

Negotiating Belief and Tradition: A Study of Saparan Ritual in the Multireligious Community of Selo

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Abstract

This research seeks to explore mystical synthetics in Selo through a case study of the Saparan tradition. This tradition embodies the cultural expression and spiritual gratitude of the Javanese people, who strive to achieve harmony with supernatural forces. The religious diversity among Selo residents does not conflict with Javanese cosmological beliefs; instead, it is seamlessly integrated into the Saparan tradition. The study adopts an anthropological approach, grounded in M.C. Ricklefs' concept of the mystical-systemic ideational framework. Field research was conducted using primary data collected from local informants in Selo Hamlet, complemented by secondary sources drawn from relevant literature. Findings indicate that the Saparan tradition consists of two main phases: preparation and celebration. The celebration phase is further divided into three components—communal, individual, and entertainment-based activities. The interaction between formal religious beliefs and indigenous Javanese spirituality is not marked by tension, but rather by a process of synthesis. Javanese mythology continues to hold a strong position in the worldview of the Selo community, as it is believed to have a tangible influence on their everyday lives. Ultimately, the Saparan tradition serves as an expression of gratitude, a form of prayer to ancestral spirits, and an ongoing effort to sustain harmony with the supernatural realm.

Keywords: Saparan tradition, Javanese mythology, religious harmony, mystical synthetics

Introduction

Being Javanese means being cultured, which implies knowing how to behave with civility and being fully aware of one's social position (Rahmaniar et al., 2020). Javanese people always uphold two principles: harmony and honour. In their lives, Javanese individuals consistently maintain interactions and avoid conflicts. The principles of harmonious living are continually developed in the lives of Javanese people (Muttaqin & Noor, 2022).

The harmony principle discourages actions that may cause conflict, as harmony, social cohesion, and soul wisdom are integral to Javanese life. Every society, even the simplest, holds a cultural value system representing the

highest and most abstract level of customs.

This is because cultural values are concepts that exist in the collective mindset of most people regarding what they consider valuable, significant, and important in life. As such, these values function as guidelines that provide direction and orientation for the lives of the respective community (Firmando, 2022).

Tradition, as an element of the cultural system, serves as a means of passing values from one generation to the next. According to Peursen, traditional ceremonies are more than just myths; their function extends beyond mere entertainment. These ceremonies reinforce traditional values concerning goodness, life, fertility, and purification (Wendry, 2020).

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Ceremonies strengthen solidarity bonds by blending various religions into a unified belief system.

Thus, traditional ceremonies fulfil social, cultural, and religious functions (Fahmi Lubis, 2021). Amid globalisation, modernisation, and religious puritanism, traditions like Saparan remain preserved. Known as *merti desa* (purifying the village), Saparan is held in *Sapar* on the Javanese calendar in Selo Village, Boyolali, Central Java, on the slopes of Mount Merbabu. It expresses gratitude for the Tok Babon spring, a vital water source that sustains daily needs and agriculture, the community's main livelihood (Subaqin et al., 2023).

The Saparan tradition consists of three processions: communal celebration, individual celebration, and entertainment. The communal celebration features a *gunungan* parade to the Tok Babon water source, led by the *Ulu-ulu*, *abdi dalem* from the Kasunanan Surakarta Palace, and religious leaders. Ritual offerings include a female goat and a chicken. The event concludes with prayers from five religious representatives: Islam, Christianity, Catholicism, Hinduism, and Buddhism, followed by a communal meal (Toisuta et al., 2022).

The individual celebration occurs in each household, where residents host guests, who are Selo villagers first, followed by *Samiran* and *Lencoh* (village names) the next day. The entertainment celebration then enlivens Saparan with *Reog* in the afternoon, *Kuda Lumping* in the evening, and an all-night *wayang* performance. Peursen notes that traditional ceremonies reinforce moral values and community solidarity, much like religion, which guides individuals toward completeness as human beings (Cimi et al., 2024).

In Islam, there are two types of relationships: vertical (*hablum minallah*) and horizontal (*hablum minannas*). *Hablum minallah* refers to acts of worship such as prayer, fasting, pilgrimage, and other rituals. This vertical relationship between the servant and God is primarily individual, benefiting the person directly. However, it also contains social aspects, such as congregational prayers and the payment of *zakat* (almsgiving), encompassing ritual and

social dimensions (Fada, 2024).

Meanwhile, the horizontal relationship, or *hablum minannas*, refers to various social activities, emphasising acts of worship that benefit the broader community. The position of the latter worship holds its distinction in Islam. The principles of *fiqh* are stated: "Worship that benefits others is superior to worship that benefits only oneself" (Kementrian Agama RI, 2015).

Human religious expressions can vary widely based on their interpretations. This flexibility reflects the orientations and backgrounds of religious interpreters. Therefore, differences in interpretation should not lead to disintegration. Despite these apparent differences, not all reinterpretation pertain to the same teachings essential for the continuity of human life.

Some are still within the same religion, with Islam providing a precise illustration in this regard. Islam has two primary sources, namely the Qur'an and Hadith. Other references agreed upon by some scholars include *Ijma'* (consensus), *Qiyas* (analogy), and others. If we observe, the Qur'an and Hadith remain unchanged. However, their understanding has evolved. Anas Saidi contends that despite Islam's universal nature, it remains diverse and open to multiple interpretations. It is this plurality of understandings that leads to diversity within Islam (Susanto, 2022).

Religion should be viewed proportionally, avoiding a rigid textualist approach while emphasising context. It evolves within history, not in a vacuum. In the Javanese context, understanding Islam extends beyond norms to societal life, where religious teachings manifest in human actions (Muslim, 2016).

Discussing religion in society involves examining human actions as expressions of belief and cultural manifestations. Culture facilitates communication among individuals and their environment, shaping social construction as a synergy of knowledge and consciousness. Within this framework, religion integrates with values, knowledge, and cognition, expressed through actions. The surrounding environment deeply influences

human religious behaviour.

On Mount Merbabu's slopes, Selo preserves the Saparan tradition, a ritual for safety and tranquility akin to *merti desa*. Unlike *merti desa*, Saparan revolves around the Tok Babon spring and takes place in Safar. This tradition enriches Selo's religious expression, uniting diverse faiths and integrating ancient Javanese beliefs with myths, social norms, and cosmic ethics (Nur, 2016).

Several studies are relevant to this research topic based on the literature review conducted. The first is a study by Rila Setyaningsih (2024) titled *Food Communication to Strengthen Cultural Identity: A Case Study on Saparan Bekakak Traditions in Indonesia*, which examines the role of food communication in reinforcing cultural identity within the Saparan Bekakak tradition (Setyaningsih & Noevi Rahmanto, 2024). This study argues that food in the Saparan Bekakak tradition is perceived as an expression of gratitude, a medium of communication with ancestors, cultural enlightenment, and a means of strengthening solidarity. The variations and shifts in its meaning facilitate negotiation processes that contribute to the renewal and reinforcement of cultural identity.

Another relevant study is conducted by Tutuk Ningsih (2019), titled *The Saparan Tradition in the Cultural Practices of Javanese Society in Lumajang*, which explores the role and significance of the Saparan tradition within the Javanese community in Lumajang (Ningsih, 2019a). Despite being in the city centre, this study argues that Ditotrunan Village preserves the Saparan tradition each Safar month. Marked by *jenang sapar* preparation as a gratitude ritual (*slametan*), households take turns making and blessing it before sharing it with neighbours. Women in traditional kebaya prepare *jenang* together, followed by a communal prayer led by a *kyai* and collective consumption by the community.

Building upon the aforementioned discussion, this study focuses on the mystical synthesis within the multireligious society of Selo by examining the Saparan tradition in Dukuh Selo, Desa Selo, and Boyolali Regency.

Unlike Rila Setyaningsih's (2024) research, which highlights food communication in strengthening cultural identity within the Saparan Bekakak tradition, and Tutuk Ningsih's (2019) study, which explores the Saparan tradition in Lumajang as part of Javanese cultural practices, this research emphasises the mystical and multireligious dimensions of the Saparan tradition.

The Selo community lives in a multireligious environment while preserving the Saparan tradition as an integral part of their local culture. This tradition reflects expressions of gratitude and communal solidarity and embodies elements of mysticism within their religious practices and beliefs.

However, no studies have specifically examined how the mystical synthesis within the Saparan tradition contributes to social harmony amid religious diversity. Therefore, this research aims to analyse the role of mysticism in the Saparan tradition, explore how this tradition reflects multireligious interactions, and explain its contribution to fostering social harmony and reinforcing the cultural identity of the Selo community.

Research Method

This study employs a qualitative approach with a case study method to explore the Saparan tradition within the context of multi-religiosity in Selo, Boyolali Regency. The research examines the mystical values, practices, and symbols embedded in the tradition and how they synthesise diverse religious backgrounds (Moh Soehadha, 2012).

This study was conducted in 2019, and data was collected through a three-day live-in at a resident's home during the Saparan event. During this period, the researcher actively participated in various community activities to gain an in-depth understanding of the dynamics of the Saparan tradition and the associated social interactions.

The study involved several key figures in the Saparan tradition. Slamet, a religious leader and prayer officiant during the Saparan ceremony, provided some insights into the spiritual and ritual dimensions of the tradition.

Kasno, the *juru kunci* or *Ulu-ulu* responsible for managing the Tok Babon water source and a highly respected figure in the community, offered perspectives on the belief systems and local wisdom embedded in the tradition. Meanwhile, Hamid, the head of the youth organisation in Selo, shared insights into the involvement of younger generations in preserving and adapting the Saparan tradition amidst social changes.

Through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and direct engagement in community activities, this study explores the role of mystical elements in the Saparan tradition in fostering social harmony within a multireligious society.

Data were collected through participant observation during the Saparan ceremonies, semi-structured interviews with key figures such as the *Ulu-ulu*, religious leader, and youth representative, and document analysis of local archives and narratives. Observations focused on ritual series, religious symbols, and interfaith participation. Interviews were conducted informally in community settings to allow for open and contextual discussions. Thematic analysis categorises, describes, and interprets the findings, linking the results to the theoretical framework (Sari et al., 2022).

To ensure validity, source triangulation was applied by comparing data from interviews, observations, and document analysis. Method triangulation was also used by integrating field notes with recorded interviews. Member checking was conducted by presenting initial findings to selected informants, including the *Ulu-ulu* and youth representatives, to verify accuracy and gain further clarification when necessary. This detailed approach ensures a contextual and grounded understanding of how the Saparan tradition contributes to fostering multi-religiosity in the Selo community.

Results and Discussion

Historiography of Saparan

Humans born into this world directly inherit culture. A child born and raised in a specific cultural environment becomes an adult within that cultural context. Socialism believes

the environment has the greatest influence and can even shape or transform a person. While humans can modify and rebuild culture to align with contemporary developments, fundamentally, every person born is an official inheritor of culture from preceding generations (Arif et al., 2023).

Culture originates from the Sanskrit word *buddayah*, the plural form of *buddhi*, meaning mind or intellect (Sa'adah & Sudrajat, 2023). Culture encompasses all aspects of human intellect and activity in transforming nature. E.B. Taylor defines culture as a complex of knowledge, beliefs, arts, laws, customs, and habits acquired within society. Despite its evolving concept, Clifford Geertz asserts that culture will continue to endure (Lubis, 2021).

Like in Selo, cultural heritage is passed down through generations, including the Saparan tradition, which is still preserved today. This ritual, a form of communal gratitude or *slametan*, has an uncertain origin. Even the *Ulu-ulu*, a custodian of half a century, inherits the practice without knowing its exact history (Pujiyanti et al., 2023). They can only provide information that ancestors have performed this ritual in ancient times, and as the present generation, they are now the successors of this ancestral tradition.¹

The Saparan tradition derives its name from the month of Sapar, the second month in the Islamic calendar, often linked to myths that encourage deeper devotion to Allah. In Selo, Saparan is observed as a gratitude ritual for abundant harvests, healthy livestock, well-being, social harmony, and the continuous flow of life-sustaining spring water (Ningsih, 2019b).

According to Koentjaraningrat, the *slametan* ceremony performed by Javanese communities is believed to ward off negative influences that could threaten their livelihoods. Thus, the people of Selo hold the annual Saparan ritual tradition to avoid disasters. Selo is located on a slope of Mount Merbabu near Mount Merapi. This geographic condition influences the

¹ "*Ulu-ulu*" is a title or nickname given by the community to a revered figure who serves as the custodian and guardian of the Tok Babon spring, the water source.

livelihoods of the Selo community, predominantly as farmers or agricultural workers (Pujiyanti et al., 2023).

The Selo community relies on Tok Babon's water for daily life and farming. A dry spring would result in drought, crop failure, and severe threats to their land and livelihood. To prevent this, they hold a slametan during Sapar, offering ubor ramped from their harvest, parading it through the village, and concluding in the spring. This ritual expresses gratitude to God and seeks protection from disasters, a belief shared by all religious groups in Selo.

The presence of various places of worship, such as mosques, churches, and temples evidences the diversity of religions in the village of Selo. Despite being a multi-religious community, the level of solidarity is very high, and there is a sense of unity where differences are respected, fostering harmony among the people (Nurhidin & Badruzaman, 2022).

Mr Slamet, a religious leader and prayer leader in the Saparan ceremony, stated: the Saparan tradition fosters unity among the residents of Selo. This is particularly significant given the community's diverse social, economic, and religious backgrounds. During the Saparan tradition, all community members come together regardless of their status or beliefs, ensuring inclusivity without discrimination. Additionally, this tradition is intended to pray for collective well-being and seek forgiveness for the sins of their ancestors while ensuring that their good deeds are accepted (Slamet, personal communication, December 12, 2019).

Furthermore, according to Pak Kasno, the caretaker (the *Ulu-ulu*) responsible for managing the Tok Babon water source and a highly respected figure in the community, stated: this ritual is a spiritual practice and serves to preserve cultural heritage. The tradition has existed for a long time in Selo Village and has been passed down through generations. The main event of the tradition is the *Wayang Kulit* (shadow puppet) performance held at night. Before that, in the afternoon, a reog performance takes place. These performances have become an integral part of the tradition and serve as entertainment for the residents of Selo Village

and the surrounding communities (Kasno, personal communication, December 13, 2019).

Saparan Tradition Preparation

The saparan tradition originally aimed to serve as a form of *slametan* or community thanksgiving in the village. The community's hope in holding saparan is to receive abundant blessings and sustenance and to be protected from misfortunes. According to Edward Burnett Tylor, cultural ceremonies or rituals performed by the community are addressed to ancestors and gods (Tylor, 2016).

This includes pleas for forgiveness of ancestors' sins and acceptance of their deeds. In addition, it serves as a ceremony of gratitude for the harvest God has provided. It reflects the Javanese belief that traditions can prevent negative influences from threatening their livelihoods (Koentjaraningrat, 2014). This serves as the foundation for the community of Selo to carry out the tradition of Saparan.

The Saparan tradition is held annually, involving participation from each family and the entire village community. One month before the start of the tradition, the community convenes to deliberate and determine the weekly contributions to be made. The amount collected varies widely here, ranging from IDR 5,000.00 to IDR 50,000.00, depending on the residents' capabilities. The collected funds will serve as the primary source of expenses for implementing the saparan tradition.

Slamet, a religious leader and prayer officiant in the Saparan ceremony, stated: every year, the residents of Selo collect contributions to organise the Saparan tradition. Due to the numerous events involved, community members must distribute responsibilities to ensure everything runs smoothly. Before the event begins, a financial assessment determines whether the collected funds can cover all expenses. Thus far, the contributions gathered over nearly a year have proven insufficient to finance the event. Consequently, it was collectively agreed to impose an additional fee, evenly distributed per household, to ensure that all aspects of the Saparan tradition can be adequately funded (Slamet, personal

communication, December 12, 2019).

Residents prepare individually for the communal event while welcoming guests, including neighbours and visitors from outside the village. Invitations are informal, often extended verbally during daily interactions or, with technology, via mobile phones. Priority is given to relatives and extended family, fostering social bonds through shared meals.

The dishes served in each household vary greatly, influenced by the different agricultural yields that determine each resident's ability to provide meals. However, during the *saparan* tradition, there is no requirement for uniformity in the presentation of dishes. As long as communal harmony and fellowship through shared meals are upheld, the details of the dishes are not a concern. The presentation of meals depends on the host's capabilities (Slamet, personal communication, December 12, 2019).

Certainly, it is a significant expense for the residents of Selo, most of whom earn their living as farmers, to uphold the tradition of *saparan*. However, despite this, the tradition remains preserved and sustainable to this day as a form of respect for ancestors who have passed down this cultural practice, supported by a collective belief held by the community in Selo. Given that most Javanese people are farmers and tend to trust others' words easily, combined with their less selective approach to what others say, it is not surprising that Javanese society tends to believe in what is referred to as myths.

According to A.G. Honig Jr., humans experience emotions that drive them to engage actively with powerful natural events within the framework of mythological thinking. This mythological framework or belief system gives rise to the spirit of nurturing and preserving religious ceremonies, which are believed to maintain the order of natural forces (cosmic events) (Santoso, 2023).

Another important preparation that is equally crucial is the preparation regarding the contents of the *Ubo Rampe* (ritual offerings)² and the entertainment programs. Communication

² "*Ubo Rampe*" refers to all the tools and materials used in a ritual. Its components vary depending on the specific requirements of the ritual performed.

between *Ulu-ulu* (village irrigation manager) and *seng mbahu reksa* (ancestral spirit) is crucial. This communication occurs through meditation in front of the Tok Babon spring. After the meditation, *Ulu-ulu* communicates whatever has been agreed upon during that communication. Whatever is expressed by *Ulu-ulu* becomes the agreement regarding the contents of *ubor rampe* and the entertainment programs in the *saparan* tradition.

Kasno stated regarding the series of events that must be carried out in the *Saparan* tradition: this event is essential, as neglecting it is believed to bring misfortune. The *Ulu-ulu* once recounted that ancestral spirits requested a specific *dalang* for a *wayang* performance. Tok Babon's water level receded when a replacement was chosen instead, causing drought, crop failure, and food shortages (Kasno, personal communication, December 13, 2019).

The preparations for the *Saparan* tradition generate a dynamic and collective sense of activity among the residents of Selo. The establishment of contributions is often accompanied by community meetings, where decisions made by the *Ulu-ulu* are considered final and trusted by all. This tradition encourages the people of Selo to maintain social bonds, preserve harmony among residents, and honour their ancestral heritage. Moreover, it serves as an expression of gratitude and a protective measure to ward off potential misfortunes that could endanger them.

The *Saparan* Tradition is a cultural practice of Javanese society rich in social, spiritual, and cultural values. This tradition is carried out as an expression of gratitude to God for the blessings of life and serves as a symbolic effort to ward off misfortunes and maintain harmony with nature. In its execution, the *Saparan* Tradition in Selo Village is not merely a customary ritual but also acts as a socially binding medium that strengthens interpersonal relationships among residents through communal practices such as deliberation, cooperation, and respect for diversity.

Values such as harmony and tolerance are reflected in every stage of the tradition, from preparation to execution. Harmony is evident

in the decision-making process that involves all community members, regardless of one's social status or economic capacity. Tolerance is manifested through mutual acceptance of diverse contributions, whether in material resources, labour, or the culinary offerings prepared by each family.

Based on the author's observational study during the Saparan tradition's preparation process, the following are forms of harmony and tolerance practised by the community of Selo Village throughout the tradition's preparatory stages.

a. Forms of Harmony in Social Structure

a) Community Deliberation

One month before the Saparan traditional ceremony, the residents of Selo Village held a communal deliberation to determine the amount of financial contributions based on each household's economic capacity, ranging from IDR 5,000 to IDR 50,000. Every resident has equal voting rights in this deliberative process, reflecting democratic values and social harmony.

b) Task Distribution

Each resident is assigned specific tasks, such as managing logistics, cooking, and organising cultural performances. For instance, a group of residents is appointed to handle catering, while others are responsible for decorations or preparing artistic performances. This cooperation demonstrates that individuals are valued based on their contributions rather than social status.

b. Forms of Tolerance in Economic and Social Life

a) Flexible Contributions

A contribution system based on economic capacity reflects tolerance for varying financial situations. Those who can contribute more do not seek special recognition, while individuals with limited means are still respected for their contributions.

b) Presentation of Diverse Foods

Each family provides food based on the produce they have. Some families may offer abundant dishes, while others provide simpler fare. There is no social pressure to equalise the quality or quantity of the food served, reflecting

an attitude of tolerance and respect for differences in economic capacity.

Celebration of Saparan Tradition

Brendan Kiely stated in his book "Tradition" that tradition is passed down from the past to the present (Kiely, 2019). Certainly, the tradition of saparan in its execution still adheres to the methods passed down from ancestors. The timing of the tradition for the people of Selo village is determined by the Javanese calendar, specifically during the month of Sapar. Sapar is chosen as a reference because the community in Selo holds a shared belief that it is an auspicious month capable of bringing prosperity to farmers through abundant harvests.

The observation conducted in the field as a data collection technique resulted in the classification of the saparan tradition celebration into three sequential types:

1. Communal celebration: a celebration carried out by all hamlet residents and guests to perform collective prayers.
2. Individual celebration: each resident celebrates by inviting neighbours or guests to visit, foster kinship, and dine together.
3. Entertainment performance: a celebration featuring entertainment shows organised by residents to liven up the saparan atmosphere (Hernawan et al., 2020).

The sequence of events in the saparan tradition begins with a communal celebration. It starts in the morning when they determine the day to conduct saparan. Initially, the residents gather on the village street or at the village crossroads to prepare a formation. The participants in this formation consist of several members, including leaders, main members, and regular members. The distinction between main and regular members lies in their roles. Main members assist the leader in prayers and coordinate the regular members. Regular members are ordinary residents who participate in the saparan ceremony (Universitas Pembangunan Nasional et al., 2023).



Figure 1 (Line of Tumpeng, Gunungan, Uborampe, and other offerings)

Each participant brings various types of food, including *tumpeng* (mountain rice), along with its accompaniments and other local produce. Once the procession is ready, they walk together, parading the food towards a single point. The destination of the procession is a spring known as Tok Babon, the sole source of water that sustains the community of Selo. Upon reaching the location, they hold a communal prayer to seek safety for their ancestors and prosperity for the village of Selo. After the prayer, the event continues with a communal meal around Tok Babon. Some of the food is consumed on-site, while the rest is taken home to be shared with family members.



Figure 2 (Prayer Together)

The *tumpeng* is a mound of yellow or white rice shaped like a mountain, adorned with side dishes and vegetables surrounding it. There are no strict guidelines for the side dishes placed on the *tumpeng*, but typically, they include chicken and eggs. The residents prepare *tumpeng* rice on a rotating basis. People are usually involved in making it to expedite the preparation of several *tumpeng* varieties. Since many *tumpeng* are needed, specific spots like village intersections and the entrance to the Tok Babon area are designated for placing them. The

village head or elders decide the selection of the *tumpeng* cook. This decision is made during meetings before the *saparan*, and the responsibility rotates annually among the cooks.



Figure 3 (*Gunungan* and *Ubo Rampe*)

There are no specific requirements for those who prepare *tumpeng*; the most important factors are punctuality and the inclusion of *ubo rampe*, which consists of produce from the earth. These *tumpeng* are then placed at specific spots throughout the village. This placement is chosen as an expression of gratitude and a means of averting calamities. The people of Selo hold this belief.



Figure 4 (Praying at Tok Babon Spring)

Shortly after completing the communal prayer ritual at the Tok Babon spring, guests and villagers began visiting each other's homes. This marks the beginning of the individual celebration phase. Typically, the guests are relatives and acquaintances of the villagers. Each guest, whether a relative or an acquaintance of the villagers, is invited to come and enjoy the food prepared by each family. The village's younger generation also participates in the festivities by inviting their school and college friends, further enlivening the atmosphere.

Communal dining is an essential component of the ritual for guests attending the Saparan tradition. For many villagers, it represents the core of the entire celebration. At its heart, the Saparan ritual is a collective festivity intended for the entire village community. As such, anyone arriving in the village—regardless of familiarity—is warmly welcomed by the residents. It is therefore unsurprising that the village becomes filled with visitors from various regions, as the event is widely recognized as a major communal occasion. Each household takes part in the event, and the villagers' family and social connections help create a lively and crowded celebration. The Saparan tradition typically concludes with a series of public entertainments, often featuring local cultural performances such as *reog* and *wayang*, staged in the heart of Selo village.

Entertainment performances are believed to be conducted only upon the request of supernatural beings, as communicated through the *Ulu-ulu*, a caretaker who is considered to have exclusive access to these metaphysical entities. This belief, shared widely among the Selo community, reflects the strong symbolic authority of the *Ulu-ulu*, whose role extends beyond ritual mediation to include determining the appropriate timing and form of public entertainment. In this way, the narrative of supernatural will not only reinforces cosmological values but also sustains the *Ulu-ulu*'s cultural leadership and influence within the community.

Kasno explained the decline of the Tok Babon water source, which led to crop failure: the people here believe that disruptions occur when the water levels begin to recede, resulting in poor harvests, frequent crop failures, and unpredictable rainfall. Additionally, the atmosphere in the village changes; usually, friendly residents become quiet, rarely greet one another, and instead engage in gossip (Kasno, personal communication, December 13, 2019).

The people of Selo believe in the potential problems arising from environmental and social conditions. Therefore, entertainment performances, such as wayang shows, must align accordingly, including the puppeteer, the

gamelan music, and the day of the wayang celebration. Selo's residents, who come from various religions, believe in these practices for their well-being.

The Saparan tradition in Selo Village fosters togetherness and mutual respect through communal prayers, shared meals, and traditional performances. Tolerance and harmony are expressed in words and collective actions, reflecting peaceful coexistence and social unity.

a. The Attitude of Tolerance in the Celebration of the Saparan Tradition.

The Saparan celebration in Selo embodies interfaith tolerance, as residents of various religions Islam, Christianity, Kejawen, and Buddhism gather at Tok Babon Spring for prayers. This ritual, conducted without coercion, fosters mutual respect through shared spiritual experiences.

The diversity of religious groups in Saparan shows that belief differences can unite rather than divide. Tolerance is evident in the shared roles during rituals, where residents collaborate regardless of their faith. This tradition fosters inclusivity, respect, and meaningful contributions from all.

b. Peaceful Harmonization in the Celebration.

The Celebration of the Saparan Tradition in Selo Village fosters a harmonious atmosphere that strengthens the values of peace within the community. One manifestation of this harmony is reflected in three consecutive types of celebrations. The first is the communal celebration, where all village residents and guests gather on the village road or crossroads for communal prayers. This event nurtures a sense of unity and cooperation as all residents actively participate in its implementation.

The Individual Celebration involves residents inviting relatives and neighbours to share meal which strengthens social bonds. Entertainment Performances, such as *reog* and *wayang*, serve as cultural unifiers, fostering joy and inclusivity across social and religious backgrounds.

c. Promotion of Peace and Its Implications.

a) Minimizing Interreligious Conflicts.

The Saparan Tradition plays a significant

role in minimising interreligious conflicts. The involvement of various religious communities in a single procession fosters harmonious interactions. Communal prayers serve as a powerful symbol of unity, effectively mitigating potential conflicts. Each community engages in an egalitarian and mutually respectful environment. Through this process, the community learns to set aside differences to achieve shared goals of peace and well-being.

The informal social forums created during the procession also serve as an effective communication channel. Misunderstandings that could trigger conflicts can be resolved through familiar interactions in the celebratory atmosphere. This tradition provides a space to strengthen trust among residents, thereby preventing potential disputes from arising early on.

b) A Cultural Barrier to Radicalism

The Saparan tradition may serve as a cultural mechanism that indirectly prevents radical ideologies. Although there is no direct indication that the ritual is intended as a counter-radical effort, its inclusive and participatory nature fosters social cohesion. Through multireligious involvement and collective celebration, the tradition helps strengthen communal bonds and mutual respect—conditions that are generally unfavorable to the growth of exclusivist or extremist views. Therefore, the Saparan tradition can be understood as contributing to the long-term resilience of the community against radical influences.

In addition to strengthening social bonds, the Saparan tradition also reflects local values that align with the principles of moderation in religious life. In practice, Saparan often involves religious leaders, traditional elders, and people from various backgrounds who work together to uphold harmony and shared values. This tradition serves as a social space that promotes tolerance and dialogue among communities, while instilling a sense of belonging to a shared cultural heritage. When communities share a strong collective identity, it becomes more resilient to radical or disruptive ideologies from outside. In this way, Saparan is not just a cultural

celebration but also a social safeguards that helps maintain stability and promote tolerance at the grassroots level.

c) Enhancing Social Awareness

Through this tradition, the people of Selo Village learn to live together peacefully. Collective awareness of the importance of social solidarity and respect for diversity becomes a consistently upheld value. In this context, every individual feels responsible for maintaining the community harmony.

Mystical Dialectics in Saparan Tradition

The term “ethnography” is drawn from the concept proposed by Geertz. It serves as a perspective within anthropology to examine the Saparan tradition. This term returns to the concise aphorism and detailed facts, uncovering various diverse and highly complex conceptual structures (Geertz, 2017).

The depiction in the Saparan tradition will be descriptive, presenting factual images that blend within a tradition. Thus, the painting has another interpretation, such as analysing structures referred to by Gilbert Ryle as fixed codes (Geertz, 2017). Codes are part of puzzles that must be translated to obtain their true meaning or significance. Langer, in this regard, remains consistent with Cassirer’s view that codes represent symbols of all human activities. With this assumption, the approach to interpretation through semantic supremacy (linguistics) is not the only method available. Although semantics once declared itself as the only legitimate medium based on rigorous reasoning (Snijders, 2016).

The picture theory is a perspective that posits an absolute relationship between language and reality, as well as the factual world. According to Wittgenstein, the essential element needed to support a meaningful expression is a form of event or a state of affairs (Zijlstra, 2006). The painting of the Saparan tradition features various images, not only of offerings but also of preparations and execution time. From the perspective of Wittgenstein’s philosophy of language, these images represent an implementation of reality or have a relationship with reality (McNally, 2017).

Therefore, someone facing them does not need to provide feedback or ask questions as they already understand. The behaviour of society must be observed with certainty through a series of behaviours, and cultural forms will be revealed. These artistic forms are articulated in various paintings of the Saparan tradition and reflect various social consciousness. All of this draws meaning from the roles played by these forms in a sustainable way of life.

As Geertz (2017, p. 22) has argued, a cultural system must possess at least a minimal level of coherence—an internal consistency or interrelated structure—to be considered a “system.” In practice, cultural systems often exhibit even greater levels of complexity and coherence, which can be revealed through careful observation. This implies that culture is not merely a collection of random habits or practices, but rather a structured and meaningful whole, composed of interrelated and mutually reinforcing elements.

In the same way, the Saparan tradition is not simply a festive event or a routine cultural occurrence. Instead, it functions as a coherent cultural system embedded with rich symbolic meaning. As previously discussed, the representation of the Saparan tradition conveys five interlinked symbolic dimensions: a symbol of prosperity, a symbol of kinship, a symbol of social solidarity and harmony, a symbol of entertainment, and a symbol of concern for cultural heritage.

The Saparan tradition holds various intriguing meanings within it. To uncover these deeper meanings, an interpretative approach is necessary. Interpretation is a complex method that adds layers of meaning to the painting or fills in previously empty spaces. Essentially, it involves a deeper exploration, which, in this case, constitutes a social discourse (Geertz, 2017). The deepening involves:

1. Symbol of prosperity

Most Selo villagers are farmers, either landowners or laborers, who believe Saparan brings prosperity and safeguards the village. Elders stress that preserving this tradition is essential to maintaining blessings and warding off malevolent spirits (Kasno, personal

communication, December 13, 2019).

The village elders and other residents who were study subjects expressed that Saparan in the village aims to bring blessings.

2. Symbol of kinship

Neighbours and village residents commemorate the Saparan tradition by inviting relatives and family members to come and foster camaraderie, especially those whose homes are not far from Selo. Most Selo residents agree that Saparan is an event that encourages connections with distant relatives and kin. The Saparan celebration resembles social gatherings during Eid al-Fitr celebrations. However, a fundamental difference lies in that the Saparan tradition transcends religious and age boundaries, allowing anyone to participate in the visits.

During Eid al-Fitr celebrations, it is customary for younger relatives to visit their older relatives or neighbours. Consequently, it's not uncommon for older relatives to miss meeting each other during this time because they are busy welcoming younger relatives, children, and guests at their homes. Moreover, Eid celebrations typically focus on immediate family gatherings involving children, their families, and grandchildren.

In the Saparan tradition, such limitations are rare. Extended families from both paternal and maternal lineages, including grandparents, can meet and visit each other. In the Saparan tradition, social visits are organised based on location. People from different villages will visit each town to perform the Saparan and reinforce their bonds with relatives there (Samiran et al., 2022).

Slamet provided a statement regarding the festive atmosphere of the Saparan event: Saparan is even more lively than Eid al-Fitr. During Eid, usually only close family members visit, and even that depends on age, the elderly tend to stay at home. However, during Saparan, anyone is welcome to attend, regardless of where they come from. As a result, the atmosphere is much more festive (Slamet, personal communication, December 12, 2019).

The timing of executing the Saparan tradition varies from one village to another. This

flexibility allows each village resident to visit neighbouring villages in turn. The Saparan tradition holds religious significance and carries a deeper social meaning. This symbol of kinship is crucial for maintaining the Saparan tradition because it strengthens every community element. It signifies that the community is cohesive and capable of conducting communal ceremonies with other villagers.

3. A symbol of community solidarity and harmony

The momentum of implementing the Saparan tradition fosters a strong sense of community among the residents of Selo village. This solidarity is evident both among fellow villagers and between villagers and neighbouring communities. Within Selo village, solidarity among residents manifests in various activities, such as preparatory meetings, collective financial contributions, communal efforts in preparing supplies, and communal prayers. Preparatory meetings are typically held monthly to assess the readiness for conducting the Saparan tradition. The community remains enthusiastic and dedicated to preparing for this communal event (Riduan et al., 2024).

Monetary contributions for the Saparan celebration are given voluntarily, strengthening solidarity in Selo. This collective support also fosters tolerance and trust as residents entrust funds to community management. These elements of unity, tolerance, and trust reinforce communal harmony (Dortje Leonora Yokbeth Lopulalan et al., 2024).

Moreover, the solidarity among residents is manifested through mutual hospitality. When people visit each other between villages, their solidarity and harmony are always maintained. Through visits and communal meals, they can get to know each other better.

Hamid, the youth leader and head of Karang Taruna in Selo stated: Saparan is indeed the most festive event, offering various forms of entertainment, including *wayang* and *reog*. The people of Selo eagerly anticipate this event as it provides entertainment for everyone. No other tradition in the village brings together as much entertainment as Saparan. Weddings, for example, are relatively simple, featuring

standard entertainment that is not as lively as Saparan (Hamid, personal communication, December 20, 2019).

Performances are selected through communication between the *Ulu-ulu* and divine beings, reflecting cultural preservation efforts. Selo villagers recognise tradition as an ancestral heritage to be upheld. Research shows Saparan also serves as an early childhood educational tool, instilling the value of *silaturahmi* (social connections).

The Saparan tradition holds a favourable image within the community. People perceive Saparan as a cultural heritage or tradition with significant positive values. These values are prominently displayed during the communal prayer rituals, where prayers are offered for the safety and health of the village residents. Through these ritual processes, the villagers deeply recognise the importance of preserving cultural heritage (Asyhabuddin, 2020).

According to Slamet, a community leader from the village of Selo, he emphasises the importance of preserving tradition. He stated, "In addition to strengthening family bonds, the Saparan tradition also serves to pass down the cultural heritage of our ancestors. On a different note, it provides education to future generations, helping them understand the traditions that existed long before they were born and reminding them of where they were born and raised, along with the traditions that carry significant values within them."

Conclusion

This study examines the mystical synthesis within the multireligious society of Selo by analysing the Saparan tradition in Selo, Boyolali Regency. The findings indicate that the Saparan tradition expresses gratitude and communal solidarity and embodies mystical elements reflecting multireligious community interactions. The ritual practices, including collective prayers and traditional belief symbols, combine formal religious teachings with ancestral spiritual traditions. In a multireligious society, this tradition functions as a crucial medium for fostering social harmony, allowing various religious groups to participate and share

values of togetherness without negating their distinct religious identities.

Academically, this study contributes to the discourse on cultural communication and religiosity within multireligious societies. Future research could further explore how mystical practices in the Saparan tradition interact with social change and modernisation, as well as how younger generations preserve or reinterpret the meaning of this tradition in broader societal contexts. From a policy perspective, this study recommends that local governments and relevant stakeholders provide sustained support for preserving the Saparan tradition as a cultural heritage that strengthens social cohesion. Community-based cultural programs, such as the Saparan festival, should be continuously developed to ensure that the values of tolerance and harmony embedded in this tradition endure amid ongoing social transformations.

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