CONCLUSION

The *megengan* tradition in Bangunrejo Kidul Kedunggalar Ngawi Village has become a habit that is still maintained today. The *megengan* tradition is a form of greeting accompanied by joint prayer activities. *Megengan* is a concrete form of acculturation between Javanese culture and Islamic religious teachings. *Megengan* can mean holding back, in the context of the month of Ramadan, this tradition means holding back desires related to eating, drinking, sexual relations, and so on. The *megengan* tradition can be a marker for Muslims to make special preparations before the arrival of the holy month of Ramadan. *Megengan*, from an Islamic perspective, has several religious values. *Megengan* is a means of da'wah and a means of broadcasting the Islamic religion. *Megengan* is also a symbol of gratitude to

Allah SWT, who still provides the opportunity to meet the holy month of Ramadan. *Megengan* is also a means of strengthening ties between hamlet residents, with the gathering of residents in one place creating an opportunity for residents to enhance each other's harmony in the hamlet.

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