

# Maintaining the Tradition: Religion, Local Elites and the Transformation of Agricultural Tradition in Rural East Java

(A Case of *Kabumi* Ceremony in Jatirogo, Tuban, East Java)

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**Abstract**— Studies show that religion has a strong influence on the local tradition that is considered full of myth. In this case, *Kabumi* ceremony as a local tradition of East Java rural communities is considered to maintain the sustainability of production in the agricultural sector. But, *Kabumi* challenged by religious puritanism (Islam) and the presence of modernization in agriculture through intensification, diversification and extensification programs also changed the cropping pattern and indirectly influenced the transformation of *kabumi* procession.

This article discusses the transformation of *Kabumi* rituals as part of adaptations after the infiltration of Islamic teachings on agricultural communities in rural East Java. This research using the qualitative method and interpretative approach. The infiltration of Islamic teachings directly influenced the transformation of *Kabumi*. *Kabumi*'s procession adopted Islamic practices and slowly began to abandon the supposedly mystical. It's supported by the important role of local elites in maintaining the traditions through local policies that provide specific allocations of village income and expenditure budget (APBDes) for *kabumi* ceremony and concession with religious elites. Although *kabumi* rituals are more Islamic but still include breeding to *danyang* as the community's ancestors and are believed to be able to provide a more abundant harvest.

**Keywords**— *Transformation of Tradition; Rural Communities; Religion; Local Elites*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia has abundant natural and cultural resources with different characteristics. Indonesian geography that consists of many islands (archipelago) also influences the different characteristics of the natural and cultural resources, not only in maritime but also agrarian areas. The culture of each area is influenced by the typical hereditary local values. The agrarian society that relies on agriculture as their livelihood has some material and non-material local wisdom [1]. The local wisdom is generated through the process of public adaptation and creativity in interacting with the environment.

The agrarian society spread in several areas in Indonesia considers the agricultural traditions as annual

routines that have to be performed. It is because the society believes that traditions could preserve the agricultural sustainability. People see the pre-harvesting or post-harvesting traditions as interactive media to ask God or other powers that could provide fertility. The agricultural rituals are mandatory in several areas in Indonesia. For example, *Aruh baharian* Ceremony held by Dayak people after the harvesting period of rice from shifting cultivation, *Seren Tuan* performed by Sundanese to welcome the harvesting period, *wiwitan* performed by Javanese before rice harvesting season as a form of gratitude to the earth and Dewi Sri (rice goddess), *Mambiak* performed in West Sumatera as a form of gratitude to the almighty God [2].

Agriculture rituals prove that local wisdom values still influence the society in adapting and interacting with their natural environment. Even the cultural values are the inspiration and foundation in managing agricultural land [3]. The activities (praxis) of the society in agricultural management are based on the system of belief (cosmos) and system of knowledge or cognitive system (corpus) [4]. The belief system of the agrarian society is frequently connected with mystical elements since the society has a belief that it is necessary to connect the real world with the supernatural world to balance life [5]. The supernatural power is not always abstract, but it is also believed to exist in human bodies and objects around humans [6].

The agrarian society in remote areas has upheld such belief for a long time, and they believe that it influences their yield [7]. It is possible due to the lack of confidence and empowerment in self-capacity to be assured of the next harvesting season so that they ask for help from a supernatural power or God [5]. However, mystical rituals start to evaporate in some areas because of the developing rationality and modernization in the society [5] although some communities still preserve them. That is to say that even though there are modernization and development of the society's rationality, the belief in supernatural power still exists [8]. Referring to the term introduced by Comte, the society's rationale still positively acknowledges irrational practices even though there is a culture shift.

The agrarian society of Bader Jatirogo in Tuban still also performs agrarian rituals that have mystical elements even though it is located near with the central government of Jatirogo Sub-district that experiences modernization. The ritual is called as “kabumi.” It aims to show gratitude to the almighty God for the rice yield. Kabumi ritual is a result of the cultural reproduction in the society that combines the aspects of belief in God and supernatural power. However, along with the Islamic infiltration in the society, kabumi ritual has shifted in term of its procession. Such reality is exciting to be discussed in relation to how religious infiltration changes the procession of kabumi tradition.

## II. METHOD

This research employed qualitative method since it is appropriate to obtain in-depth and comprehensive data. The data collection was performed through interviews with informants who were purposively selected to gather broader and more accurate data. Data analysis followed the data collection by using Miles and Huberman models, namely data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion.

## III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### A. *Jatirogo and Agrarian Society: A Social Context*

Bader is a village located in Jatirogo Sub-district of Tuban. It is near with the central government of the sub-district and passed by the main road that connects Tuban sub-districts. The northern area of Bader village borders Sadang village and the western area borders Wangi village. This village has 2181 population consists of 594 Heads of Households. Most members of Bader society earn a livelihood from the agricultural sector although an option of forestry sector is also available. A land of 310 ha divided into 55 ha rain field rice and 240 ha paddy field provides a livelihood for the Bader community.

The society’s tendency towards agriculture can be seen from an additional rice field of 17 ha of which area is higher than the rice field conversion area of only 2 ha. However, farmers in the society are dominated by men namely 257 men while there are only 45 women. It is because the male population holds a responsibility as the financial providers of their families, either as on-farm labors or landowners. Meanwhile, the female population mostly deals with the domestic household.

### B. *Kabumi Tradition as an Agricultural Local Wisdom in Jatirogo*

The history records that agriculture holds an important role in the economic activities of the ancient Javanese society [6]. Rice plant is the primary commodity in Java so that the society relies on it to meet their basic needs either for consumption or commercial need. Wuryantoro indicated that rice cultivation has been popular since the Majapahit era proven by the *pangulu-banu* that was assigned to manage the irrigation [5]. The high rice production that could be harvested for 2-3 times a year becomes a reason of the society’s tendency to choose rice as the primary commodity. Even though in the 1960s, the

*pranata mangsa* (the solar month system) of rice planting pattern experienced a drastic change due to the green revolution program [4]. However, the society could adapt while still maintaining an intensive production of rice. Also, the geographical condition of Java that is conducive to cultivate farmland encourages the society to maximize the agrarian sector.

Farmland management does not only relate to the system of the economy but also cultural aspects that become the local wisdom of the society. Such cultural aspect (tradition) is connected with rituals, beliefs, knowledge, and skills. Cultural values in agricultural production are not only complementary but also become the foundation of reasoning and activities farmland cultivation [3]. In some areas, agricultural traditions and rituals even hold a central role in maintaining the continuity of agriculture, such as *Aruh baharain*, *seren taun*, *wiwitan*, and *mambiak* traditions [2]

Agricultural traditions reflect the local wisdom of the society in their interaction with and utilization of the environment. The local wisdom includes knowledge, belief, and cultural values of the society that regulates the relationship between humans, human and nature, and human and God [8]. This context of local wisdom limits the society’s utilization of the available natural resources. The actions taken by the society should be based on the values that are socialized and practiced hereditary.

The agricultural traditions in the agrarian society have a superstructure that could survive the modernization in all aspects of life [5]. According to Redcliffe-Brown, it is possible to happen because the traditions as the local wisdom already have an institutional function so that people maintain its existence [8]. Agricultural traditions are believed to have an essential role in preserving the sustainability of the society’s livelihood.

Kabumi tradition of Bader Jatirogo society is included as local wisdom in the agricultural sector. The term of *kabumi* is originated from a longer term of *sedekah bumi*, which means charity for the earth. The tradition could also be found in other areas around Central Java such as Kudus, Rembang, and Pati. However, Bader community has a unique *kabumi* ritual. During the ritual procession, the society mixes Islamic values and their belief in a supernatural power that is likely to give them abundant harvest. Kabumi ritual takes place after the rice harvest. However, the ritual will not start until after the head of the village has harvested his rice. It is because the village government and figures hold a critical position in the kabumi procession.

As a tradition, the Kabumi ritual is held annually on *Rabu* (Wednesday) *Pon* based on the Javanese calendar since the day is sacred for the society. Such dating based on Javanese calendar dating has been socialized from generation to generation. However, the society also believes there are specific dates on which it is not appropriate to hold the Kabumi ritual called as *taliwangke*. Such prohibited time is called *ruah*, *poso*, *suro* and *selo*. There is also a specific time at which the society cannot held the *kabumi* ritual even though it is Wednesday, which is called as *tompo seren*, namely *satu*

*suro* (the first day of the Javanese calendar year in the month of Sura).

The procession of Kabumi starts with a food parade (*danyang* favorites) by the people in the village. The foods are carried to three sacred places called *punden* one after another. Two of the places are wells, and one of them is a cemetery that is believed to be inherited from the *danyang* (Bader village ancestors). A public figure opens the ritual and then the continued by prayers and preparing the offerings that are led by a *modin* (a religious public figure). The prayers aim to show gratitude to the almighty God and to ask for a better harvest. The *Modin* will also send prayers to the spirits of the ancestors that are believed to “remain” in the three *punden* with an expectation to obtain better yields.

### C. Religion Infiltration, Local Elite and the Transformation of Kabumi Ceremony

Kabumi tradition could exist up until now because it is one cultural heritage that is not in conflict with the laws of the country. The government of the village even allocates a budget of 8-12 million rupiahs from the village treasury for the implementation of kabumi. The society also has an active role in the ritual by reasonably contributing their foods, money, and energy even though they are not farmers. They think they also have the benefit of the produce from the farms and the way that becomes the central location of the ritual. Hence, it is also necessary for them to contribute to the harvest and natural resources that they could take benefit from.

The infiltration of Islam into the society of Jatirogo has changed the mystical practices since the society started to consider the Islamic laws that contravene with such practices since they are considered as idolatry or polytheism. Such Islamic infiltration results in changes and the lessening participation of the society in the procession. The Islamic laws are considered in kabumi procession. As a form of a celebration, kabumi is not only regarded as a mean to communicate with the spirits of the ancestors and to maintain the social solidarity [9] but also to show gratitude to the almighty God for his blessing in the form of the farm produce.

The Islamic infiltration into mysticism and local tradition resulted in a hybridization of the three aspects leading to the society’s transcendental perspective to religion [10] [11]. In the end, the perspective dominated the society’s understanding of life practices including the agricultural practices. Since then, the development of traditions is dominated by Islamic nuances.

Even though the procession of kabumi ritual conforms to the Islamic laws, it still should be held in *punden*, and not in a mosque since it has become a hereditary condition and the Society considers that a kabumi ritual that is held in *punden* could be a medium of interaction between the society and the spirits of the ancestors of Bader. The society still respects the tradition as an inheritance from their ancestors that should be preserved. The tradition also could balance the portion of the real and supernatural world.

After putting the offerings on the three *punden*, the ritual shall be followed by an entertainment show called

*sinder*, i.e., a traditional dance performed by a female dancer, until late in the afternoon or even late at night. Different with *tayub* that is performed by many dancers, *Sinder* is performed by one dancer who dances to traditional music. *Sinder* is included in the procession since it is considered as the favorite show of the *danyang* in the past. Once, the society did not include *sinder* but instead holding a puppet show. However, there was a mystical occurrence where the gong and sound system could not function. Thus, *Sinder* show is still maintained up until now.

The world’s advancement in the form of modernization also has a role in the changing tradition of Kabumi. The modernization that is characterized by knowledge and technology advancement could change the mystical understanding and practices in the society. The society tends to be more rational by emphasizing the means-end calculation, which, according to Weber, has faded the magical and religious attractiveness (disenchantment of the world) in understanding the reality of life [12]

The Jatirogo society who used to consider kabumi ritual as a sacred procession that should be preserved starts to see it as an irrational, mystical practice. Such view has lessened the active participation of the society in kabumi ritual. The society used to actively participate in kabumi ritual even though they do not have any croplands since they believed that they also got benefits from the sacred source of water.

The calculative and predictable programs of the government regarding the agricultural sector also contribute to the disappearance of the tradition due to the changes in the agricultural patterns. The intensification, extensification, and diversification programs of the government to promote agriculture gradually change the subsistence system and the concept of communal work in processing a cropland [13]. The emergence of technology and chemical products has also changed the *pranata mangsa* (cropping pattern) of the society and therefore changed the implementation of kabumi.

Such changes in the cropping pattern have shifted the practice of the kabumi ritual. However, the society still performs it on *Rabu* (Wednesday) *pon*. Change does not only occur in kabumi implementation but also on the society’s relationship with the neighboring village since there is a belief that kabumi ritual should be performed at the same time with the neighboring village. If such belief is violated, it will result in a lower quality of the crop products and welfare of the society. The society still upholds such belief even though some of them consider it as a myth and irrational. Such belief emerges from the understanding and knowledge of the society in the past based on the *titen* knowledge.

## IV. CONCLUSION

The Kabumi tradition that forms local agricultural wisdom is now facing a challenge that threatens its existence. Along with the world’s development, such local tradition should survive the religious infiltration and modernization in the society. The modernization can be identified from rationality and science and technology that

change the world's view towards the reality of life. The society's rationalism puts aside any mystical and transcendental so that it directly implies kabumi tradition since mystical nuance dominates it.

The Islamic infiltration strengthens such condition in various aspects of the social life. Some processions in Kabumi tradition are considered to oppose the Islamic laws so that they need to be eliminated or replaced to be more Islamic procession. However, the fundamental procession of Kabumi is still authentically implemented to preserve its sacredness and the connection with the spirits of the ancestors.

Such competition between modernization, religion, and local tradition in the agrarian community eventually changes the aspects of life. Such competition continues until recently and will continue in the future. However, the results of this research show that the local tradition of kabumi has survived through moderation and Islamic infiltration so far by the processes of adaptation and adjustment.

On another side, the advancement of science and technology creates the agricultural modernization through different programs and forms. Intensification, extensification, and diversification programs for agriculture have changed the *pranata mangsa* (crop pattern). Besides, agricultural technology also changes the subsistence agricultural system that involved communal work into more independent and tends to be calculative and predictable (means-goal oriented). Kabumi tradition is believed for a long time to be able to preserve agricultural sustainability even though the implications of modernization slowly replace it.

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